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Narrating and focalizing the *Book of Margery Kempe*

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Abstract Narratology can profit from closer critical attention to premodern texts. This essay opens an extended narratological analysis of the Middle English *Book of Margery Kempe* (mid fifteenth-century). Modifying narrative theory (Genette, Bal) to suit a medieval narratology, I use discourse analysis to explore the language, focalization, and temporality of the narrating discourse. The text, with a dramatized storyteller but not an explicit narrator, deploys multiple focalizations to construct not a strict autobiography but a detailed third-person narrative of the life of a lay, extravagantly pious, and visionary woman. I describe five focalizations: two internal (Everyday and Visionary Experiencers) and three external (Summarizer, Commentator, Scribal-Textualist). The lively narration weaves together homodiegetic and heterodiegetic perspectives and constructs multifocalized accounts of the protagonist's everyday struggles and interactions with lay people and clergy and her interior experiences and visions of Jesus suffering in the Passion and "fresch" on the streets. Narratological analysis foregrounds the textual power of the protagonist's life story with intersecting and transplacing temporalities of Apostolic past, near past, and present reading time.

Keywords narratology, medieval narrative, Gerard Genette, Margery Kempe, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, focalization, autography, autobiography

1. Introduction[1]

Narratology can profit from closer critical attention to the *Book of Margery Kempe* (mid fifteenth century). Our understanding of the *Book*'s narrative complexity can be more critically and historically adept by reading the text with innovative narratological theory. Much narrative theory and analysis have focused on post-1700 writing, especially the novel. Medieval narrative traditions encompass a thousand years of various genres and modes of storytelling. By focusing on the language of narration, a narratological analysis of the *Book* proposes a more textual way we can better understand the scope and textual power of sophisticated medieval narrative structures with their mixed temporalities, hybrid oral/written styles, and fluid audience

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formations and at the same time expand our appreciation for narrative as a fundamental human activity.

Why 'narratology'? Narratology involves reading and analyzing storytelling across a range of media with linguistic, formal, and increasingly cultural critical models. In the late 1960s and 70s, the high-water mark in classical narratology, Gérard Genette's influential *Narrative Discourse* (1972/1980), Roland Barthes' compelling 'Introduction to the Structuralist Analysis of Narratives' (1966) and *S/Z* (1970), and Seymour Chatman's *Story and Discourse* (1976) mostly discussed post-1700 prose fiction. Earlier, German theorists Franz K. Stanzel (1955/1971) and Käte Hamburger (1957/1973) had expanded the already sophisticated linguistic narratology among Continental scholars, but their work was unfortunately less available to many Anglo-American theorists until translated in the 1970s. Post-classical narratology, according to David Herman (2013) and Monika Fludernik (1996), doesn't abandon classical narratology's insights and critical vocabulary, but rather theorizes narrative with cognitive and semiotic, not just Sausurrean, models of the sign. Post-classical narratology explores a wider range of genres and media, including not only prose fiction but also epic, romance, fairy tale, *exemplum*, saint's life, manga, [auto]biography, historiography (chronicle, diary, letters), religious and legal discourses, film, video, and mixed-media texts. Post-classical narratology has also taken up an equally wide array of critical approaches, including cognitive theory, gender studies, emotions and senses studies, affect studies, and historicist and materialist narrative analysis. Both classical and post-classical narratology have provided sophisticated vocabulary for narrative analysis, more fine-grained than the humanist rhetorical approach of plot, 'point of view,' and 'narrator.' Both examine storytelling's imaginative complexity and textual power beyond plot and character. Further, post-classical approaches contribute to a more materialist genealogy of narrative by historicizing and analyzing verse and prose premodern narratives in pre-print and oral/written hybrid modes.

What about medieval narratology? Eva von Contzen urges that "Both narratologists and medievalists can profit from a medieval narratology that does not reject classical or post-classical theories but is based on an informed understanding of the historical groundings of narrative forms and their place in the history of literature" (2014:16). Classicists have taken up that challenge in the past three decades and explored various forms of ancient Greek and Latin literary narrative (de Jong 2015). However, despite the extensive narrative tradition in multiple genres produced during the European (and now global) era we call the "Middle Ages," medieval romances have attracted the most critical narratological attention, perhaps because they seem most like novels. To be sure, theoretically oriented medieval critics have contributed important concepts to the development of more narratological criticism, as shown for example in the work of Tzvetan Todorov, Paul Zumthor, Eugene Vance, R. Howard Bloch, and more recently Monika Fludernik (2011) and A. C. Spearing (2012) (cf. Holsinger 2005). However, medievalists, with some exceptions (e.g., Evans 2021), have not really engaged with Spearing's attention to what he calls "textual subjectivity" as part of narratology. Whereas some critics describe textual subjectivity, not only in the *Book of Margery Kempe*, in terms of representations, performances, and traces of affect or emotion (e.g., Rosenwein 2012; contributors to Burger and Crocker 2019), I locate Spearing's "textual subjectivity" within a broad phenomenology of a textualized Subject in terms of "being in itself," "being for itself," and "being for others," with their constituent questions about agency (will), identity, intention, otherness, intersubjectivity, and world making.

Post-classical narratology's interest in diachronic or comparative questions only makes sense if medieval narratives are included. Post-classical narratology's interest in different media and textualities can be historically inflected with analysis of how medieval narratives were produced as part of oral, manuscript, and hybrid literacies. In post-classical narratology, we need to consider medieval to modern narrative continuities and also distinctively medieval narrative forms and genres (e.g., chronicle, saint's life, *exemplum*, sermon, dream vision, devotional visionary text), how they functioned experientially in a Christian society, how they were produced and received in social and religious contexts, how they create textual subjects, and how they contribute to our general theory of narrative.

Medieval narratives and genres are part of not only European traditions but also global genres such as the epic, folk drama, and the international popular tale (Utley 1974). Our narratological questions of medieval texts contribute to broader narrative theory and history. For instance: What sorts of story logic do medieval narratives manifest? What are medieval storytellers' strategies for depicting characters, speech, agency, interiority, religious belief? Are the modern concepts of 'narrator' and 'authorial narrator' relevant to medieval narratives, and if so, how? How do time and space function in medieval representations of action, perception, and being? In European medieval society, how did folk, mercantile, and religious ideologies and values influence the relation between stories and commonsense, empirical, or transcendental notions of what is 'real' or 'true'? Our narrative theorizing needs to sort out which questions are relevant to the 'medieval' and which reflect or manifest something inherent in narrative itself. For instance: How do kinds of narrative contribute to what we consider to be our 'experience'? What is the relation between narrativity and our idea of a person's interiority? What does a narrative express, intentionally or otherwise?

So, what about the *Book of Margery Kempe*? Narratology can profit from closer attention to the *Book*, and as I shall argue, the *Book* is very available to sustained narratological analysis. Style, temporality, and narrating perspective are crucial to narrative structure, and all are complicated in the *Book*. Nonetheless, linguistically focused approaches to the *Book*'s narrative have been few. One exception is R. K. Stone's (1970) early rhetorical/stylistic comparison of the *Book* and Julian of Norwich's *Shewings*. Stone claims that the text's "lively," "homely," "extroverted" discourse and "freshness" are formally constituted by lexical and syntactic features, including alliteration, verbal repetition, familiar word choice, and phrasal and clausal balances, all well-established features of English poetic and prose styles. The *Book*'s colloquial style using exaggeration, quotidien detail, and understatement imbues the oral dictation with an "informal chattiness and spontaneity" (1970:112). Unlike many earlier critics, Stone's linguistic approach sees these formal features as part of the text's strengths rather than weakness.

More recently, a few linguistically oriented critics have been discussing the *Book*'s narration with other textual approaches. In historical pragmatics, Olga Timofeeva (forthcoming) has highlighted the important role pronouns and deixis play in establishing modes of address and social interaction as depicted in the narrative. I have argued the *Book*'s narration of key episodes presents a complex conversational pragmatics of public self-making

(2021:206–239). Combining discourse analysis and feminist criticism, Ruth Evans uses Benveniste's pragmatic distinction between narrated (*énoncé*) and narrating (*énonciation*) to think about why someone's life story might be dictated and written in the third person and why that matters to how we read the *Book* as a woman's story. She argues that "the use of the third person as a figure allows Kempe to articulate her selfhood as a tension between identity and difference, unity and division" (2021:84).

The rest of this essay works out a more extensive narratological account of the *Book* so as to foreground the text's multiperspective, multitemporal *writtenness* as a narrative of subject distinction and exemplarity rather than as a mediated archive of medieval 'life.' The *Book* constructs a distributed and multifocused kind of subjectivity. As this critical narratological reading and analysis show, the *Book* doesn't conform easily to what we might take for granted about narrativity, temporality, and selfhood in either medieval or modern narratives.

The *Book of Margery Kempe* is more accommodating to post-classical narratology models for several reasons. The *Book*'s collaborative composition, third-person narration of a life story, historically verifiable sociocultural settings, and complex mix of everyday and visionary experiences, all suggest the text's alterity with respect to conventions of 'realism,' 'authorship,' narrative voice, intention, and mimetic ('natural') narrative, that is, the conventions of individual subjectivity as articulated in modern terms. With both a single protagonist and multiple focalizing perspectives, the *Book* also prompts us to rethink the universalizing impulse of our modern, yet still largely Aristotelian, notions of story/plot, character, author/narrator, narrating subjectivity, situatedness, and temporality.

The *Book*'s availability to post-classical narratology is also enhanced by its mixed textualization. The materiality of medieval textuality is relevant to any account of medieval narratology. The mixed oral/written literacy of medieval textuality disturbs print world assumptions about textual composition and production, the materiality of language, and the relation of voice and writing. Medieval culture's often collaborative and hybrid literacy destabilizes linguistic and literary assumptions that speech is the fundamental form of human language (e.g., Benveniste, Saussure) and that writing is simply a representation of speech (*a la* Rousseau or contemporary education's "phonics" curricula). When we think about the *Book* in relation to its textualization, that is, to its becoming a written thing, we are already asking Derrida's question about the metaphysics of discourse. Also, taking account of the production of the manuscript text as part of the storyworld suggests how the *Book* enacts a self othering within the narrative. When we read closely the text's narrative self-representation in relation to late medieval ideologies of discourse, narratology gives us a way to think productively about what counts as authorship, narration, or 'authorial narrator' in medieval narratives and more broadly about what makes up a mimetic or non-mimetic narrative and for whom.

