

Introduction

People use the word 'gender' to refer to cultural and/or social differences between male and female. Since mid-20th century, much ink has been spent on gender in history. My title of this paper includes the words 'religious women', a very popular topic among medievalists. The term 'religious women' includes 'nuns', 'recluses' and 'vowesses' in medieval society; all types have been objects of historical studies. Cultural and social differences between nuns and monks and between male and female recluses have been the subject of agreement, and through a comparison of male and female religious activities, or focusing on female part, a relatively new field of medieval 'religious women' studies has been formed. To rescue women who were historically ignored is one main purpose of building up the women's history, and scholars thus turn the spotlight on women in church history.

The words 'religious women' in medieval England may sound good, but how about the expression 'religious men'? There is something wrong. As Joan Wallach Scott pointed out, following an "equality-versus-difference" debate does not solve gender-biased situations, and on the contrary, it makes the situation much worse.¹ Pursuing the cultural and social differences between men and women leads us to a conclusion that since there have been differences, it is impossible to give women an equal status in history. Judith Butler says, "There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its results."²

My question is who or what makes religious women marginalized. The purpose of this paper is two-fold: first, I shall examine historical resources and archaeological evidences which show us various activities of 'religious women' in medieval East Anglia from pre-Conquest times to the later middle ages; and second, I shall examine how scholars have dealt with 'religious women' in their studies. I chose East Anglia because there are two famous religious women who have provoked a great deal of controversy; an anchoress Julian of Norwich and a vowess Margey Kempe of Lynn.

¹ Joan Wallach Scott, "Deconstructing Equality-Versus-Difference: Or, the Uses of Poststructuralist Theory for Feminism," *Feminist Studies*, 14 (Spring 1988), pp. 33-50.

² Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and Subversion of Identity*, NY, 1990, p.29,

1. Problems of terms

First of all, I want to clarify an ambiguity in the terms of this topic. Readers often get confused with terms related to ‘religious women’.

As Sarah Foot stated, in pre-Conquest England, there is no word which means a religious house of women living under vows of chastity and which would be equivalent to today’s nunnery or convent, neither in Latin nor in Old English.¹ Religious houses occupied by monks are described as ‘monasterium’ in Latin and ‘mynster’ in Old English. Even though ‘mynster’ is a vernacular word for ‘monasterium’, scholars of Anglo-Saxon church history tend to avoid using ‘monastery’ in their works, because this word connotes a strict community of monks and nuns enclosed in a remote place following a monastic rule. In the age of Bede, people living in a ‘monasterium’ took on a wider range of functions such as taking pastoral care of lay people and walking around to their duty.²

The terms of ‘nun’ and ‘nunnery’ can not be defined clearly. For example, the word ‘religiosa’ is sometimes extended to cover the notion of a devout woman not living in a monastery, and not totally secluded from the secular world.³

‘Double monastery’ is also a very problematic word. It means a joint community of men and women, but ‘double monastery’ in the age of Bede is not the same institute as one founded in the middle age. In Pre-Conquest age, ‘double monasteries’ were founded by royal houses and commanded by abbesses derived from these royal families.⁴ In the twelfth century, Robert of Arbrissel founded the order of Fontevrault for his male and female followers in France, and in England, Gilbert of Sempringham opened up religious opportunities for women by accepting them in his newly founded order of the Gilbertines. If you look up in the index of scholarly works on medieval religion in England, you could find the word ‘double monastery’ which would lead you to pages describing ‘double houses’ in Anglo-Saxon age and the ‘double order’ of Gilbertines. ‘Double monastery’ is

¹ Sarah Foot, *Veiled Women*, vol.I, Aldershot, 2000, p.1.

² John Blair, ‘Introduction: from Minster to Parish Church’, *Minsters and Parish Churches, the Local Church in Transition 950-1200*, ed. John Blair, Oxford, 1988, p.1.

³ Sarah Foot, *op. cit.*, pp.3-5.

