**A fifteenth-century Eat, Pray, Love illuminating the intersecting lives of two female mystics who changed history—Margery Kempe and Julian of Norwich.**

Like most women in history, female mystics have often been overshadowed and even mocked and persecuted by society and their male counterparts. Women like Margery Kempe and Julian of Norwich challenged societal norms and risked their lives by sharing divine messages and professing their faith. These courageous rebels helped shape modern Christianity yet the amount of resources detailing their lives is limited—until now.

**REVELATIONS** (on sale April 27, 2021) narrates how in 1413 at the age of forty, Margery Kempe leaves Bishop’s Lynn, England and everything she knows behind to pursue her spiritual journey and cement her faith. Margery has nearly died giving birth to her fourteenth child. Fearing that another pregnancy might kill her, she makes a vow of celibacy, but she can’t trust her husband to keep his end of the bargain. Desperate for counsel, she visits the famous anchoress Dame Julian of Norwich.

Pouring out her heart, Margery confesses that she has been haunted by visceral religious visions. Julian then offers up a confession of her own: she has written a secret, radical book about her own visions, Revelations of Divine Love. Nearing the end of her life and fearing Church authorities, Julian entrusts her precious book to Margery, who sets off on the adventure of a lifetime to secretly spread Julian's words.

Author **Mary Sharratt**, who’s previously written about strong women of the past—such as mystic Hildegard von Bingen in her previous novel *Illuminations* (2012)—puts us in the shoes of Margaery Kempe and vividly brings the medieval past to life as Margery blazes her trail across Europe and the Near East, finding her unique spiritual path and vocation. It's not in a cloistered cell like Julian, but in the full bustle of worldly existence with all its wonders and perils.

**MARY SHARRATT**, the author of seven previous critically acclaimed novels, is on a mission to write strong women back into history. Her fascination with women mystics inspired this novel. Originally from Minnesota, she now lives in Portugal.

Mary Sharratt is available for interviews and to write original pieces. Sections of the book are available to excerpt.

**REVELATIONS: A Novel by Mary Sharratt**

**Houghton Mifflin Harcourt | On Sale: April 27, 2021 | 320 pages | $26**

**ISBN: 9781328518774 | Also available as an eBook and Audiobook!**

**PRAISE FOR REVELATIONS**

“Set during a time of fervid religious persecution, Mary Sharratt’s carefully researched, capaciously imagined Revelations brings to vivid life 15th century Christian mystic Margery Kempe. A transporting novel that captures both the harsh reality of medieval womanhood and the mystery of the divine.”

—**Cathy Marie Buchanan**, New York Times bestselling author of The Painted Girls and Daughter of Black Lake

“Considered through the female gaze, Margery Kempe’s travels and travails take on new significance as she undertakes a dangerous mission for Julian of Norwich in a time of Lollard persecution and a misogynist Church patriarchy. Thriller, domestic tragedy, medieval travelogue, meditation on a woman’s spiritual awakening, Revelations pulses with life. A gem of a book. Highly recommended!”

—**Candace Robb**, Author of the bestselling Owen Archer mysteries

“Mary Sharratt's Revelations is a book worthy of its fascinating subject. A deeply imaginative and empathetic novel, full of surprises and delights.”

—**Bruce Holsinger**, USA Today bestselling author of The Gifted School and A Burnable Book

“Revelations brings to vivid life Margery Kemp and her world with all its riotous color, conflicting religious beliefs, deadly perils, saints and sinners. In Sharratt’s skillful re-imagining of Kemp’s travels and travails she gives us a Margery Kemp who is not only wife, mother, steadfast pilgrim, and surely one of the most remarkable women of her time, but also an implausible yet endearing heroine. Sometimes incredible, sometimes bizarre, Revelations is a fascinating journey into both the medieval world and the medieval mind.”

—**Patricia Bracewell,** author of The Steel Beneath the Silk​

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**A CONVERSATION WITH MARY SHARRATT**

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**How did you first learn about Margery Kempe?**

I first encountered Margery Kempe in 2008, in Dr. Sam Riches’s University of Lancaster course, *Late Medieval Belief and Superstition*. I was very intrigued by the story of this enterprising woman who survived postnatal depression and a soul-destroying marriage to become an intrepid world traveler and literary pioneer. *The Book of Margery Kempe* (c. 1436–38) is the first autobiography in the English language. Margery dictated her story to a priest, whose ecclesiastical authority gave gravitas to her narrative.

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**What drove you to write *Revelations*?**

Margery’s story is so extraordinary and she explodes our every stereotype about medieval women.Mother of fourteen. Failed businesswoman. Weeping mystic. Globe-trotting pilgrim. When on trial for heresy, where a guilty verdict would see her burn at the stake, she kept her spirits high by regaling the Archbishop of York with a parable of a defecating bear and a priest.

Margery Kempe is one-of-a-kind, so quirky and unforgettable, you couldn’t possibly make her up.