The boundary between inside and outside the text can be porous when reading a narrative such as the *Book*. While the *Book*'s story (*l'histoire*) exists in a limited but to some extent verifiable sociohistorical context, the material artefact, the written text, constitutes everything we know in the narrative, even when we recover biographical or historical information outside the text itself. The protagonist (some version of Margery Kempe), her husband John Kempe, Archbishops Thomas Arundel and Henry Bowet, and others are discursively always part of the diegesis (story) of the narrative, regardless of their historically verifiable status outside the text. Their historicity does not make them any more or less diegetic in the narrative. For narratology, it's not a question of sorting out whether the *Book* is 'true' or not, but of describing how the narrative is structured and how the text's form and maneuvers shape and enable our reading experiences and interpretations.

As part of a medieval narratology, we can say that a text as densely written as the *Book* solicits a strong linguistic mode of critical narratology. I argue that the *Book*'s variable focalizations, shifting narrating levels, and overlapping temporalities function less as a single representation and more as a multiperspective account of one woman's social and religious experiences mediated within the medieval hybrid literacy of oral storytelling transcribed by several scribes and told and edited over several years. In addition, the text's self-representation means the text exists not only as something read or heard by a reader and not only as a mediation between composers and readers but also as an object in the storyworld, a written version of a prior spoken narrative inscribed by clerics and supported by the protagonist's reading with clerics from the Bible and a small cache of spiritual texts, some by women. We can't hear the presupposed prior oral version. The *written* narrative is our access to the narrative experience and narrating contexts of the *Book*.

2. Narration and autography

Since 1934, when Hope Emily Allen recovered the manuscript now marked as BL Add. MS 61823, the *Book of Margery Kempe* has been known as 'the first English autobiography,' the story of the life of the historical woman Margery Kempe as told by Margery Kempe. Reading the *Book* this way tends to deflect our attention away from the constitutive linguistic surface and pragmatic discourse by authorizing the narrative with an historical figure construed as prior and external to the text. Even when acknowledging that the narrative might be partly "made up" or mediated by the storyteller or scribes, many readers and critics have adopted a bio-historical orientation (e.g., Atkinson 1983; Gallyon 2004; Sobecki 2015). In his formal analysis, Stone refers to the *Book* as autobiography simply because it presents so much detail about the protagonist's life, unusual for a "devotional" text (1970:14–16). In the bio-historical reading formation, readers attribute the text to a female author so as (I presume) to increase the literary or historical value of the text. Authorial value and narrated modern autobiography go hand in hand. Lejeune (1975) characterizes autobiography in the strict sense as depending on "le pacte autobiographique," a tacit "contrat" between author and reader that the narrating subject is being truthful rather than fictionalizing or fabricating her life story. Lejeune's pact, which ties textual agency solely to a single narrator (fictional or nonfictional), is both a textual inference and a reading formation imposed on the text.

We have no reason to doubt the *Book* was produced as a language object in the world by several people, but it's another thing to say the *Book* was 'authored' by Kempe or her confessors or that the *Book* is historically true. (Rory Critten's [2018] reading of the *Book* as "self-publishing" is a more workable approach within the bio-historical paradigm.) Instead, I want to start with the *Book of Margery Kempe* as a text, and as a text, it presents a different configuration of narrating subjectivity from Lejeune's theory of autobiography. For one thing, the narrative discourse is composed in the third person (“sche”), not in the conventional first-person mode of autobiography. Obviously, medieval writers knew how to use the first-person pronoun to designate a past or present speaking or narrating position in fictional, historical, or autobiographical texts, as attested by Augustine’s *Confessiones,* Abelard’s *Historia calamitatum,* Guibert de Nogent’s *Monodiae*, Chaucer’s fictional narrators, Lydgate’s authorial references, Marco Polo’s *Travels,* Mandeville’s *Travels*, and many introspective Old English, Provençal, and Middle English lyrics (cf. Amsler 1981). Kempe’s contemporary, Julian of Norwich composed both the versions of her *Showings* in the narrated first person.

However, the *Book of Margery Kempe* is not such an autobiography. The narrating time external to the diegesis, the time of narration (*énonciation*), is always present. But nowhere in the text does the principal narrating focalization keyed to the dictator in present narrating time use the first-person pronoun to narrate or comment on “hir” narrated life in the past. Rather, the first-person pronoun is restricted, with one exception, to quoted speech and to three instances in scribal metadiscourse (1.70, 309, 5101) and one instance of commentary discourse (1.1626–1645).[2] That is, the *I* pronoun, Benveniste’s linguistic index of a speaking self, is aligned not with the external narrative discourse but with the protagonist and other actors in the story (internal diegetic) and occasionally with narrative commentary or scribal comments about the text in production. There is no *I* associated with an author or the main narration. Because first-person speakers are embedded in the diegesis or in the material text production, the external narrating discourse reorients us away from single-voiced autobiographical discourse. As we’ll see, the text distributes the speech of narrating subjectivity among several perspectives, not all of them diegetic.

The one exception to the use of first person in quoted speech comes when the Bishop of Lincoln, Philip Repingdon, grants the protagonist and her husband permission to live in a chaste marriage. When the archbishop affirms the change in their marital status, the text reads “And the Bysshop dede no mor to us that day, save he mad us rygth good cher and seyde we were rygth welcome" (1.783–784). First-person plural pronouns at the level of the dictating speaker. Does this passage, unique in the manuscript, represent an unrevised version of the original oral dictation of the narrative? If so, I take the passage as clarifying three things. It suggests that at least parts of the text we have have been revised to fit with the preferred third-person reference to the protagonist. Second, in the passage we read something less mediated that reflects the straightforward rhetorical and syntactic style of the original narrating discourse. Third, the passage confirms Margery Kempe to be part of the narrating composition of the text and not just the protagonist of someone else's narration.

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[2] Unless otherwise noted, citations are to book and line number in Lynn Staley’s TEAMS edition (1996).

However, reading the *Book* as a whole strictly as an 'authored' autobiography entails a larger and problematic reading assumption. Since the publication of Meech and Allen's *EETS* edition (1940), scholars have speculated about how much Kempe and individual scribes contributed to the single extant text (e.g., Hirsh 1975; Staley 1994; Bale 2017). For many, the goal is to pry out the real or "ultimate author" (Staley 1994:1–38), assumed to be an individual woman, from those clerical text makers who would manipulate the author and coopt the composition for their own religious or ambitious purposes. In these views, the 'authorship' question is actually about speaking authority and value (cf. Krug 2017:2–3, 13–20). The bio-historical reading formation also presumes to determine how much the historical figure Margery Kempe 'intends' the text or controls the production of the text assigned to her. Staley's ingenious, basically New Critical distinction between the author 'Kempe' and the protagonist 'Margery' still privileges the historical author as the singular authorial narrator.

When we read the text as a traditional autobiography, we likely set aside the text's explicit, complex, and intriguing narrative configuration, the product of collaborative composition by a narrating dictator working with several scribes over several years. But if we step away from the historical author question, we can think differently about how narrating the *Book* is a multifocalized textual act. Perhaps a multifocalized narrative without a distinct 'narrator.' As Ruth Evans has persuasively argued, "The task is not that of rescuing Margery Kempe as an author. It is rather to propose a different set of materialist reading practices for the *Book*: readings that acknowledge its complexity of pronoun use, engage with the texture of its writing, and challenge any notion at all of 'self'" (2007:519).

Instead of autobiography, I propose we read the *Book* as *autography*. In textual studies, the term *autography* refers to a material text inscribed by its 'author,' with stylus, pen, pencil, typewriter, or laptop. Lisa Samuels (1997:103) has proposed the term *autography* metaphorically to highlight the textual connection between narrating and selfhood without necessarily identifying a single intentional 'narrator' or 'author.' Spearing (2012:37), discussing medieval first-person writing, follows Samuels' definition of *autography* as "the story of a languaged self, a written 'I,' rather than the autobiography of an experiencing human." That is, because language is always already social and material, the written narrative unfolds the protagonist's life among many writing subjects and written discourses. We read the text as autography *as a text* rather than as an historical record, as a language made object without necessarily correlating every detail with an extratextual autobiographical 'real.' The text incites our *reading* experiences and therefore our linguistic and affective feel for a life written rather than as an eye-witness or even 'expert' account.

The *Book of Margery Kempe* resonates with the theory of autography and expands textual pragmatics in several ways. Rather than restricting the narration to the first-person pronoun, the text constructs multiple narrating perspectives or pragmatic stances affiliated with several narrating functions, not all of them diegetic. The deictic movement of narrating perspectives in the text redistributes narrative temporality and subjectivity. The text's language mediates and materializes rather than represents historical experience.

3. Distributing writing

The *Book* is a medieval autography of diffracted intersubjectivity. As a text, autography doesn't require first-person narration or even a discrete narrator. As a discursive mode, autography decenters the notion of narrative subjectivity and potentially distributes the narrating act among several writing subjects. Many medieval narratives have one or more explicit or implied narrators, but many don't. A narrative is situated as coming from a dramatized teller or it just appears on the page, and readers may or may not mentally construct an implied teller of the *text*. The *Book* has two paratexts which narrate from a scribe's point of view how the oral narrative became textualized, but that's as close as we get to a distinct narrator or narrating consciousness. More relevant is the fact that the protagonist is represented in the text in two different ways, one diegetic and the other somewhere between diegetic and extradiegetic, telling and co-writing the story and being the central figure of the story and a figure in the narrative of telling the story too. However, that doesn't make the protagonist herself the 'narrator.'

Despite the narrative beginning with the first paratext describing the protagonist's oral dictation, the text quickly abandons that origin story and emphasizes throughout its *writtenness*. Internally, the manuscript text is referred to as a "tretys," "copy," "booke," or "wrytyng." In Middle English, "wrytyng" could refer to many different kinds of written discourse: chronicle, poetry, scripture, translation, administrative document, copy, and so forth (see *MED*, s.v. "wrytyng"). Writings were very often read aloud. Self-referential phrases such as "as is wretyn befor" (e.g., 1.1775) give the writing object status in the world.

The "wrytyng" of the text is explicitly narrated as a collaboration of the protagonist and others in the diegesis (storyworld) as well as being mentioned in the extradiegesis (outside the storyworld). The Prologue to Book 1 describes how the text was initially inscribed and then copied by at least three scribes. In one passage the paratext describes the protagonist and scribe editing the text together (1.98-99). The last scribe, "Salthows," is responsible for copying BL Add. MS 61823 after Kempe's death (c. 1439), according to Bale sometime between 1444-1449 (2017:183). The Salthows copy was later annotated by several readers, most likely clerical and mostly in the early sixteenth century (Bale 2017; Bugyis 2014). We have no information as to whether other manuscript copies besides the original and Salthows' ever existed nor what version of the *Book* Wynkyn de Worde used for his 1501 printed excerpts.