⁴ Barbara Yorke, *Nunneries and the Anglo-Saxon Royal Houses*, NY, 2003, p.2.

generally explained as a place where monks and nuns live separately within the same enclosure, they often use a common church for their liturgical services, directed by the same abbot or abbess. This explanation seems to cover all of the 'double monasteries' in the history of medieval England, but the actual conditions of 'double monastery' in the Anglo-Saxon age are far from clear.

In addition to 'nun', the words hermitess, anchoress and recluse need to be defined. Men and women who took a vow of chastity but did not join enclosed monasteries are widely found in the medieval records. They are called 'hermits (F: hermitess)', 'anchorites (F: anchoress), and recluses. All of them followed solitary devout lives; in the age of the great church fathers, 'hermits', 'anchorites', and 'monks' had almost the same meaning. When Christian monasticism appeared in the deserts of Egypt and Palestine, there were two different types of monasticism: communal one and solitary one. People often adopted a solitary life to concentrate on praying and serving God. The word 'monachus' derived from the Greek word 'monos' which means 'alone'; from the word 'monachus', the English word 'monk' is derived. In the fourth century, a form of monastic life that included both solitary and communal life arose. People regarded a solitary life in a desert as a much higher status than a communal one in cities. Since the hermitic life in desert is not easy to take, there were alternative options such as semi-eremitic life in which a small group of people living in individual cells located in close proximity, or a person could start one's 'ascetic life' at one's own home. In *The Rule of St. Benedict (Regula Sancti Benedicti)*, St. Benedict divided 'monachorum' into four categories; the first kind is 'coenobitarum', who lives in an enclosed monastery under the monastic rule and taking a vow of obedience to an abbot; the second kind is 'anachoritarum', i.e. 'eremitarum', who takes a solitary life in a desert after having a long monastic experience and being well trained to fight against the devil; the third is the most wicked kind of monks, 'sarabaitarum', who live alone, or two or three together, without a rule and without being well trained and they do what they want and avoid what they don't like to do; the fourth kind is 'gyrovagum', who keep wandering around staying a couple of days in different monasteries, and indulging their cravings and passions, and they are worse than 'sarabaitarum'.¹

According to *the new Catholic Encyclopedia*, the English word 'religious' is 'religios-i/-ae' in Latin, and the words 'monachus'(monks), 'anachoreta'(anchorites), and 'eremita'(hermits) reflecting their early life style have no clear differences in meaning, and the word 'monasterium' is used to indicate those enclosed sites for

¹ Terrence G. Kardong, *Benedict's Rule, A Translation and Commentary*, Minnesota, 1981, p.33.

religious people living together under a rule and an abbot. Religious people who officially joined an 'ordo' are called 'M: regularis' or 'F: monialis'.¹

It is already enough complicated, but if you check these words in the Oxford English Dictionary, it will make you totally confused. For the word 'anchorite', it explains: "A person who has withdrawn or secluded himself from the world; usually one who has done so for religious reasons, a recluse, a hermit", and the earliest usage of this word is in 1460. 'Anchorite' is a word for both sexes, but ' anchoress' is the feminine form of this word. Then, an ' anchoress' is: "A female anchorite, a nun" and the earliest usage is in 1397.² A 'Hermit' is: "One who from religious motives has retired into solitary life; especially one of the early Christian recluses", and the earliest usage is in 1205. 'Hermitess' is the feminine form of 'hermit'.³ A 'Recluse' is: "A person shut up from the world for the purpose of religious meditation; a monk, hermit, anchorite or anchoress", and the earliest usage is in *Ancrene Wisse* in 1225.⁴ Francis Darwin pointed out that these definitions are not appropriate to indicate the underlying differences, and explained that the word hermit refers to a person who can wander about at liberty, but an anchorite is a person who is enclosed in a cell usually attached to church or monastic site and does not leave his cell. A recluse is almost synonymous with an anchorite.⁵

To avoid throwing readers into confusion, in this paper, I shall use Latin terms such as 'monasterium' and 'anachoreta', if necessary.