I decided I simply had to write a novel about her. I joked that it was a 15th century *Eat, Pray, Love*. While Margery’s well-known among medievalists, I wanted to make her story accessible to the general reader.

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**What are some of your favorite or surprising facts about Margery and Julian that you learned while doing research for the novel?**

Sadly, some historians and theologians try to pit Julian and Margery against each other. Julian is held up as the real saint, the real deal, while Margery is dismissed as a hysterical wanna-be. Because of her copious tears, many people, both in her time and ours, have refused to take her seriously. Yet many fascinating synchronicities connect these women. In so many ways, their stories intertwine and complement each other.

Margery was born in 1373, the same year that thirty-year-old Julian received her “showings”—the divine visions that would inspire her landmark book *Revelations of Divine Love*, the first book written in English by a woman. Both women lived in Norfolk, in cities less than 45 miles away from each other.

*The Book of Margery Kempe* narrates how Margery traveled to Norwich to seek Julian’s counsel before embarking on her pilgrimage to Jerusalem. This was an exceedingly vulnerable time in her life, for she had just left her husband and children behind and was filled with self-doubt and uncertainty. Julian’s advice to trust God and not worry too much about what other people thought seemed to have a profound and empowering impact on Margery. While Julian had chosen to wall herself into a cell and live as an anchoress, she gave Margery her blessing to travel the wide world.

My portrayal of Kempe secretly carrying Julian’s manuscript, *Revelations of Divine Love*, on her pilgrimage was inspired by Dr. Janina Ramirez’s 2016 BBC4 documentary, “The Search for the Lost Manuscript: Julian of Norwich.” Julian’s book reveals the radical theology of an unconditionally loving God so at odds with the Church of her time. She took the extraordinary step to write of her visions in English to make them accessible to ordinary people, and this at a time when one could be burned as a heretic for reading the Bible in English.

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*Revelations of Divine Love* was so highly controversial, it was possibly kept secret and passed from hand to hand. Dr. Ramirez speculates that Julian entrusted her precious manuscript to Kempe so that she might share it with people sympathetic to Julian’s ideas. Dr. Ramirez even suggests Julian inspired Kempe to write her own book.

As is too often the fate, both women and their books were cast into oblivion and forgotten. *Revelations of Divine Love* only reemerged from obscurity in 1901, thanks to Grace Warrack’s modern English translation. Meanwhile, *The Book of Margery Kempe* was lost to the world for five centuries and only unearthed by accident at a house party in Derbyshire in 1934, when people were rooting through the closets in search of ping-pong balls.

Both women and their lifework were nearly lost to history.

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**What were some of the documents, research, people, or places, you referenced and used to write *Revelations*?**

I am indebted to the Julian Centre and the Friends of Julian in Norwich, England, for their warm hospitality and fantastic multimedia library. I spent a beautiful hour of contemplation in the reconstructed anchorage of Saint Julian’s Church—Julian’s original anchorage and church were destroyed in the Second World War. My research, of course, also brought me to Margery Kempe’s haunts in Lynn, as well as Lincoln, York, Rome, and Santiago de Compostela.

Not being proficient in Middle English, I relied on the following translations of the primary sources: *The Book of Margery Kempe*, translated by Anthony Bale (Oxford University Press, 2015); Julian Norwich: *Revelations of Divine Love*, translated by Elizabeth Spearing, (Penguin Books, 1998); and *Julian of Norwich: The Showings, a Contemporary Translation* by Mirabai Starr, (Canterbury Press, Norwich, 2014). *A Companion to The Book of Margery Kempe*, edited by John H. Arnold and Katherine J. Lewis (D. S. Brewer, Cambridge, 2004) proved indispensable.

Other important secondary texts include Clarissa W. Atkinson’s *Mystic and Pilgrim: The* *Book and World of Margery Kempe* (Cornell University Press, 1983); Anthony Goodman’s *Margery Kempe and Her World* (Routledge, 2002); and *Mystics, Visionaries and Prophets: A Historical Anthology of Women’s Spiritual Writings* edited by Shawn Madigan, CSJ, (Augsburg Fortress Press, Minneapolis, 1998).

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**Have you embarked on a pilgrimage of any sort? Was that experience useful for writing this book?**

I’ve always been drawn to the sacred sites of diverse faiths, from Chartres Cathedral to Stonehenge. I’m fascinated how certain places in the landscape can be perceived as so numinous and holy that they attract devotees of vastly different religions over many centuries.

In 2017 I traveled to Bhutan, a once-in-a-lifetime experience. If you go anywhere on the planet right now, Bhutan probably bears the closest resemblance to the dynamics of Margery’s medieval world. In this Buddhist kingdom, religion dominates every aspect of daily life. Monasteries are everywhere and abbots and monks wield great power. Lay people here still offer their young children up to monastic life as child oblates. There’s no village or wayside that doesn’t have some kind of shrine. Everywhere you look, you see devotees counting their mala beads, turning prayer wheels, doing full-body prostrations.