The discourse of *wrytyng* mediates the briefly mentioned prior spoken version of the narrative. Reflecting the text's distributed narrating subjectivity, the terms *wrytyng/wryter* (noun) and *wryt/wryten* (verb) are assigned to various actors and activities rather than to a single character or even a single speaker and certainly not to a single controlling consciousness in the postmedieval sense of an *author*. The dictating and narrated figures pronominally referred to mostly as “sche” (less often as “this/the creatur”) and the scribes pronominally referred to as “he” or “I” are all described at one time or another as “wryter” or as “wrytyng” or having “wryten” the text. For example: “had the creatur no wryter . . .” (1.66); “preyng hym to wrytyn this booke . . .” (1.88); “therfor sche dede no thing wryten . . .” (1.102); “. . . it was wretyn fyrst by a man . . .” (1.122); “he that wrot this boke had nevyr befor . . . (1.4234–4235); “thowtys and many mo than I cowde evyr writyn . . .” (1.5101); “in hir chambre wyth hir writer and seyd fewer beydys for sped of wrytyng . . .” (1.5139); “thu stodiist for to do writyn the grace . . .” (1.5145); “. . . than ye don wyth yowr writing” (1.5147–5148). In the *Book* the term *wrytyng* comes to signify both oral and written narration, and the image of the dictator in the text is as a writer among other writers. The text’s use of the term *wryter* for people who can read, write, or neither reflects both the text’s distributed narrating subjectivity and the multidirectional reach of late medieval understandings of literacy and textuality.

The text complicates the semantics of “wrytyng” in relation to text time. The time of reading the text is always present. The text we read is referred to internally as having been or being or about to be “wrytyn.” These three narrating (*énonciation)* times are affiliated with the text, not the dictation or diegesis. The act of writing is also marked with anaphoric or epiphoric phrases such as “as is wretyn befor” (e.g., 1.999, 1775) or “as it schal be wretyn aftyrwarde (e.g., 1.1391). These temporal expressions are situated in what I call the extradiegetic Scribal-Textualist focalization (below). The temporal adverbs *befor(n)* and *later* conceptualize the text as constituted within a continuous narrating stream made up of multiple time frames related to diegetic action, textualization, and extradiegetic discourse. As we shall see, forward (anticipation) and backward (retroversing) temporal movement is an important part of the *Book*’s narrativity at both the diegetic and extradiegetic levels.

In the *Book* the *wrytyng/wryter/wretyn/wryt* cluster signifies not an author but a network of actors, events, things, and times: the text dictated, inscribed, and revised and several actors who dictate, compose, remember, inscribe, revise, comment on, evaluate, and summarize the narrative text. In the *Book*, literate agency is distributed across a number of enunciating (narrating) homodiegetic and heterodiegetic subjects situated in multiple time frames. The text's third-person narrative discourse ("sche") further distances the narration and further unsettles expectations for narrating coherence.

Some critics find evidence for the text's singular authorship in the occasional references to the protagonist and dictator with third-person nominals ("the/sayd/this/simple creatur"), scattered references to "synful caytyf" (1.10), or the seventeen references to "Margery," "Margery Kempe," or "Mar. Kempe of Lynne" (e.g., 2.553). These third-person references differ from the first-person references in the diegesis, but they are no less problematic. Textual cohesion depends on more than correlating all third-person references (names, nouns, pronouns) with a protagonist who is also a prior version of the one narrating the story.

The seventeen instances of the proper name 'Margery Kempe' reveal the problem. Affiliating "sche" with the historical Margery Kempe is certainly plausible but textually underspecified. All the 'Margery' references occur in the diegesis or storyworld, not in a narrated or narrating position external to the diegesis.[3] That is, the proper name is part of the *wrytyn* text's direct reported speech in the narrated past. Usually, the proper name is spoken by characters in the physical world, but once, when the protagonist has been arrested as a suspected heretic, "sche" hears a "lowed voys clepyng, 'Margery'" (1.3091). It's unclear whether the name is spoken by people outside her cell or in her dream. The text doesn't say. Either way, the utterance is direct reported speech.

The most direct collocation of the proper name and the first-person pronoun occurs when "sche" addresses rumors she has been a "ypocrite." Encountering a crowd in a London street talking about "Mar. Kempe of Lynne," the narrated protagonist explicitly claims the name: "for I am that same persone to whom thes wordys ben arectyd" (2.590–591). Again, the pragmatic speech situation shows that the connection between “Mar. Kempe of Lynne” and the first person *I* occurs in direct reported speech in the diegesis, not in the narrating perspective.

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[3] The proper names "Margery," "Margery Kempe," or "Mar. Kempe of Lynne" are embedded in the story (homodiegetic) and always uttered by another diegetic actor to address the protagonist: 1.521, 544–husband; 1.604—confessor; 1.796—bishop; 1.2022—Jesus; 1.2030—God; 1.2410—Castyn; 1.2573—bishop; 1.2904—doctor of divinity; 1.3091—anonymous voice; 1.3509—goodmen; 1.3666—confessor; 1.3872—"three worschepful men"; 1.3926, 3947, 4037— Custawns; 2.553—townspeople.

4. Focalizing the *Book*

Narratology’s concept of *focalization* sets up a rich framework for exploring the *Book*’s complex subjectivity, shifting temporality, and variable narrating perspectives. Genette’s theory of focalization straddles the classical/post-classical narratology divide but needs to be adapted to medieval and pre-print contexts. I’ll supplement Genette’s theory with pragmatic and discourse analysis and articulate a more focused linguistic analysis of the medieval text’s narrative form and effects.

Genette (1980) distinguishes five narrating acts: order, duration, frequency, voice, and focalization. The first four are based on tense. *Order*: the sequence of events as presented in the narration (text), not as they might occur chronologically in the ‘real,’ physical world. *Duration*: the amount of narrative space/time over which a given event is narrated. *Frequency*: the number of times a particular event is recounted in a narrative. *Voice*: the narrating situation with respect to time and enunciation (Who is speaking when?).

Genette’s fifth narrative act, *Focalization* (or *Mood*), is based on linguistic aspect. All focalizations exist in the text on the narrating level (*énonciation*), not the narrated. Focalization encompasses more than a single speaker or the visual centrism underpinning ‘eye-witness testimony’ or traditional narrative criticism’s ‘point of view.’ Linguistically, aspect encodes temporality in verbs and degrees of confidence or certainty in an expression (for example, ‘He’s arrived.’ vs. ‘He is arriving.’ vs. ‘Maybe he’s already arrived.’). Aspect signifies the speaker’s stance with respect to an utterance.

Focalization is also connected with the flow of information in the text. Focalization establishes limits on what a character or narrator can be said to know or believe at a given moment and the position (pragmatic situation) from which an event or object is described to the reader. As narrating perspective, focalization occurs on different narrating levels. Also, focalization occurs in the text either homodiegetically (narrating speaker is part of the storyworld at that level) or heterodiegetically (narrating speaker is not part of the storyworld at that level) (Genette 1980:162, 189–194). In terms of textual subjectivity, I will adapt Genette's terms as follows: *homodiegetic* identifies narrating characters involved on the same level of action with other characters; *heterodiegetic* nominates figures or positions whose perspective or stance is not on the same narrative level or in the same storyworld as that of diegetic characters (cf. 1980:248–249).

Genette distinguishes narrating and narrated levels in terms of focalization and information flow: zero, external, and internal (1980:189–193). Zero focalization is unanchored to a localized position and often associated with the omniscient narrative tradition, able to understand characters' minds and shift seamlessly from time to time and place to place in the story. Such all-knowing narration does occur in the *Book*, as we shall see. External focalization represents the narrative action from a perspective outside the storyworld. Genette's theory is based on literary fiction, so the other minds problem really doesn't exist for him. There's nothing for the author or narrator to know. There's no there there. I'll discuss how the *Book*'s narration regularly appeals to what is possible to know about other people's thoughts and feelings from an external or extradiegetic position. Internal focalization in narrative diegesis filters a characters' thoughts, affect, beliefs, imaginative experience, and interior disposition. As such, internal focalization is likely to be more personal or restricted than zero or external focalization. In the *Book*, internal focalization is centered almost entirely on the protagonist's mental actions, "hir" everyday and visionary experiences, thoughts, and feelings.

Mieke Bal (2009:147–165) offers important modifications to Genette's focalization, some of which I follow here by way of expanding the narratological framework when reading the *Book*. She increases the targets of narrative focalization to include invisible (disposition, feelings, thoughts) as well as visible focalized "objects." This is important since the protagonist's visions are crucial to the *Book*'s narrative. Bal also clarifies Genette's distinction between internal-homodiegetic and external-heterodiegetic focalization by distinguishing "the vision through which the elements are presented and . . . the identity of the voice that is verbalizing that vision" (Bal 2009:146). The narrator is not to be confused with the "focalizor." In narratological reading, we need to work out how a particular focalization can be attributed to some narrating position(s). This is important when we consider how the *Book*'s protagonist's behaviors, speech, internal dispositions, and visionary experiences are narrated from multiple focalized positions.

However, I don't think we need to parse focalization as strictly as Bal does into a focalizor agent, a focalizing perspective, and a focalized object. The *Book*'s textual focalizations are more networked than transitive. Focalization as a narrating position constitutes an interaction between at least two perspectives, an individual and a social one, both embedded in the text. It foregrounds how we make and use stories to give shape to what we call 'experience' or 'knowledge,' ours and others'. When we encounter narratives, we can read and experience things as familiar or expected or, just as likely, different perspectives and mediations, events and feelings which we find odd, 'unnatural,' counterintuitive, or disturbing. When we read and interact with unexpected or unfamiliar narrated people, places, objects, behaviors, and norms, a narrative challenges our horizon of expectations, sometimes so much that we change that horizon, even if only for the duration of our reading. We reassess what's a possible narrative (cf. Herman 2013: esp. 73–99, 161–215). Every narrative is an encounter, an opening to an other.

5. Textual functions

The *Book of Margery Kempe* and other medieval narratives challenge us to historicize and rework Genette's distinctions among focalizations, which he bases mostly on Proust's novels. Focalization is inherently pragmatic, situational, and historically contextualized with regard to audience expectations. The *Book* also prompts us to ask historicizing and materialist questions about the reach of narrative theory for distinguishing between 'natural' and 'unnatural' narrative and discerning what in historical contexts counts as the 'real world,' the possible, or the conventional (see Alber 2016, 2012; Richardson 2015).