2. Archaeological evidences and written records on medieval religious women in East Anglia

(1) Pre-Conquest evidences

According to Roberta Gilchrist, scholarship on medieval nunneries with archaeological evidences has been scarce, not because of lack of evidence but because of gender stereotypes which had made scholars' eyes closed. Today, many archaeologists critique male-biased archaeological interpretations. The diversity of

¹ The New Catholic Encyclopedia, Tokyo, 1996-2009, vol.1, pp.537-8, vol. 3, pp.167-168.

² *Oxford English Dictionary*, second edition, 1989, p445.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 169-170.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p.340.

⁵ Francis D. S. Darwin, *The English Mediaeval Recluse*, London, 1944, pp.2-4; Ann K. Warren, *Anchorites and Their Patrons in Medieval England*, 1985, pp.7-8.

approaches to gender in archaeology will lead to rich and flourishing scholarly works.¹ However, for studies in pre-Conquest age, written records such as Bede's *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* (*Historica Ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum*, hereafter *HE*), *the Anglo-Saxon Chronicles*, *the Domesday Books*, royal and episcopal documents, and lives of saints are still mainly used. *Gazeteer of Norfolk monastic houses attached to Not of this World, Norfolk 's Monastic Houses* includes 86 houses founded from c.645 to the Dissolution of the monasteries in the 16th century and only 14 of them remained 'worth a visit' or 'worth a detour', but 40 of them do not remain.² Even for well-remained cases, the buildings has reached their present style after having been moved, reconstructed and extended, so there are limitations on the use of archaeological evidence for these ages.

Saxon 'monasterium' for women in East Anglia were at Ely and at Dereham and they were both 'double houses'.³

An old Saxon Ely was one of the most well documented sites. The Anglo-Saxon Chronicles tells that in 673, 'and that year there was a synod at Hertford and St. Aethelthryth (St. Etheldreda, St. Audrey) founded a monastery at Ely'.⁴ In *HE*, Bede paid special attention to Athelthryth, a daughter of King Anna of East Anglia. She remarried King Egfrid of Northumbria, but she kept her virginity throughout her life, and later she secluded from secular world, and became 'abbatissa' of Ely. She constructed a 'monasterium' at Ely and was a virgin mother of many virgins dedicated to God.⁵ St. Aethelthryth was a queen of Northumbria, but she fled from her husband to seek her devout life. The Isle of Ely in Fenland was a land she inherited from her first husband Tonbert, a local prince. After her death in 679, her sister Seaxburh became the next 'abbatissa'. the 'Monasterium' at Ely was destroyed by Vikings in the ninth century, and almost 100 years later, a new Benedictine 'monasterium' was founded at the same place. Bede also stated that in the seventh century, royal families of England wished to send their daughters to a 'monasterium' in Frank, because there were few 'monasterium' in England. Barbara Yorke pointed out that princesses of East Anglia, such as Aethelthryth and Seaxburh, may be

¹ Roberta Gilchrist, *Gender and Material Culture*, London, 1994, pp.1-20.

² Frank Meeres, *Not of this World', Norfolk's Monastic Houses*, Norwich, 2001, pp.139-145.

³ Roberta Gilchrist, *op. cit.*, pp.26-29.

⁴ *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicles*, translated and edited by Michael Swanton, London, 2000,p.34.

⁵ Bede, *The Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, translated by Leo Sherley-Price, revised by R. E. Latham, London, 1968, pp.236-240; Bede, *Opera Historica*, vol.II, with translation by J.E. King, London, pp.102-105.

among the earliest examples of Anglo-Saxon royal women choosing religious lives in England.¹ In the late twelfth century, *the Book of Ely (Liber Eliensis)* was composed, not as Saint Aethelthryth's life, but as a history of Ely monastery from its foundation.

The other recorded 'monasterium' for women was at Dereham. In 798, Wihtburh's body was found undecayed at Dereham². There are two surviving texts of *The life of St. Wihtburh*, which derived from *the Book of Ely*³.