The highlight of my trip was a visit to the Hermitage of Juneydrak, where Machig Lapdron (1055-1145 CE), the revered female mystic and Vajrayana lineage founder, once meditated. I had to scale a sheer rockface to reach the hermitage and only managed with my local guide’s expert assistance. This helped me in my portrayal of Margery attempting to scale the Mount of Temptation in the Judean Desert, a feat she achieved through the help of her compassionate Muslim guide.

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In researching *Revelations*, I walked part of the pilgrimage route to Our Lady of Walsingham in Norfolk, England, in the month of September when hazelnuts fell from the hedges to scatter on the path. I still have a hazelnut I picked up and carried with me as a reminder of Julian’s vision of the universe as a hazelnut in God’s hand.

I also walked part of the pilgrimage route to Santiago de Compostela, a most fascinating encounter with diverse people from all over the world walking the Camino for all kinds of reasons, both spiritual and personal. I saw a mother and grandmother taking turns pushing a stroller that contained both a toddler and all their gear up the steep track. There were ex-military guys marching so fast that they wouldn’t deign to respond to other pilgrims’ friendly greetings. Meanwhile happy hippies did yoga on the wayside.

When we finally reached Saint James’s Cathedral in Santiago, I crowded into mass with the other pilgrims. The priest warmly welcomed visitors of all faiths and told us that there’s no false reason for going on pilgrimage. In a world so fractured by divisiveness and hatred, this was an incredible experience of spiritual hospitality and homecoming.

Walking the Camino made such a lasting impression on me that in some ways I feel I’ve never really left it. In the wake of Brexit, I left the UK, where I’d lived for nearly 20 years, and moved to Portugal. My current home is very close to the Caminho Português de Santiago. When I drive down the main road, I see pilgrims with scallop shells dangling from their backpacks. Going to my Portuguese language class in Caldas da Rainha, I literally walk the Caminho, which cuts through the center of the town.

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**Margery and Julian were both very spiritual—did your views on spirituality change after you wrote the book?**

Immersing myself in Julian’s theology of the primacy of divine love was a profound experience. Like Margery, I often found myself moved to tears by the beauty of Julian’s visions, by her absolute assurance that no matter how dire things may seem, all will be well.

But what took me by surprise was how revelatory Margery’s dance with self-doubt was for me. In writing this book and delving into medieval mystical texts, I discovered that our doubts, as painful and wrenching as they are, aren’t a flaw or hindrance, at all. In fact, they lead us deeper into the divine mystery, the vast “Cloud of Unknowing” where God dwells. Only when we set aside our preconceived notions of what we think we believe the divine to be, can we enter this numinous place.

As a mystic, Margery’s especially fascinating to me, because she found her spiritual bliss not in the cloister, but as a laywoman, in the full stream of worldly life with all its wonders and perils.

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**You’ve written about women’s hidden histories in the past—did you run into any challenges when writing about Margery that you hadn’t experienced in the past?**

It was indeed a challenge how to make a weeping mystic—a woman many might regard as an unhinged religious fanatic—relevant to an audience of modern secular readers.

Living in a world utterly dominated by established religion, the only thing that legitimized her choice to walk away from an abusive marriage was her faith, her calling to be a pilgrim. And when, as woman traveling on her own, she attracted suspicion, the only way to wriggle out of it was to play the weak hysterical woman so that people would shrug their shoulders and dismiss her instead seeing her as the agent of radical subversion she truly was.

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**In your previous novel, *Illuminations,* you wrote about the visionary abbess and polymath, Hildegard von Bingen. Did you find any parallels between Hildegard, Margery, and Julian?**

I’ve always been fascinated with the women mystics and I identify very powerfully with Hildegard, Margery, and Julian as women of faith facing the roadblock of an institutional, male-dominated religion that sidelined them precisely because they were women. But instead of letting this beat them down, they found within their own hearts a vision of the divine that mirrored their female experience. I believe it’s no mere coincidence that both Hildegard and Julian dared to create a theology of the Feminine Divine, of God the Mother. All three women seized their power and their voice to write about their encounters with the sacred, preserving their revelations to inspire us today.

In our modern world, when many traditional religious institutions are crumbling, we can follow in these women’s footsteps and seek the divine—however we perceive the divine—within the sanctuary of our own hearts. This is the birthright no one can take from us, our eternal refuge.



**Need Something To Sip On While You Read?**

**Make some ‘Medieval Mulled Wine’ and get in the reading spirit!**

**Ingredients:**

Grated rind and juice of half a lemon

2 cloves

1 cinnamon stick

3 tablespoons of honey

2 tablespoons of raisins

1 bottle of white wine

**Instructions:**

Heat all ingredients in a pan but do not let it boil. As soon as a white foam forms, pour into heat-proof glasses and remove the spices. Enjoy immediately!

To make it nonalcoholic, substitute cloudy unfiltered apple juice for the wine.

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