In other words, to grasp the *Book*'s focalizing practice, we need to situate the text further within medieval literate practices and look closely at variable focalization. The *Book*'s textual functions and narrating focalizations to some extent correspond to medieval literacy's text-production roles of *auctor*, dictator, scribe, annotator, and commentator (Minnis 2010). In the *Book*, these roles are implicitly part of both narrating the text and the narrated action, two different narrative levels. The *Book*'s focalizations also filter narrative information differently to how information is theorized in traditional narrative criticism's 'point of view.' Distributed and variable focalization includes narrated action and inner beliefs, attitudes, imagined or interior experience, interpretive strategies, pragmatic speech acts, and self-presentation in social interaction – everything discourse and pragmatic analysis calls 'stance,' 'perspective,' or 'frame.'

I identify five focalizations in the *Book*, all part of the text's *wrytyng*:

1. Everyday Experiencer: narrated events presented on the narrating level from the internal perspective of the protagonist in the world;
2. Visionary Experiencer: narrated events presented on the narrating level from the internal perspective of the protagonist as visionary;
3. Summarizer: narrated events presented on the narrating level from the external (heterodiegetic) perspective of a chronicler;
4. Commentator: remarks about narrated events from the external (heterodiegetic) perspective of an interpreter, apologist, or someone claiming personal knowledge of the protagonist's motives;
5. Scribal-Textualist: remarks focused on the composition and aspects of the material text from the external (heterodiegetic) perspective of the inscriber of the storyteller's dictation.

These focalizations constitute both the "wryters" and the distributed "wrytyng" of the text. The two Experiencer focalizations are protagonist-centred and homodiegetic as the dictators relate "hir" story. The Summarizer, Commentator, and Scribal-Textualist focalizations are heterodiegetic narrating perspectives and are associated with medieval manuscript production, but they have different relations to the Experiencer focalizations. The two Experiencers and Summarizer internal focalizations are responsible for most of the storyworld (diegesis), including the protagonist's travel, devotional activity, interactions with others, and visions. The Commentator and Scribal-Textualist focalizations intervene in the narration from extradiegetic perspectives, one external to the narration and the other internal not to the diegesis but to the inscription of the narration of the *Book*.

In addition to the main or “first narrative” (Genette 1980:48), a few sub-narratives are embedded in the main narrative, always focalized through one of the Experiencers in narrated or narrating contexts. Perhaps the most powerful diegetically is the protagonist’s *exemplum* of the Priest, Bear, and Pear Tree, which she tells at the Archbishop of York’s court as an indirect rebuke to clergy (1.2980–3008). The *exemplum* is in effect quoted speech in a specific narrated context. In a different, extradiegetical manner, the embedded story of how the protagonist’s scribe was conned twice by clerical scoundrels is situated at the level of narration. The story interrupts the order of the first narrative and is presented as having occurred at some out of order yet indefinite time with respect to the immediate narrative moment in the text (Genette’s “anachrony”; 1980:40). The episode is recounted as part of the narrated level of the text’s inscription and the protagonist as dictator rather than as everyday and visionary experiencer. The narrated interruption is thematically related to the question of the protagonist’s truthfulness and the scribe’s trust in the storyteller (1.1253–1336). Another sub-narrative affirms the protagonist’s prophetic trustworthiness and is also inserted anachronically, as the event occurs “long aftyr the materys” being narrated in the immediate present of the main narrative. Again, the Scribal-Textualist’s justification for this insertion is thematic: the event “is in felyng lech to the materys that ben wryten beforn” (1.1338), that is, related to the protagonist’s visionary trustworthiness.

The five focalizations described above are not agents but textual functions, that is, narrating stances or pragmatic positions rather than discrete individuals, characters, or narrators in the *Book*. That narrative stances are not characterological is marked by the fact that a narrating stance or focalization does not belong consistently to one character or external figure. Rather, a narrating focalization can be activated by one or more narrating stances (homodiegetic or heterodiegetic), sometimes at the same time, sometimes at different times in the text. Some are slippery. The Summarizer and Commentator perspectives slip between internal and external narrating levels. Together, the five functions construct a multitemporal, porous narrative which enfolds the protagonist at any point with one or more narrating positions. The majority of events in the *Book* are narrated from the perspectives of the two Experiencers, the extradiegetic alter egos of the protagonist “sche,” which we usually associate with “Mar. Kempe of Lynne” (2.553), and the Summarizer. But those are only three of the many narrating positions in the text. The text’s competing, sometimes conflicting narrative information is a function of the *Book*’s multifocalized narration.

These textual functions expand the narrative horizon and information customarily associated with autobiography and a single narrating perspective. Opening to an other, the *Book*’s various narrating perspectives interweave throughout the text, crossing space, time, and discursive streams. Frequently, but not always, narrative continuity becomes multidimensional instead of linear. Text time loosens. Anachrony emerges. The textual functions and fluid text solicit an active, fluid reader. They construct the narration and open but do not fully determine readers’ engagement with the text. The manuscript’s various annotating hands suggest how a few, likely clerical, fifteenth- and sixteenth-century readers engaged with the narrative. But the position of readers always remains open in the text, whether manuscript or print or digital.

6. Text, time, other minds

To specify how these five focalizations shape the narration, I’ll read a few key episodes closely and show how the narrative text is composed from different narrated perspectives and how variable focalization constructs multiple temporalities and narrating positions rather than a single personalized narrator.

Because focalization directs the flow of narrative information, it also plays a role in whether the narrative is read as ‘natural’ or ‘unnatural’ or shifts between the two. Events that don’t conform to ‘real world’ physical laws or possible actions might be considered unnatural, but for whom? Historicizing our reading makes ‘What is possible in the narrative?’ a complex question. Historicizing a text and historicizing readings of the text are not the same thing. Today, we accept possibilities medieval people wouldn’t, and vice versa. It’s hardly news to say that medieval world views do not correspond fully with modern ones. Medieval cosmology and miracles present clear cases of how realist assumptions in a narrative change over time. Variable focalization in a medieval religious narrative creates distinctive temporalities which presuppose a transcendental realm of being, which may or may not align well with modern audiences. At the same time, our modern interest in the lives and thoughts of women and others transcends historical distance and makes the *Book of Margery Kempe* an important text for reading and rethinking women's lives and religiosity in the past.

Temporality and sequence (Genette's Order) are fundamental for narrative. Experientially, readers' perceptions of time are filtered through different narrating levels, internal or external to the diegesis. These narrating levels and perspectives manipulate narrative order by maintaining or diverting from natural chronology.

The instability of text time and story time is endemic in the *Book*. The instability of narrating and narrated time begins at the very beginning of the manuscript. The paratext associated with Book One, written after most of the text had been written, describes the narrative order of events as derived from the dictator's historical memory and not therefore rendered in strictly chronological order: "Thys boke is not wretyn in ordyr, every thyng aftyr other as it wer don, but lych as the mater cam to the creatur in mend, whan it schuld be wretyn . . ." (1.99–101). The passage implies that the dictator's memories, not the protagonist's actions, are coterminous with the narrated order. The text is not strictly a record of 'what happened' but a story of what is remembered (Genette's Order). However, given that the first paratext and the opening of Book 2, Chapter 1 post-date the first narrative, it is uncertain where the passage's implication comes from and when it was delivered in the course of composing the text. The passage might be attributed to the scribe or copyist's judgment (Scribal-Textualist) or to the dictating Everyday Experiencer's narration.

Narrative temporalities in the *Book* matter at both the macro and micro levels. Anachrony is always embedded in diachrony. A key component of the *Book*'s temporality is travel. Considering the narrative at some distance (macro level), we can read story time as organized in two loosely circular orders: Book 1, from Lynn to Constance to the Holy Land to Rome and back to Lynn; Book 2, from Lynn to Constance to Danzig, and back to London, Mount Synon abbey, and finally Lynn, after which the narrative dissolves in the protagonist's cosmic prayer of spiritual unity narrated as indirect reported speech (2.660ff.). Besides evoking the life of St. Bridget as a hypotext, this macro text order suggests something of Campbell's hero quest (departure, adventures, conflict, and return; Campbell 2008).

In a medieval context, the macro text suggests how the *Book* shares a broad travel narrative pattern with medieval epic, romance, and saint lives. However, the *Book* disrupts the narrative telos of those genres. Actively reading the *Book* reveals how text time and story time are not synchronous in the text. Time is fluid and multidirectional with respect to the protagonist's exterior and interior experiences and the narrative situations in which they occur. While the narrative order of events is more or less linear, the text's narrated sequence does not constitute a narrative arc with a defined telos. The last we read of the protagonist, she has returned to Lynn and is being admonished by her confessor for having travelled abroad against his command (2.653–657). The episode is not a reconciliation, just a return to where "sche" started and her confessor is once again admonishing her. Nothing is resolved. Everything could start again, or something entirely different might happen.

The material text stops in the midst of a possible future which neither resolves nor ends the narration. The final section (2.660-800) is a devotional monologue of reported speech, the protagonist's infinitely repeatable prayer for spiritual peace and cosmic unity among all "creaturys." The prayer is situated in pan-diegetic time and described as something the protagonist has "usyd many yearys to begynnyn hir preyerys" (2.660–661). The prayer is repeated as quoted speech, but within what narrating focalization? Coming at the end of the text, as a report or quotation of what "sche" prayed for all people at indeterminate times ("usyd many yearys"), the quoted devotional words suggest some intimate knowledge of the protagonist over many years. But the narrating focalization is not so clear. Is this the Everyday Experiencer perspective? Commentator? Scribal-Textualist? The prayer is rendered in present, ongoing text time and not within any story chronology or arc. The words are consistent with the protagonist's religious speech elsewhere and potentially repeatable by others following her example (exemplarity). At this moment, the text dissolves into infinitely repeatable speech, like ritual, like prayer. And then it stops. The text, protagonist, and narration disappear.

The fluidity of the narrative's space-time field also characterizes the narration of the protagonist's visions. The protagonist's visions transplace "hir" with respect to the narrated situation (in England, the Holy Land, and Rome). Since the Visionary Experiencer's narrating mediates the visions themselves, we can't be certain as to how long any particular vision actually lasts interiorly for the protagonist. The time span of a vision is not necessarily equal to the duration of the linguistic account of the vision (Genette's Duration). Some events, especially visions of the Passion, are narrated more than once, sometimes in extended, sometimes in abbreviated form (Genette's Frequency). The protagonist's narrated visions, with their temporal and spatial discontinuities and repetitions, ignite a *frisson* of 'unfamiliar' world experience and challenge readers to grasp and integrate information narrated through the Everyday and Visionary Experiencers' internal focalization. Medieval and modern audiences might be familiar with the Passion, but not necessarily as it is focalized imaginatively and affectively through the Visionary Experiencer's highly personalized observer involvement.