Both Ely and Dereham were 'Double houses', but they are called 'monasterium' in the documents. And it is difficult to find their specific function as 'double houses', because there is little difference between a 'monasterium' commanded by 'abbas' and one commanded by 'abbatissa'.⁴

(2) Post-Conquest

Sally Thompson pointed out that evidence for studies of 'monasterium' for women after the Conquest is not sufficient compared with the evidence about male counter parts. *Monasticon Anglicanum* provides the main sources that were transcribed and edited in the 19th century.⁵ *Victorian County History and Religious Houses of England and Wales* by David Knowles and R. N. Hudcock⁶ are often used as sources for making statistical tables, tables, such as numbers of 'monasterium' for women. Royal and episcopal records sometimes give information related to 'monasterium' for women, but it is scarce and hard to find.

Besides these royal and episcopal documents, lives of saints, rules for 'religious women', wills probated in courts of medieval cities, and works by 'religious women' are available. Roberta Gilchrist and Marilyn Oliva counted 11 'monasterium' for women in the Diocese of medieval Norwich.⁷ Gilchrist estimated that over 150 religious houses were founded in medieval Norfolk, and approximately 50 sites still contain

¹ Barbara Yorke, *op. cit.*, pp.17-18.

² *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicles*, *op.cit.*, p.56.

³ Susan J. Ridyard, *The Royal Saints of Anglo-Saxon England, A Study of West Saxon & East Anglian Cults*, Cambridge, 1988, p.59.

⁴ Barbara Yorke, *op. cit.*, pp.2-4.

⁵ Sally Thompson, *Women Religious—The Founding of English Nunneries after the Norman Conquest*, Oxford, 1991, pp.7-8.

⁶ David Knowles and Richard Neville Hudcok, *Medieval religious houses : England and Wales*, second edition, London, 1971.

⁷ Roberta Gilchrist and Marilyn Oliva, *Religious Women in Medieval East Anglia—History and Archaeology c1100-1540*, University of East Anglia, 1993.

earthworks and/or buildings.¹ In addition to archeological excavations, aerial photography contributes to identify the plans of sites with no standing remains.

To study 'anachoreta', *De institutione inclusarum* by Aelred of Rievaulx, and *Ancrene Wisse* are useful. These rules are written by men religious for women religious who wished to choose devoted solitary life in enclosed cells attached to a parish church or 'monasterium'. Aelred wrote *De institutione inclusarum* in the twelfth century, and *Ancrene Wisse* was written in the thirteenth century. These rules themselves prove that the number of women who wished to be 'anachoreta' was increased by the new movement of 'Devotio moderna'. Aelred's voice shows a cynical tone when he stated that 'inclusae' of those days were too loose and often sexually misbehaved, so now their cells were being turned into brothels.² *Ancrene Wisse* also emphasized the importance of keeping chastity, and these rules show to what extent 'anachoreta' could be involved in secular world. Such repeated prohibition orders mean that people outside of their cells needed their help. *Ancrene Wisse* instructed that the windows of their cells should be quite small and have curtains made of black and white cloth, showing white cross in black ground from both side.³ *Ancrene Wisse* forbid them to run any business, and to be school mistress for children.⁴ Aelred also gave the same instruction not to teach children.⁵ It means that 'anachoreta' did teach children, and outside of a window covered with a heavy curtain, local people came and asked her advice. These rules show 'anachoreta' did not live alone in her cell: there were maidservant(s) who lived together to serve the 'anachoreta'. Archaeological evidences indicate wide range of variety of residences, from a tiny cell for one person to a two-storied house for a couple of 'anachoreta' living together.⁶ *Ancrene Wisse* also indicates to answer that she was belong to the order of St. Jerome when she was asked what order she joined.⁷ A life of 'anachoreta' is far from 'isolated' by these rules.

There is another status of religious women: vowess. A vowess takes a vow of chastity, but keeps staying

¹ Roberta Gilchrist, 'The religious houses of medieval Norfolk', in: *A Festival of Norfolk Archaeology*, eds, Sue Margerson, Brian Ayers & Stephen Heywood, Norwich, 1996, p.86.

² *Aelred of Rievaulx's De institutione inclusarum, Two English Versions*, eds. John Ayto and Alexandra Barratt, Early English Text Society, O. S. 287, OUP, 1984, p.2.

