

REVELATIONS

A DISCUSSION GUIDE

QUESTIONS AND EXTRAS



1. Did you know anything about Margery Kempe before reading this novel? If so, does the author's depiction of Kempe differ from other accounts you've read? Did this book change your view? What do you make of Kempe? Do you find her intriguing, irritating, witty, or courageous?
2. In what ways does Margery Kempe defy our common stereotypes of medieval women? What aspects of her life do you find most surprising? Which of her struggles do you consider most relevant to women's experiences today?
3. What do you make of Kempe's frequent bouts of uncontrolled weeping? How did the people in her world judge her for it? How would we judge her today for this kind of behavior?
4. Kempe broke all the rules of medieval female duty and convention by leaving her husband and children to go on pilgrimage. According to her own account in *The Book of Margery Kempe*, she even left an infant behind—although she left the baby in good care. What do you make of her choice? Would we be any less disapproving of her choice today? What choice would you have made if you were in Kempe's shoes?
5. Kempe sought the counsel of Julian of Norwich before embarking on her pilgrimage to Jerusalem. This was an exceedingly vulnerable time in Kempe's life and she was filled with self-doubt and uncertainty. What advice does Julian give her and what impact does it have on her? How would you describe the relationship between these two women?
6. What did you know about Julian of Norwich before reading this novel? Have you read *Revelations of Divine Love*? What do you make of Julian's spirituality?
7. Kempe and Julian walk two very different spiritual and life paths. Julian has chosen to be literally walled in to an anchorage for the rest of her life while Margery breaks free of an unhappy marriage in order to wander the world as a pilgrim. Why do you think these women made the choices they did? What other female paths and vocations are represented in the novel? Compare the lives of beguines, enclosed nuns, Kempe's fellow female pilgrims, and the Lollard women, such as Hawisia Moone, who appears early in the book. If you were a medieval woman, which path would you have chosen?
8. On her pilgrimages to Jerusalem, Rome, and Santiago de Compostela, Kempe meets women and men of diverse outlooks and faiths. How do these encounters impact her own spirituality and sense of vocation?
9. Both Margery Kempe and Julian of Norwich were pioneering women of letters. Julian's *Revelations of Divine Love* was the first book written in English by a woman while *The Book of Margery Kempe* is the first autobiography in the English language. But Julian's book was not widely circulated in her lifetime and only re-emerged from obscurity in 1901 with Grace Warrack's modern English translation. Meanwhile *The Book of Margery Kempe* was lost for five centuries and only rediscovered by accident in 1934 when people at a house party in Derbyshire, England were rooting through a closet looking for ping-pong balls. How does Sharratt's novel reflect upon the tenuous position of women's writing and literary legacy?

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10. While many novels are centered on young protagonists, *Revelations* features two older heroines. Kempe is forty when she marches off to Jerusalem while Julian is in her seventies when Kempe first seeks her counsel. Do you find it inspiring to read about older female protagonists? How do their struggles and aspirations differ from that of their younger counterparts? Do you think that older women's narratives are neglected in our youth-obsessed modern world? What fresh perspectives can they offer?
11. Mary Sharratt humorously refers to *Revelations* as a 15th century *Eat, Pray, Love*. Have you read *Eat, Pray, Love* by Elizabeth Gilbert or seen the film? Compare Kempe's travels and spiritual quest with that of Elizabeth Gilbert's journey to Rome, India, and Bali.
12. Have you read Sharratt's novel *Illuminations* about the visionary abbess and polymath, Hildegard von Bingen? How does Hildegard compare with Margery Kempe? Like Julian of Norwich, Hildegard, in her early life, was enclosed in an anchorage. How did Hildegard's experience of anchorage life contrast with that of Julian's? How does Hildegard's theology of the Feminine Divine compare to that of Julian's revelations of God the Mother?
13. If you were to talk with the author, what would you want to know? Mary Sharratt enjoys chatting with book clubs. Contact Mary via her website www.marysharratt.com or her Facebook Author Page www.facebook.com/Mary-Sharratt-960515374037848 to see if you can set up a Zoom or Skype book group visit.



ENRICH YOUR BOOK CLUB



- ❖ Have you ever been on pilgrimage? Share your experiences. What does pilgrimage mean to you?
- ❖ Go on a book group pilgrimage to a local place of interest that inspires you. It doesn't have to be a church or temple. It can be a museum, a park, or a special place in nature.
- ❖ For a full immersion in the contemplative life, you might consider a group retreat. Many monasteries and Buddhist retreat centers offer accommodation to retreatants from all faith backgrounds. If you prefer a virtual experience, head over to Abbey of the Arts (abbeyofthearts.com). Or you can rent a nice Airbnb and go on a group reading retreat!

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- ❖ For more worldly comforts, enjoy some homemade medieval-style spiced wine that Margery and her friends would have loved. Here's an easy recipe:

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

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.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

MARY SHARRATT, an American author living on the Silver Coast of Portugal, is on a mission to write women back into history. She is the author of *Revelations* and seven previous critically acclaimed novels, including *Daughters of the Witching Hill*, the Nautilus Award–winning *Illuminations: A Novel of Hildegard von Bingen*, *The Dark Lady's Mask: A Novel of Shakespeare's Muse*, and *Ecstasy*, about the life, loves, and music of Alma Mahler. When she is not writing, you can find her riding her beautiful Welsh mare.