Some episodes in the everyday and visionary storyworld are temporally more mixed sentence by sentence (micro level). For instance, the narration in present text time (time of narrating) often encompasses more than referential chronology or story time. While the principal narrating perspective is that of the Everyday or Visionary Experiencer, other stances are regularly interpolated. For instance: The Scribal-Textualist focalization intervenes in the narration with metaleptic utterances such as "as it is wretyn befor" or "as wil be wryten aftyr," sometimes in the first-person (e.g., 1.309). The Scribal-Textualist phrases focalize time by calling attention to the ongoing act of writing the dictated (oral) narrative (e.g., 1.3628ff.). The internal metalepses call the reader's attention to narrative coherence by connecting prior and posterior events to the immediate narrative moment. (I set aside the later red ink and other manuscript annotations, which constitute other, post-Salthows Scribal-Textualist perspectives. See Parsons 2001; Bugyis 2014). The metaleptic phrases refer to a written text being inscribed, conceptualized, and read in immediate writing or reading present time. Sometimes, the Scribal-Textualist stance emphasizes a pan-narrative perspective by referring metaleptically to figures narrated elsewhere with whom the protagonist is connected, such as Richard the "brokebakkyd man" or the protagonist's confessors, especially Richard Spryngolde, whom some nominate as the real 'author' of the text.

Reading time and narrated time sometimes intersect in the text. The Scribal-Textualist function focalizes the rubrics of medieval manuscript production as part of the text's materiality. The manuscript's chapter divisions with elaborated initial letters are not part of the story being narrated nor part of the dictator's memory. They are public features of the material text, constituents of the Scribal-Textualist focalization. Manuscript markup directs our reading experiences and makes possible a reader's organized and discontinuous or "skipping" reading. One of the *Book*'s most striking moments of textual and temporal discontinuity occurs at the end of Chapter 16 (BL Add. MS 61823, f. 19r), where the Scribal-Textualist addresses readers directly: "Rede first the twenty-first chaptere and than this chaptere [Chapter 17] aftyr that" (1.863). In some indefinite post-dictation time, the metatextual sentence was inserted in the manuscript by the copyist "Salthows" or another amanuensis to correct a copying or perhaps narration error. Temporally and pragmatically, the utterance directs the reading act by extradiegetically calling the reader's attention to temporal anachrony. The utterance presents not a particular scribe's writing but the Scribal-Textualist function of reading the text in immediate text time and then inserting new writing that reading instigates.

However, rather than solving a sequence problem, the inserted utterance creates a textual and reading dilemma at the micro level. At line 1.863, the Scribal-Textualist function uses the imperative mood, pragmatically implying present time, to direct the reader in advance in her present time to read discontinuously with respect to the text in hand. But it doesn't work out quite that way. If the reader follows the textual command, reads Chapter 21, and then returns to Chapter 17, she is confronted with the opening line ". . . On a day long befor this tyme" (1.864). When is "this tyme," which time? Rather than resolving the narrative sequence diachronically, the opening sentence of Chapter 17 further disrupts the forward linear sequence (Genette's Order) of the diegesis (story time) by using the spatializing temporal deictic marker "befor this tyme" in a referentially vague context. Scribal-Textualist discourse is regularly oriented around temporal *retroversion* and *anticipation* in the narration. The phrase refers to a time before (in front of) the immediate narrative situation and external to the diegesis, while at the same time it projects an infinite present reading time external to the written narrative itself.

7. Narrating and Commentary Time

The Everyday Experiencer focalization accounts for most of the narrative episodes, focalizing the protagonist's experiences traveling, speaking, and making a life, as when she seeks a chaste marriage or decides to care for her husband whose health is failing or when she travels to the Holy Land. As Stone (1970:16) commonsensically points out, the sheer wealth of lived detail about the protagonist is unusual in a Middle English or any other medieval devotional text. One of the most sustained narrative episodes focalized entirely through the Everyday Experiencer is the protagonist's complex pragmatic interaction with clergy at the Archbishop of York's court in 1417. The text narrates the intense, antagonistic exchanges in York as the protagonist verbally parries with clergy who challenge her sincerity, truthfulness, and religious agency (cf. Amsler 2021:212–239). Eventually, she secures the Archbishop's grudging acceptance after telling (internal-homodiegetic) a pointed moral tale (*exemplum*) about clerical misconduct. In dramatic vernacular speech, the narration lays bare the conflict between the protagonist and patriarchal clergy. The York interrogation episode is narrated in chronological order, unmixed with other focalizations and replete with energetic conversation and direct reported speech. The York examination episode is one of the best examples of the text's narrative coherence in a stable time frame.

Elsewhere, however, the Commentator focalization, like the Scribal-Textualist perspective, repeatedly interpolates an external-heterodiegetic perspective into the Everyday Experiencer's storytelling focalization. The Commentator focalization belongs to text time and thus floats in and out of the narrated story. Usually, Commentator utterances (*énonciation*) explain or gloss a narrated event or add new information. In one passage (1.1626–1645), the Commentator function, like the Scribal-Textualist function, shifts narrative levels by switching from third to first-person (plural) speech. In that passage, the use of the first-person plural ("whan we may se eche day at eye . . .") directly involves the reader with the Commentator speaking on behalf of the community. As heterodiegetic discourse in present text time, Commentator focalization provides context, information, and evaluation as part of an extradiegetic metadiscourse, that is, new information or judgment which cannot be attributed to the protagonist or to either of the narrating Experiencers in narrated time.

The shifts between narrative coherence in a stable time frame and more general commentary discourse in and out of the narrated story suggest how the narrative works to exemplify the protagonist as a holy human figure. The *Book* is an exemplary rather than hagiographic text. Further, the narrative's multiple focalizations suggest a complex, even contradictory mode of spiritual exemplarity. The protagonist fully participates in the world constituted by intersubjectivity, (mis)trust, and discovery, yet she is set apart by her intense spiritual affect and performative piety. The Commentator, for example, sometimes explains the protagonist's behaviors as what most people do in similar circumstances (grieve, for example). Other times, the Commentator asserts what others do not recognize or acknowledge about the protagonist: that her extravagant behaviors are signs of her holiness. Some episodes attest to the protagonist's truthfulness, trustworthiness, and loyalty, but not her sanctity. The Visionary Experiencer focalization complicates the protagonist's interactions with Jesus. "Hir" beliefs and faith are filled with doubt, anxiety, and conflict as much as with holiness. The protagonist's resilience and struggle do not immediately affirm her sanctity. The protagonist's encounters with Archbishops Arundel and Bowet and other clergy affirm, however haltingly, her orthodoxy from the established Church's point of view; but orthodoxy is not sanctity.

Focalization entails that readers actively infer the boundaries of a narrative field for some narrating act from some perspective. Occasionally, the Commentator functions like the narrating objectifying "I" found in first-person autobiographies. We might assume the narrating Everyday and Visionary Experiencers have at least the same knowledge of most of the external events and all of "hir" internal experiences which the protagonist had. If so, that would establish the referential continuity of narrative subjectivity. But again, that's not always how things work out in the *Book*. Sometimes, the Commentator perspective supplements the Experiencers' versions of events with different information as well as providing separate evaluations of those events.

Whereas the Scribal-Textualist foregrounds the material text as languaged, the Commentator focalization defends or ameliorates many of the protagonist's unruly behaviors. The text uses *felyng* (n.) and occasionally *steryn* (v.) to describe psychosomatically the protagonist's physical behaviors and the psychological or spiritual disposition they index. In Middle English, *stiren* (*steryn*) could mean physical, sexual, or spiritual arousal (*MED*, s.v. *stiren*, def. 9). Rolle regularly used the word in his contemplative writing. The verb's polyvalence suggests how "hir" affects are physical and mental motions with different possible interpretations. We often read in the *Book* how in the narrated past people responded positively or negatively to the protagonist's public behaviors and speech in everyday or spiritual contexts. Clergy and lay people call "hir" witch, Lollard, heretic, or troublemaker. She is arrested and examined for possible heresy. For some, "hir" stirrings and feelings are provocations.

However, the Commentator perspective rebuts her critics with more than strictly empirical or ideological explanations for the protagonist's behaviors. The Commentator focalization assumes privileged access to the protagonist's interior dispositions, whereas "Other wheech had no knowlach of hir maner of governawns, save only be sygth owtforth er ellys be jangelyng of other personys, perverting the dom of trewth . . ." (1.994–996). There is no narrative explanation for the Commentator's claim. It just is. The Commentator stance is amplified by separate but key diegetic episodes in which the powerful Archbishops Arundel and Bowet vouch for the protagonist's orthodoxy and where other diegetic characters interpret "hir" speech and behaviors as signs of her spiritual gifts, piety, and most important, truthfulness. Implicit in all these encounters is whether people, including readers, can trust the protagonist, what she says, and how she behaves. The Commentator focalization seeks to authorize the dictator's truthfulness across narrating levels. Both the protagonist in the past and the storyteller in the narrating present are situated as trustworthy.

8. Multi-focalization and transtemporality

Some episodes in the *Book* combine multiple focalizations and temporalities within a single narrated event (Genette's anachrony). Chapter 28 (1.1552–1612) is a rich example. In the chapter, we learn through the Everyday Experiencer and Summarizer focalizations the history of the protagonist's "roaring," exuberant "contemplacyons," crying out, and weeping when she hears, sees, or imaginatively recreates an image of Christ's Passion. The narration proceeds in chronological order but on a timeline not restricted to the immediate narrative moment (Order) and at different narrating speeds (Duration). The cumulative effect of these mixed temporal accounts suggests an action-filled period in the protagonist's spiritual experience over many years. There's a lot going on.

Beginning with the Everyday Experiencer focalization, Chapter 28 narrates the protagonist's entry into Jerusalem: "And, whan this creatur saw Jerusalem, rydyng on an asse, sche thankyd God wyth al hir hert . . ." (1.1552–1553). Suddenly, at line 1579, the narrative orientation shifts. As the protagonist begins to cry out and weep, the text switches from the immediate past to a wider temporal focus with a summary and evaluation of her "roryng" and crying out in response to places, images, or speech about the Passion not only in Jerusalem but also later ("many yerys aftyr this tyme," "sumtyme") in England and elsewhere (1.1580–1581, 1585, 1591). The temporal focalization shifts from a distant past time in Jerusalem (retroversion) to a series of times in the nearer past (Rome, England) relative to the narrating present of the text.