³ *Ancrene Wisse, Edited from MS. Corpus Christi College Cambridge 402*, by J. R. R. Tolkien, The Early English Text Society, OUP, 1962, pp.30 &35 : *Ancrene Riwle*, trans. M.B.Salu, University of Exeter Press, 1990, pp.21-22 &28.

⁴ *Ancrene Wisse*, pp.216-7; *Ancrene Riwle*, p.180.

⁵ Aelred of Rievaulx, *op. cit.*, p.314.

⁶ Roberta Gilchrist, *Gender and Material Culture*, London, 1994, p.178.

⁷ *Ancrene Riwle*, pp.4-5.

in their home and continues her property management. Since a vowess is not strictly controlled by bishops, it is difficult to grasp their situation. Mary Erler's monograph is one of the best studies on this topic.¹

Next, as examples of religious women in Medieval East Anglia, Julian of Norwich and *The Book of Margery Kempe* will be considered.

3. Religious women: reconsidered

(1) Julian of Norwich

On 8 May 1973, people gathered in Norwich Cathedral for a celebration which was to honor the 600th anniversary of the mystical experiences of Mother Julian, the medieval anchoress of Norwich. It was not only for Anglicans, but Roman Catholic priests, monks and nuns from all over the world also joined with them.² Julian of Norwich was the author of *the Revelations of Divine Love (Showings)* in which she told about the visions she was granted when she was seriously ill. She recorded her visions carefully and vividly, so now, *Showings* is regarded by theologians as one of the greatest mystical work in the fourteenth century, and it is also important as the earliest example of the middle English literature written by a woman.³

Julian and her book has been widely researched since the beginning of the twentieth century, especially from the fields of theology, English literature and history.⁴ I shall start from the question of who Julian was, with making reference to past researches. Because of lack of surviving documents, almost nothing is known about her personal background. All we know is that she was born at 1342/43, she was granted 16 revelations when she was thirty years old, she was known as an anchoress in 1413 and she met Margery Kempe of Lynn as a spiritual adviser.⁵ There is no evidence which shows her social status, educational background, and whether she had been

¹ Mary C. Erler, 'English vowed women at the end of the middle ages', *Medieval Studies*, 57, 1995, pp.155-203.

² Sheila Upjohn, *In Search of Julian of Norwich*, London, 1995(1989), p.1.

³ Evelyn Underhill, *Cambridge Medieval History*, vol. VII, ed. Tanner et al., Cambridge, 1949, p.807.

⁴ Thomas Merton, *Mystics and Zen Masters*, New York, 1967, p.140; Brant Pelphrey, *Love was His Meaning - The Theology and Mysticism of Julian of Norwich*, Salzburg, 1982; Kenneth Leech, 'Hazelnut theology: Its potential and perils' in: *Julian Reconsidered*, 1988, Oxford; Ritamary Bradley, 'The goodness of God: a Julian study' in: *Langland, The Mystics and the Medieval English Tradition*, ed. Hellen Phillips, Cambridge, 1990; Denise N. Baker, *Julian of Norwich's Showings-From vision to book*, Princeton, 1994.

⁵ Julian of Norwich, *A Book of Showings to the Anchoress Julian of Norwich*, 2 vols., eds. Edmund Colledge O.S.A. & James Walsh S.J., Toronto, 1978; *Showings*, translated by Edmund Colledge O.S.A. & James

a nun or a lay before she became an anchoress. However, scholars have argued about these points depending on very thin evidence. For example, one concluded that Julian had been a nun of Benedictine ‘monasterium’ of Carrow because Julian commanded a wide range of traditional rhetoric and quotation from the bible and spiritual classics.¹ Others are opposed to this opinion because of the possibility that Julian could get such knowledge by listening to a priest’s sermon. I am sorry to say that, at this point, these arguments might not reach any agreement. One of the scholars warns us that, without clear evidence, each scholar’s subjectivity tends to promote each conclusion.

From the fourteenth century, middle English literature fully flourished again, and while French and Latin were used as official languages, ordinary lay people enjoyed the traditional English literature. Especially for women, there were a couple of works called AB text in English, and also some rule books for ‘anachoreta’ like *Ancrene Wisse* in English gave significant influence in the formation of middle English literature. These books were addressed from church priests, monks and hermits to women. In the fourteenth century, along with *the Book of Margery Kempe*, *Showings* shows that women authors start to raise their voice, and not only women but men might support these women authors. There are surviving six manuscripts of *Showings*, and some of them were copied by English Benedictine nuns at the continent. It is probably because when the suppression acts of Henry VIII caused the dissolution of Catholic monasteries in England, monks and nuns took refuge on the continent, and *Showings* was included among the books which they brought with them.²

Julian was known as an ‘anchoress’, not as a ‘nun’. Then, what differences were there between an ‘anchoress’ and a ‘nun’ in medieval England? In *The Rule of St. Benedict*, a recluse was already referred to as a higher status of monks. Since a recluse lived outside of a monastic community, the higher qualification was demanded for a candidate. However, some records show recluses who had never been monks or nuns before they started the solitary life as recluses.³ Originally, the status of ‘anachoreta’ use was much higher than monks, however, during the twelfth and thirteenth century, the gate to ‘anachoreta’ seem to be opened widely for lay women. The new religious movement among lay people might have encouraged lay women to choose religious

Walsh S.J., New York, 1978.

¹ Frances Beer, *Women and Mystical Experience in the Middle Ages*, Woodbridge, 1992, p.130; Sayer, op. cit., p.7.

² Colledge & Walsh, *op. cit.*

³ Ann K. Warren, *op. cit.*, pp.22-26.

life, but in those days, 'monasterium' for women did not have enough capacity for applicants. As a result, church priests led these women to be 'anachoreta' and, instead of 'abbatissa' for 'religiosa', bishops took care of their spirituality.¹ This is the reason that many rule for 'anachoreta' were written in the thirteenth century.

From the point of church hierarchy, 'anachoreta' might be regarded as lower than 'religiosa'. However, the solitary life of 'anachoreta' allowed her to enjoy freedom, and also living in the city gave her an opportunity to contact lay people. *Ancrene Wisse* prohibited her giving advice to lay men and teaching children in her cell. It means there were some who advised not only lay women but men, and who taught children in her cell. Some evidence has survived that priests, monks and lay people left their money to an anchoress, showing they were respected and supported by church people and citizens.² *Showings* has not been widely studied since the Dissolution in England, and after that, recluses also disappeared from the history of England. However, today, next to the St. Julian Church at Norwich, there is a Julian Centre and people from all over the world visit there to learn more about Julian. Since her 600th anniversary, her name came to be well known, and finally, in 1980, the Anglican church added her name to their calendar. What made Julian become famous again? It is beyond the reason that a medieval anchoress whose name even we do not know should have such a great influence now. Sheila Upjohn suggests that Julian seems to play a part in the ecumenical church movement of today. In *Showings*, Julian showed her optimistic view and emphasizes the motherhood of God instead of talking about a fearful angry God. Julian's words which had been conveyed by women from the fourteenth century have given consolation and hope to many people.

(2) Margery Kempe of Lynn

Although *The Book of Margery Kempe* (hereafter *The Book*) has been an object of study since the discovery of the only surviving manuscript in 1934, there is little agreement about how we can locate it in a late medieval setting. There are two questions: The first one is what kind of writing *The Book* is and the second one is what kind of image it shows us. In this section, I shall reconsider these two points.

¹ Francis D.S. Darwin, *op. cit.*, pp.53-55.

² Colledge & Walsh, *Introductio to A Book of Showings to the Anchoress Julian of Norwich, vol.1.*, Toronto, 1978, pp.33-34.

First, *The Book* has been categorized into various genres: an autobiography of a medieval merchant wife¹, a hagiography of a vowess², or devotional prose by a woman mystic³. My question is why these modern terms should have been applied to the fourteenth century writings such as *The Book* in this way. Especially, autobiography is a quite modern conception and it could only appear later than the end of the Middle Ages⁴. Once the Book is classified into a certain category, that category itself exercises strong influence on our reading of *the Book*. Even if *The Book* was really written by a medieval woman called Margery Kempe, I could not regard *The Book* as an autobiography in a modern sense.