In this time-shifting passage (1.1579–1612), the Summarizer focalization overtakes that of the Everyday Experiencer, accumulating and accelerating the action (Duration). Eventually, the Summarizer perspective merges with that of the Commentator. The accelerating tempo and merging focalizations expand the scene's action and narrative horizon with multiple temporalities and perspectives. The anachrony is narratively productive. The Summarizer focalization surveys in the diegesis people's explanations for the protagonist's outbursts – demon possession, sickness, drunkenness. The Commentator focalization intervenes from an external perspective to refute the laypeople's and "gret clerkys" insults directed at the protagonist. As before (1.994–996), the Commentator explains "but thei knewyn ful lytyl what sche felt, ne thei wolde not belevyn but that sche myth an absteynd hir fro crying yf sche had wold" (1.1604–1605). In the narrating present (heterodiegetic), the Commentator focalization articulates special knowledge of the protagonist's interior feelings ("what sche felt") at that time. The Commentator stance presumes to know the other's mind. This heterodiegetic focalization inserts into the narration a more "true" understanding of the protagonist's affective speech and behaviors and implies her holiness. But just how the Commentator focalization has attained that information is not accounted for.

Nonetheless, refocalizing the narration in Chapter 28 in present narrating time (extradiegetic), the Commentator perspective inserts new information and asserts the sincerity of the protagonist's behaviors and therefore the ethical goodness and spiritual truthfulness of her interior experience. The combination of external and internal focalizations enables readers to trust the narrating at this point. We are assured the protagonist is aware of how her public behaviors affect others, even if she can't predict or control her feelings: "sche kept it [crying out, weeping] in as long as sche mygth and dede al that sche cowed to withstond it er ellys to put it awey til sche wex as blo as any leed, and evyr it schuld labowryn in hir mende mor and mor into the tyme that it broke owte" (1.1606–1609; cf. 1.1625–1626, 3652–3654).

We read Chapter 28's narrative structure and temporality as multifocalized and nonlinear and the action as occurring on different narrating levels. The Everyday Experiencer focalization is surpassed by that of the Summarizer and the Commentator. The Summarizer focalization (external-heterodiegetic) embeds later similar events into the immediate account of the protagonist's "roryngys" in Jerusalem, thereby expanding the narrative horizon and quickening the narrative tempo. The clerical and lay criticisms of the protagonist are internal-homodiegetic focalization mediated by the external Commentator focalization with a sympathetic evaluation of the protagonist's intentions. The Commentator focalization inserts into the narration an authoritative extradiegetic evaluation, one which complements the Experiencer's and Summarizer's internal narration.

Narratological close reading shows how the narration in Chapter 28 intertwines the perspectives of the Scribal-Textualist, Commentator, and Summarizer with the Experiencers' homodiegetic perspectives. The Commentator focalization reshapes the narrative horizon of the text, refocalizing, expanding, contextualizing, and correcting the diegetic narration with knowledge of the protagonist's interior experience. Chapter 28's event sequence (Order) is anachronic, whose textual effect is to thicken the narrative temporality. The sliding focalizations also encode authoritative text alongside the Everyday and Visionary Experiencers' more testimonial discourse.

9. Focalizing visionary time

The protagonist's visions are a core part of the narrative and raise questions about how transcendent experience can be narrated. The vision narratives comfort and support the protagonist or provide her with affective modes to express her attachment with Jesus, in marked contrast with her antagonistic or hostile encounters in the everyday world, especially among clergy. The vision episodes are similar to those in other medieval mystical writing in the late Middle Ages, notably St. Bridget, but with some differences. One difference is the text's multifocalized narrating mode.

Let's briefly consider how the Visionary Experiencer focalization relates with other focalizations in the narrative. Recent post-classical narratology has distinguished between 'natural' and 'unnatural' narratives, but we need to historicize and theoretically expand the concept when considering medieval texts. Whatever an 'unnatural' narrative might be, it is always constructed in relation to what readers and narrative actors consider 'natural' narrative to be. And what narrative actors think and what readers think are not necessarily the same thing.[4] The 'natural'/'unnatural' spectrum needs to be deployed critically to situate texts in different worldviews and physical assumptions. Alber (2016), starting with a model of realist constancy, defines 'unnatural' narrative as violating the assumption that "the world we inhabit is dominated by physical laws, logical principles, and anthropomorphic limitations that are permanent and stable. . . [P]henomena such as speaking animals, animated corpses, coexisting time flows, and flying islands were as impossible in the past as they are today" (2016:6). Richardson (2015) takes a more genre-based approach to the dichotomy. 'Unnatural' narrative contains "antimimetic events, characters, settings or *frames*, . . . representations that contravene the fictional presuppositions of non-fictional narratives, violate mimetic expectations and the practices of realism, and defy the conventions of existing, established genres" (2015:3; his emphasis). Fludernik sides with Richardson, describing 'unnatural' narrative as "the fabulous, the magical, and the supernatural besides the logically or cognitively impossible" (2012:362). She also places great theoretical weight on the distinction between oral (natural) and written (unnatural) narrative performances (1996, 2012).

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[4] I use the somewhat unfortunate terms "natural" and "unnatural" narrative in a value neutral way, as do Alber, Richardson, and Fludernik. I don't claim any special truth value or authority for the visions outside the *Book* itself, regardless of what diegetic figures in the text or other readers might claim.

Some caveats: What is conventional in a narrative can and will change over time. As Fludernik points out, omniscient narrative fiction has over time naturalized an inherently unnatural mode of storytelling, one in which an all-knowing teller external to the implied audience dips in and out of characters' minds and exposes to the reader what each character is thinking and feeling as well as what they are doing. Sometimes, the Commentator focalization in the *Book* narrative has aspects of the omniscient narration convention.

Second, a text need not be entirely natural or unnatural. Mimetic narratives can include non-mimetic sections or events. It's hard to think of a narrative that is entirely non-mimetic.

Third, what counts as 'real-world laws' and so forth needs to be contextualized in terms of both late medieval religious and commonsense worldviews as well as medieval debates about the trustworthiness of sense perceptions and, most important, interior experience and affect. Alber and Richardson seem to accept we can make ahistorical or universalizing assumptions about what counts as 'unnatural.' But it's not enough to simply allow for the 'willing suspension of disbelief.' Eva von Contzen (2017) presents an excellent critique along these lines, arguing that narratology's natural/unnatural model needs to be historically inflected with medieval texts and narrativity. Among different sections of medieval society, peoples' varied notions of what is possible or impossible, conventional or odd circulated in religious discourse, commonsense, and experience, notions inflected by everyday and ideological factors.

The narration recounts the protagonist's visions as interior, inherently narrative experiences through the Visionary Experiencer focalization. If we think of the *Book*'s vision narratives as imaged (not just visually) and as mental projections, we might read them as both possible and impossible narrative. Of course, there's ample evidence that people in the late Middle Ages believed in the truth of "visions," but elites and peasants alike also expressed skepticism about religious visions, miracles, and some Christian doctrine.[5] A person's self-reported visions were often controversial and subject to clerical inquiries to determine if they were "real" and not illusions, figments of the imagination, or worse, intentionally made up. Visions required verification and authentication to be trusted. Visions were intimately but uncertainly imbricated with authority. In late medieval culture, whether one's bodily senses could be trusted was subject to debate and interrogation in commonsense and intellectual contexts. If someone claimed to see or hear what others could not, were they perceiving with different sensory receptors or with spiritual gifts, or were they delusional or making things up?

That last question is a persistent part of the *Book*'s narration of the protagonist's visionary experiences -- What is the source of the protagonist's visions? What did it mean for medieval people to think someone perceived things, whether transcendental or otherwise, outside the commonsense ordinary world? Could a person be trusted when they reported seeing what no one else could? Did the vision authorize that person's speech? Conversely, could the vision experience be languaged? Whether a medieval person's vision reports were trustworthy or not was rooted, to varying degrees, in people's faith, commonsense lived experience, communal sense of trust, and traditional superstition.

In the *Book* the protagonist's visions are sometimes described as prophecy (e.g., 1.1253–1263) but usually as empathetic piety. The text uses the devotional language of "gostly seeing" to narrate "hir" visionary experience. The protagonist's self-reported experience is presumed to be the basis for the visions' authenticity, even when "sche" doesn't trust them herself. The protagonist's struggle to believe is another persistent thread in the narrative.

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[5] See, for instance, Lollard and Waldensian critiques of established Church doctrine and practices; Jacques de Vitry on miracles in the legend of St Margaret: "Istud autem, quod dicitur de draconis devoratione ct ipsius crepatione, apocryphum et frivolum reputatur" (*Legenda aurea*, ed. Grässe 1850:401); and with caution, testimony gathered by fourteenth-century investigators in Montaillou (Le Roy Ladurie 1978).

As narrative events, the visions are embedded in the diegesis. They are aligned with the Visionary Experiencer focalization, whereas the protagonist's affective responses to her visions are aligned with the Everyday Experiencer perspective. The *Book*'s visions fall roughly into three groups: imagining the Passion (or once, Nativity), talking with God and Jesus, and seeing Jesus manifested on the streets. All are connected with Apostolic rather than eschatological time. I'll briefly discuss the Passion and visions of Jesus on the streets. I set aside for now the visions of talking with God and Jesus, in particular the protagonist's extensive (and important) vision of talking with God and Jesus in the Apostles Church in Rome (1.2000–2156).

As an example of the protagonist's visions of the Passion, let's return to Chapter 28 and the Jerusalem episodes. The chapter foregrounds the phenomenology of space-time and perception by complicating the relation between narrated time and text time. After the protagonist's difficult journey to the Holy Land, the chapter depicts the protagonist's arrival in Jerusalem and her guided ascent of Mount Calvary with other pilgrims (1.1612–1645). Through the Everyday Experiencer focalization, "sche" is narrated in the diegetic past riding into Jerusalem on an ass (1.1553), a clear echo of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem in more distant Apostolic time. In addition, the passage associates the protagonist's joy at seeing Jerusalem with a future spiritual joy. Under the sign of the Everyday Experiencer, "sche" approaches Jerusalem via Mount Joy (now the Palestinian village of Nabi Samwil [Samuil]), the location from where pilgrims first saw the Holy City.[6] When the protagonist nearly falls off her donkey, overcome as she is with "joy" and the "swetnesse and grace that God wrowt in hir sowle" (1.1556, 1558–1559), "sche" thanks God for showing her the "erdly cyté Jerusalem" and then immediately refers to a future time when she hopes to see the "blysful cité of Jerusalem abovyn, the cyté of hevyn" (1.1554–1555). However embarrassing her riding might be, the protagonist's immediate joy on earth is presented as a herald of future joy in heaven.