Many scholars have insisted that Margery Kempe in *The Book* is the same person whose name was recorded in the documents of medieval Lynn, and they also regard her as a daughter of John Brunham, who held a number of honourable positions, including being five times Mayor of Lynn, and as a wife of John Kempe, who might be a member of a rich burgess family of Lynn. Some have seen the possibility of Margery of Lynn being an actual model for Margery of *The Book*; however, it is difficult to prove that she really behaved like Margery. So there is no clear evidence that *The Book* is written (or spoken) by a substantial merchant wife of medieval Lynn; I shall categorize *The Book* as a writing of fiction at this point.

Therefore, I will concentrate on inner-text world of *The Book*, not seeking the relation between the inner- and outer-text worlds. First, I shall check the structure of *the Book*, and then I shall consider who's point of view dominates the Book.

When we read fiction, we usually know who wrote what. But the structure of *The Book* looks much

¹ Margery Kempe, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, ed. by S. B. Meech and H. E. Allen, Early English Text Society, Original Series 212, London, 1940, Introduction, pp.xxxiii-xxxiv. M. Fries, 'Margery Kempe', P. E. Szarmach (ed.), *An Introduction to the Medieval Mystics of Europe*, Albany, 1984, pp.217-235; S. Dickman, 'Margery Kempe and the Continental Tradition of the Pious Woman' in M. Glasscoe (ed.), *The Medieval Mystical Tradition in England, Exeter Symposium III, Papers Read at Dartington Hall, July 1984*, Cambridge, 1984, pp.150-168; D. Despres, *Ghostly Sights, Visual Meditation in Late-Medieval Literature*, Oklahoma, 1989, p.60; M. Gallyon, *Margery Kempe of Lynn and Medieval England*, Norwich, 1995, p.4.

² Gail McMurray Gibson, *The Theater of Devotion: East Anglian Drama and Society in the Late Middle Age*, University of Chicago Press, 1989, p.47; Julia Bolton Holloway, 'Bride, Margery, Julian and Alice: Bridget of Sweden's textual community in medieval England', in: *Margery Kempe: A Book of Essays*, ed. Sandra J. McEntire, New York, 1992, p.209; Gunnel Cleve, 'Margery Kempe: A Scandinavian influence in medieval England?', *The Medieval Mystical Tradition in England, Exeter Symposium V*, ed. Marion Glasscoe, Cambridge, 1992, p.171.

³ M. Thornton, *Margery Kempe, an Example in the English Pastoral Tradition*, London, 1960, pp.12-15; T. Merton, *op. cit.*, ; K. Lochrie, *Margery Kempe and Translations of the Flesh*, Philadelphia, 1991; S. Beckwith, 'A very maternal mysticism: the medieval mysticism of Margery Kempe' in Jane Chance (ed.), *Gender and Text in the Later Middle Ages*, Gainesville, 1996, pp.195-215.

⁴ C. W. Atkinson, *Mystic and Pilgrim, the Book and the World of Margery Kempe*, Ithaca, 1983, pp. 21-22.

trickier. Between the text of *The Book* and readers, it seems that more than two people are involved: the first scribe who wrote down the words of Margery, the second scribe who edited and revised *The Book*, and Margery herself. In addition, in *The Book* she consistently refers to herself by using the third person as “this creature”.

The author-subject-scribe issue is one of the most disputable topics of *The Book*¹. There are two amanuenses in *The Book*, and ‘who wrote what’ is not clear. In an autobiography in the modern sense, an author’s perception is narrated by him/her. Compared to this, *The Book* has a quite complicated structure. In chapter 62 of Book 1, a voice of the second scribe is inserted. But in the majority part of *The Book*, it seems that Margery talks about her story and the second scribe writes it down, including the part of her own revelation.

A revelation, being given a mystical message from God is a highly private experience; during the Middle Ages, these mystical experiences have been written down and opened for the public. There are two types of writings: one is written down by the person who experienced the revelation, and the other is recorded by a different person such as his/her spiritual adviser. Most of the theological works by church fathers and the clergy are the former types, and in addition, some are written by lay people such as Richard Rolle of Hampole. *The Life of Dorothy of Montau* is the latter type. The structure of writings of the former type is quite simple. But in the latter one, the scribe stands between the layperson and his/her mystic experience, i.e. the voice from God, and it means that its writing is under the church’s control. What a lay visionary sees is authorized by written words of the clergy.

At a glance, *The Book* seems to belong to the latter types of writing, but the function of the amanuenses is quite different from others. In *The Book*, the amanuenses do not reveal their names or prove their identity. This makes *The Book* unique, if it is really recorded by those amanuenses. But as I already claimed above, I regard *The Book* as fiction. Then, all three people --- two amanuenses and Margery --- shall be characters created by the author, and there is no difference among their roles.

Then I shall consider the relation among these three characters and the author. We should not mix up “who sees” with “who speaks” in fiction. Vision in *The Book* has two points of view: one is from which this story

¹ J. Hirsh, ‘Author and Scribe in The Book of Margery Kempe’, *Medium Aevum* 44, 1975, p.150; J. A. Erskine, ‘Margery Kempe and her models: The role of the authorial voices’, *Mystics Quarterly*, 15-2, 1989, pp.80-81; R. Voaden, *God’s Words, Women’s Voices: the Discernment of Spirits in the Writing of Late-Medieval Women Visionaries*, New York, 1999, pp.112-113.

is narrated, and the other is from which an event is perceived by the main character, Margery. For example, when Margery complains that she was treated unfairly by one of her companions on the pilgrimage to Jerusalem, from Margery's standpoint this incident is perceived, but the author's viewpoint is different from it. He/She narrates the story as a third person. But sometimes the author simulates as if he/her is the second scribe, and in other parts, he/she looks as if he/she is actually Margery.

I already mentioned above, there are two different voices in *The Book*; one is of Margery, and the other is of the author. In some part, the author of *The Book* speaks from Margery's point of view and next, speaks from his/her own point of view. When the author stands within her mind, Margery's voice sounds around in the text, but when the author speaks from his/her point of view, the author's voice dominates the scene. These two voices sound sometime alternately, sometime harmoniously, but sometime discordantly.

Margery's voice strongly insists that she is a mystic, a pious laywoman, a reputable vowess, and a woman pilgrim who has visited not only the famous shrines in England but also Jerusalem, Rome, and Santiago de Compostella. However, at the same time, the author of *The Book* tells us about her exact opposite personality --- a pseudo-mystic, a conceited burgess, a woman who might have committed sexual misconduct, and a troublesome companion on a pilgrimage.

Margery's image as a troublesome religious woman show us that the author of *the Book* does not have a positive image about religious women, and the author's blame is related to the bad nature of women; women who do not following the church's instruction, who talk too much, who do not obey their husbands, who commit sexual misconduct, who get through their difficulties such as being suspected of a heresy by using secular power --- by mentioning her father's social status, and who boast of their appearance and behavior such as going on pilgrimage.

4. Conclusion

Julian of Norwich and Margery Kempe of Lynn are both famous religious women in medieval Norfolk, but their characters and images are opposites of each other. Generally speaking, Margery get much critical

assessment mainly from theologians, but she is rated highly by feminist scholars. Both of them are quite problematic women, because Julian's work is wonderful but reveals almost nothing about herself; it means that even though Julian is one of the most famous 'anachoreta' in the middle ages, it seems almost impossible to find a clue for the relationship between 'anachoreta' Julian and her society.

The absence of historical evidence makes some of religious women invisible to our eyes. And at the same time, applying modern terms to religious women gives an exaggerated importance to some of them. In this sense, both Julian of Norwich and Margery Kempe of Lynn were marginalized religious women. Highly rated Julian is one side of a coin, and lower rated Margery is the other. Religious women are not isolated, but marginalized by medieval writers, who were mainly men, and then by today's scholars. These religious women are divided into minority group in the schema of medieval world being set up by modern scholars.

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