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6 I thank an *NM* reviewer for the Mount Joy reference.

The passage expresses multiple overlapping times and feelings. First, the narrative of the protagonist's entry into Jerusalem repeats Jesus' entry in the distant Apostolic past, only to quickly disrupt the similitude with the protagonist's near fall in the narrated present. Second, the passage collapses together three narrative temporalities -- initially, Apostolic and near past time, then the protagonist's response to seeing Jerusalem (near past) from Mount Joy, and finally a broad sweeping time frame encompassing the distant Apostolic past on earth and the protagonist's near past wish for future joy in heaven. The Everyday Experiencer focalization gathers together all these temporal positions and the protagonist's "joy" and "contemplacyon" around the pronoun "sche" in the diegetic past rendered in the immediate narrating present.

On Mount Calvary, the scene continues to manipulate the multitemporality of the protagonist's experience by shifting from Everyday to Visionary Experiencer focalization. When the protagonist comes to the actual scene of the Crucifixion, she undergoes a major spiritual transformation. Friars lead the pilgrims through the stations of the Cross in a memorial act of contemplative devotion. As the group travels up Mount Calvary, the protagonist imagines the scene of the Crucifixion and begins to weep and cry out: "*as thow* sche had seyn owyr Lord *wyth hir bodyly ey* suffering hys Passyon at that tyme" (1.1569–1570; my emphasis). The phrase "as thow" signals the shift from Everyday to Visionary Experiencer focalization. The deictic phrase "at that tyme" is not syntactically required, but its ambiguity combines the Apostolic past with the immediate narrated past. With the focalizing phrases "as thow . . . Befor hir in hyr sowle . . ." (1.1569–1570), the Visionary Experiencer stance highlights a contingent motivation and a situated perceptual frame in the immediate narrating present. The analogizing phrase "as thow" (*as if*) occurs in narrating text time (*énonciation*), not narrated story time (*énoncé*). It indexes the diegesis with an interpretation via the Commentator focalization. The narrative discourse maintains this discursive shift between times and focalizations as the pilgrims climb Mount Calvary while the protagonist continues to see the Passion before her: "for in the cité of hir sowle sche saw verily and freschly how owyr Lord was crucified" (1.1574–1575). In the chapter the narration continues the motif of the "cité," from historical to heavenly to one's soul. But without a contingent "as thow," the protagonist's vision in present space-time manifests the spiritual power of sacred space on Calvary. Atop Mount Calvary, the narration presents the protagonist's immediate past perception with her "gostly ey," her imagining eye, as an interior image realistic enough to be taken as evidence with her "bodyly ey." At that point, the narrative ground shifts and the interior vision transplaces the protagonist, spiritually and psycho-somatically, from fifteenth-century Jerusalem to the Crucifixion in Jerusalem in the distant past.

At this climactic moment, the Commentator perspective in extradiegetic narrating time interpolates new information: the protagonist "myt not kepe hirself fro krying and roryng, thow sche schuld a be ded therfor" (1.1578–1579), a view the Commentator will repeat shortly (1.1604–1605). Crossing narrating levels, the Commentator perspective then merges with the Summarizer's to provide a more historicized temporal and experiential context for the immediate event on Calvary: "*And this was the first cry* that evyr sche cryed in any contemplacyon" (1.1579–1580; my emphasis). Suddenly, the Summarizer focalization (1.1579–96), sliding between narrative and metanarrative discourse, reorders the immediate narrated event within a different timeline whose future has already occurred (story time) but which has not yet been narrated and written (text time) (anticipation). Following the Summarizer focalization narrating the protagonist's "roryng" in later past times (Genette's Subsequent Narrating), the Commentator focalization (1.1596–1612) introduces an explanation for the protagonist's interior experience of the Passion: "And whan the body myth ne lengar enduryn the gostly labowr but was ovyr come wyth the unspekabyl lofe that wrowt so fervently in the sowle, than fel sche down and cryed wondyr lowed" (1.1609–1610). The Commentator stance pulls away from each of the narrated events and asserts the protagonist's intense devotion affect – she collapses with "unspekabyl lofe."

Capping off the narration on Mount Calvary, the Everyday Experiencer and Scribal-Textualist focalizations deploy syntactic transitions and anaphora which, surprisingly, return us to the immediate scene with the protagonist in the near past in Jerusalem: "And *thus* sche dede in the Mownt of Calvarye, *as it is wretyn beforn*" (1.1612–1613; my emphasis). The textual self-reference reasserts the diegetic narrative in text time which the Summarizer and Commentator focalizations have expanded, glossed, and narrated away from.

Chapter 28's variable focalizations and multiple temporal shifts disrupt and reorder the text's events and diegetic time in a combination of everyday and visionary experience. The nonlinear narrating, not just the Scribal-Textualist focalization, is full of retroversion and anticipation. The narrated text begins in the past in fifteenth-century Jerusalem, leaps further back to the Crucifixion in the distant Apostolic past, and then quickly shifts forward to a nearer past (England and other undefined places), all which have occurred after the scene in Jerusalem (story time) but not yet in future text time. With the non-causal transition "thus" (1.1612), the narrating Everyday Experiencer focalization returns to the near past in Jerusalem, relative to the present time of narrating (text time). The passage concludes with the extradiegetic Scribal-Textualist self-reflexively binding the sentences with textual deixis to an earlier instantiation of the episode.

The text of Chapter 28 scrambles narrative cause and effect with respect to the protagonist's affective spiritual behaviors. The Summarizer's sequence of temporal refocalizations characterize the protagonist's later affective behaviors as being like her earlier behavior in Jerusalem. The protagonist's post-Jerusalem behaviors are yet to be narrated (future text time) but have already occurred in the storyworld's near past. The narrated text time reverses the narrative logic and natural chronology of events (story time). The first was like the last. The present is like the past. The past is like the present. On a different narrating level, the Commentator focalization provides an interior spiritual rationale for the protagonist's feelings and external behaviors. The narration mixes repetition with causation and explanation.

The expanded present narration (narrating time) of the vision is similar to what Michel de Certeau describes as the eternal present of mystical experiences and narratives oriented around the Passion and Apostolic times (1992:184). What is mystical, he says, is a *modus loquendi,* a way of speaking, a discourse with a never ending present. That certainly applies to the *Book*, but the narration through the Visionary Experiencer's focalization goes further than de Certeau's spiritually continuous present of the past. It also fulfils Genette's narrative act Frequency. Scenes of the Passion are reiterated as the principal narrative of the protagonist's visionary experiences.

Chapter 28 shows how the *Book*'s narration intertwines narrating focalizations. Unlike the narratives in other medieval mystical writing, the text's Visionary Experiencer and other focalizations manifest the narration not as defamiliarizing but as familiar yet highly affective social interaction. The Visionary Experiencer and other focalizations reflect how someone's report of their interior experience and feeling in their own life can also communicate the emotional power of that experience.

The protagonist's visions as narrated often support and comfort "hir," yet sometimes disturb "hir." The protagonist sometimes questions or worries about her visions and whether she should trust them and herself or not. However, the Commentator focalization doesn't let such doubts detain the reader. The protagonist's doubts are narrated through the Everyday Experiencer focalization, but the Commentator focalization ameliorates the behavior which people in the diegesis and (medieval or modern) readers might think odd. In the Mount Calvary episode, for instance, after the narration through the Visionary Experiencer focalization tells us "sche" wept and fell down while contemplating her vision of the Passion on Mount Calvary (1.1613–1625), the Commentor focalization intercedes on the metanarrating level with a familiarizing analogy. Addressing readers in immediate text time, the Commentator perspective glosses: "It is nowt to be merveyled yyf . . . whan we may se eche day at eye . . ." (1.1625–1638). The focalization seeks to render the protagonist's visionary experience as familiar in terms of commonsense perception ("whan we may se eche day at eye"). The Commentator focalization authorizes the protagonist's contemplative yet boisterous affect with a general psychological account in present reading time, not restricted to the protagonist's experience alone. "We" all – narrating subjects, readers, humans – will likely react just as inconsolably if we lose something we dearly love. "Sche," the Commentator focalization suggests, is no different. What *is* different is that the protagonist's "gostly eye" and spiritual intention are properly focused on Jesus' sacrifice rather than on worldly losses. The Commentator focalization with present-tense explanation normalizes the protagonist's visionary affect, discernible but disturbing to others, and then idealizes the affect as proper devotional response.

The vision narratives are embedded in the diegesis, sometimes in explicitly devotional contexts, sometimes in random transtemporal, transplacing experiences. One account, the protagonist's repeated visions of Jesus in her encounters on the Roman streets (1.2010–2019), exemplifies how one vision is embedded in the narration of another vision, such that the Everyday and Visionary Experiencer focalizations are intertwined with the Summarizer perspective.

In the Rome episodes, the embedded Summarizer focalization expands the horizon of the Commentator's (external-heterodiegetic) and Visionary Experiencer's (external-homodiegetic) focalizations in the extensive visionary conversation between the protagonist and Jesus in the Apostles Church in Rome. The subject of their visionary conversation is Jesus' "manhode," the focal point of the protagonist's unending desire for intimate contact with the embodied transcendental being of Jesus. At one point in the narrated conversation, the Summarizer focalization intervenes to recount the protagonist's visionary experiences of Christ's "manhode" on the streets of Rome, where "Sche was so meche affectyd to the manhode of Crist . . ." (1.2010). The Summarizer extradiegetic stance interpolates into the immediate diegesis a parallel narrative of the protagonist's desire for Christ's "manhode." Earlier in the text, the Summarizer focalization was vague as to where and when the protagonist cried out in her contemplations (1.1580ff.). Now, in Rome the Summarizer focalization gives a series of specific transplacing interactions (1.2010ff.). Small children remind the protagonist of the infant Jesus and cause her to weep and try to kiss them. Handsome ("semly") men compel her to turn away "les than sche myth a seyn hym that was bothe God and man" (1.2015–2016). The protagonist both desires and fears Christ's "manhode." Through the Summarizer focalization, "hir" pleasure in His holy body is narrated as ambiguous. The passage indicates how the text sometimes occasionally inserts one vision inside another to open the borders of the narrated field and depict multiple times and places in an expanded narrating horizon.

10. Focalization and narrative punctum

At least one vision combines Everyday Experiencer and Visionary Experiencer focalizations without any extradiegetic or interpolating perspectives. The episode in Leicester in 1417 narrates a different kind of narrative simultaneity. The protagonist was in Leicester seeking a letter from local religious authorities to guarantee her safe conduct as "sche" travelled throughout England. At the time, “sche” was being harassed by the Mayor of Leicester and others. Soon, she would be summoned by the Archbishop of York and examined on her orthodoxy.

The Augustinian abbey in Leicester was headed by Richard (of) Rothley (in service 1405-1420). The narrative depicts Richard as at first suspicious of the protagonist, but after vetting “hir” orthodoxy (1.2692–2752) he decides to support her request for a letter of safe passage as she travelled to Lincoln to obtain a letter from the bishop discharging her from the mayor of Leicester’s jurisdiction (1.2743–2745). The narrated episode manifests a multifocalized and transtemporal narrativity and a different kind of textual subjectivity from what we read in other vision episodes.

As the abbot and his entourage enter the abbey church with what the protagonist hopes is the letter guaranteeing her safe travel, the narrative perspective quickly shifts from Everyday to Visionary Experiencer focalization. The protagonist suddenly perceives the entourage transtemporally, similar to the vision we read earlier in Jerusalem and to the visions on the Rome streets. She sees in her imagination not the abbot but Jesus and the Apostles approaching her. Perhaps the protagonist’s vision is ignited by her anticipation that the abbot is coming to protect her, an instance of her reading the world in Apostolic time. Significantly, the Commentator focalization is absent. Rather than imaginatively transplacing her into the distant Apostolic past, the narrative combines the distant Apostolic past with the immediate narrated present in Leicester; that is, the Everyday and the Visionary Experiencer focalizations are combined to encompass simultaneously the protagonist’s interior and exterior public experiences. “Sche” is narrated as being both in Leicester and as meeting Jesus and the apostles in an English church. So far, much like on the streets of Rome.

However, this time the variable but intertwined focalization is signalled by a *punctum*, a rupture in the narrative frame. As she is suddenly “raveschyd into contemplacyon,” the protagonist leans against a church pillar to catch herself:

> Whan sche sey hym comyn, *anon in hir sowle* sche beheld owr Lord coming wyth hys apostelys, and sche was so raveschyd into contemplacyon wyth swetnes and devocyon that sche myth not

> stondyn ageyns her [*their*] comyng *as curtesy wolde but lenyd hir to a peler in the chirche and held hir strongly therby for dred of fallyng*, for *sche wold a stondyn* and sche myth not for plenté of devocyon which was cawse that sche cryed and wept ful sor. (1.2755–2760; my emphasis)

The passage repeats the Visionary Experiencer's interior focalizing phrase "in hir sowle," read elsewhere when the text describes the protagonist's visions. The narration also includes devotional vocabulary which echoes that found in the writings of Nicholas Love, Walter Hilton, Richard Rolle, and the Pseudo Bonaventure (now Johannes de Cauligus), the last three of whom were included in the protagonist's reading list with her clerics (1.898–900).

However, despite these commonalities, the highlighted passage (1.2757–2758) suggests the difference between the Leicester abbey vision and most of the protagonist's other visions. The passage above in italics is unique in the *Book*. The narration of the Leicester vision simultaneously maintains the protagonist as acting consciously and simultaneously in two narrated positions, the ecstatic and the courteous, the visionary and the everyday. The present time narrating discourse attributes the worldly protocol of "curtesy" to the protagonist's state of mind. The contrastive connector "but" emphasizes the disjunction between visionary and everyday perceptual modes and the visionary's psychosomatic conflict. The Leicester episode recalls the streets of Rome passages where the protagonist imaginatively sees Jesus in children and handsome men. But in the abbey church, the protagonist remains distinctly self-conscious as to her socio-material position. "Sche" insists on maintaining a more customary and socially approved presence even as she is experiencing a vivid spiritual vision. Even though the protagonist cries out and weeps "ful sor," "sche" is not entirely overwhelmed by her ecstasy or "hy contemplacyon." "Curtesy" motivates "hir" to control her body and her spiritual outbursts in the past time storyworld even as she is simultaneously inhabiting spiritually a distant Apostolic past. The protagonist thinks about social "curtesy" even as she is spiritually "raveschyd" by her inner vision.

Literate power comes to the fore in the episode. Unlike in the other narrated visions of the suffering, talking, or walking Jesus, the narrated protagonist at Leicester abbey is focalized as more cognizant of the immediate material and social protocols in the abbot's presence and also as desiring her own safety, which depends on the abbot's social power. In other episodes the protagonist is depicted as trying unsuccessfully to control or contain her spiritual outbursts, crying out, weeping, shaking, or turning blue (e.g., 1.2474–2475, 1.3652–3654), often leaving her publicly vulnerable. In the Leicester episode, she is singularly successful in sustaining her position *between* the everyday and Apostolic worlds. The abbot's letter signifies power and safety in the everyday world, relying ultimately on Apostolic authority. "Sche" must maintain a social presence worthy of written authority. The Everyday and Visionary Experiencers co-focalization mediates the protagonist's multisensory, multitemporal perception by combining her contemplative imagination with her pragmatic literate consciousness and social savvy. Obtaining the abbot's letter gives the protagonist a kind of literate power, just as textualizing and circulating her *Book* does or at least might have done. Rather than being wholly transplaced to the distant past or wholly empathizing with the image of the suffering Jesus, the protagonist in Leicester is focalized as a lay women empowered with corporate literacy linking the distant authoritative past, institutional power, and the immediate narrated past. Most important, the protagonist's desire for literate power and security supersedes her desire for Christ's "manhode," although it doesn't erase it. "Sche" holds herself up against the pillar, even as she cries out and weeps with ecstatic spiritual pleasure. The Everyday and Visionary Experiencers' perspectives merge in the immediate diegetic moment to form a new co-focalization which is neither one place and time nor another.

In the narrated immediate past, the Leicester abbey episode presents an imagined Jesus as very much 'fresh,' alive, and walking toward her, an active agent in the protagonist's phenomenal world rather than the sacrificial suffering image or object of sympathetic mourning. For perhaps the only time in the *Book*, the Everyday and Visionary Experiencers together focalize the protagonist as truly inhabiting two times and two places simultaneously. Moreover, the episode rewrites the text's repeated representation (Genette's Frequency) of the protagonist's uncontrollable affect of crying out and falling down in the presence of an ecstatic vision of the suffering Jesus. With co-focalized external and internal diegetic narration, the Leicester abbey episode depicts the protagonist as experiencing an Apostolic vision while simultaneously and self-consciously maintaining her intention toward her worldly self. Motivated by her understanding of literate power, she desires and gets what she needs at that moment in the world from the Church. The protagonist manages to keep her feet to protect herself, while interiorly she experiences another transtemporal vision.

11. Conclusion: Writing, narrating, focalizing the *Book*

Narrating and focalizing the *Book of Margery Kempe* is formally organized through narrative functions. These textual functions distribute the narration through several internal and external diegetic positions, including the protagonist's alter egos – the boisterous, desiring, often disruptive everyday experiencer and the increasingly authoritative devout visionary experiencer. All the psychological drama and social intensity occurs at the diegetic, narrated level in the text. Sometimes, the tone of the narrated text suggests a colloquial semi-realist novel. But the various narrating focalizations manipulate the narration and encode multitemporal and multiperspective narrating acts in a kaleidoscopic narrative which defies singularity.

The textual functions are somewhat aligned with the material functions of medieval manuscript production. The *Book*'s written narration is comprised of a distinct separate *narrating* act and a *narrated* diegesis, but unlike Chaucer's dramatized and impersoned narrators, a particular narrator is not associated with the text's narrated events. At different points in the text, the narration (narrating level) adopts one or more focalizing functions to depict the events and the feelings, thoughts, and speech of the protagonist and to a lesser extent those of other characters. Reading closely with narratological attention and following the fluid trajectory of shifting focalizations, we see how the narrating act implicit in every narrative at the narrating level manipulates the underlying events. Different focalizations construct different time frames in the narrative. As part of perceived textuality and reading interaction, the narrating act is external to the diegesis but is traced in the text along with the narrated level (story). Formally, the split between the narrating level (*énonication*) and the narrated level (*énoncé*) is maintained, even in the brief narrated episodes showing the protagonist narrating her story to scribes.

If the *Book of Margery Kempe* were made into a film, the character Margery Kempe would be in nearly every scene. The diegesis is very much the protagonist's story. But the narrating act belongs to many perspectives, not only the one we attribute to the historical or textual character Margery Kempe. Commentary, summary, scribal textual intervention, and distanced dictating functions reflect the *Book*'s material imbrication with late medieval book culture and manuscript textuality. The diegetic (internal) narrating is mostly conducted through the two Experiencers and Summarizer functions. The Scribal-Textualist and Commentator functions exist solely on the metatextual (external) narrating level.

As critical practice, narratology doesn't take a stand on the *Book*'s verifiable historicity. And the narrative is replete with historically recognizable figures – Margery Kempe, her husband John, Julian of Norwich, Archbishops Bowet and Arundel, and Abbot Rotheley. The text refers to many other, less documented figures – numerous friars, priests, mayors, and the protagonist's confessors, including Richard of Caister and especially Robert Spryngolde (priest at St. Margaret's parish, Bishop's Lynn). Many secular people populate the narrative, usually as part of an anonymous group. The few named have faint historical footprints: for example, the Irishman Richard the "brokebakkyd man." All of which is to say the narrative is deeply situated in a fifteenth-century English world. But that's not to say the text is an 'historical' or factual account of the protagonist's adult life between first giving birth and disappearing from the historical record.

Critical narratological analysis foregrounds the complex narrative structure of the *Book of Margery Kempe*. That structure produces an exciting account of a lay woman's pious experience filtered through several narrating perspectives which manifest a distributed textual subjectivity, beyond the discrete Experiencers. The structure suggests how the narrating stances and focalizations are textual features which function as narrating strategies rather than as impersoned or dramatized narrators. It's difficult to associate all the focalizations with a single integral narrating subject, so working out the various narrating focalizations shows the distributed 'made-ness' of the narrative. It also reveals the vernacular sophistication of the *Book*'s narrating discourse, a complexity which exceeds explicit intentionality, language ownership, or authorship. Textual power is afforded at least as much by the collaborative writing as by the representation of the protagonist. Narratology inflected with discourse analysis offers a productive framework for understanding the force of textualized language in a medieval narrative. It expands rather than replaces or excludes other ways of exploring the *Book*'s extraordinary narrative and helps show why the *Book* continues to surprise, disturb, compel, and please us to read again and again. N

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