



O livro de Margery Kempe: análise e tradução da primeira autobiografia escrita em língua inglesa, by Fernanda Nunes (2023)

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Fernanda Cardoso Nunes holds a Ph.D. from the Postgraduate Program in Literature (PPGL) at the Federal University of Paraíba (UFPB) and is an Assistant Professor at the State University of Ceará (UECE). In 2023, she defended her doctoral thesis and published, in the same year, an excerpt from her research entitled *O livro de Margery Kempe: análise e tradução da primeira autobiografia escrita em Língua Inglesa* in the collection PósLetras; thus becoming the first publication corresponding to the Research Line in Classical and Medieval Studies (López; Deplagne, 2023).

In *O livro de Margery Kempe: análise e tradução da primeira autobiografia escrita em Língua Inglesa*, Nunes (2023) deconstructs the imaginary surrounding women in the Middle Ages and presents the anchorite Juliana of Norwich and the religious figure Margery Kempe as two figures that prompt us to reconsider the writing of History by tracing the genealogy of these authors. Thus, Nunes (2023) maps out Middle English literature that parallels the discussion not only about English-language female authors but also about the medieval European context.

Therefore, Nunes (2023) investigates the works *Revelations of Divine Love* and *The Book of Margery Kempe*, written by Juliana of Norwich and Margery Kempe, respectively. It is evident that both authors are pioneering women in the English literary canon, leaving an invaluable legacy in the history of female-authored literature. Thus, at a time when women lacked the right to literacy, these two English mystics gifted us with their books, some of the earliest written works by women in the English language.

Fernanda Nunes (2023) provides an unprecedented translation of *The Book of Margery Kempe*, along with analyses of the work. Nunes (2023) invites theorists from Translation Studies, Gender Studies, and Literature, as well as their extensions into Religious Literature produced by women, to engage with her work. Nunes's (2023) translation goes beyond interlinguistic linguistic issues, understanding Kempe's work through a deconstructive lens of the phallogocentric imagery of the Middle Ages that silenced women.

Moreover, it is important to emphasize the memorialistic nature of these works, marking the mystical experiences of these English women. Norwich's and Kempe's memories, transmuted into narratives, contribute to the construction and recognition of female protagonism in the ancient lands of Albion, demonstrating that women were not entirely illiterate as conventionally believed in medieval times.

In *O livro de Margery Kempe: análise e tradução da primeira autobiografia escrita em Língua Inglesa*, Fernanda Nunes (2023) organizes the work into three sections: "Medieval English Female Authorship: Across the Lands of Albion, Women of Letters"; "Translating Medieval Mystical Narratives by Female Authors: Canon Issues and Gender Studies"; and "The Book of Margery Kempe". Nunes (2023) offers a study that traces a historical path of female writing, situating it within discussions of gender, translation, and canon, revealing to readers how these categories are interconnected within the fields of Women's History and Feminist Literary Criticism (Nunes, 2023, p. 16).

Through the fields of Women's History and Feminist Literary Criticism, we observe that the exclusion of women in English Literature is reconsidered and rewritten as the stories of women walk parallel to feminist movements. Thus, we understand the political nature of the exclusion of women in literary production over the centuries.

Considering these attitudes towards women's participation in literary production, we comprehend why figures like Beowulf, Brutus, and King Arthur are central male figures in English literary imagination. Similarly, figures like Caedmon, Bede, Geoffrey of Monmouth, and Geoffrey Chaucer represent writers of Old English and Middle English.

But what is the place of women in this predominantly androcentric universe? Such reflection leads us to consider the role of the canon and its power to exclude names from its list. Since it is predominantly male, white, and European, the criteria for selecting the canon are permeated by power relations that reflect the patriarchal, white, and Judeo-Christian nature that it assumes regarding the names and titles that should or should not be included. As Nunes (2023) points out, it is not surprising that the first medieval female authors to be included in the canon were religious. This fact underscores the power wielded by the Catholic Church, reinforcing the exclusionary, androcentric, and hegemonic nature of the canon.

Even amidst the religious aura, the self-writing promoted by these mystics based on their divine experiences constituted an act of transgression against patriarchy, offering an alternative to the clearly patriarchal literary production of the time. Consequently, Nunes (2023) emphasizes that Norwich and Kempe are the "English counterpart" to the literary movement that emerged in medieval Europe, centered on mystical female writing. Juliana of Norwich thus became one of the greatest theologians of this historical period, contributing to a profile shared by women from the 11th to the 15th centuries based on their subjective experiences with the divine through visions.

Facing the silencing imposed on women, the mystical writing of these women served as a way to transgress the ostracism imposed upon them. Thus, the mystics found in writing a tool to subvert the silence, rupturing the characterization of women as fragile beings, infantilized and prone to the traps of evil. This rebellion against the representation of women painted by men destabilizes their oppressors by challenging the essentialist view of vulnerability attributed to them.

In this context, the writings of Norwich and Kempe surpass these stereotypes and assume an even more transgressive character, especially when we consider how Juliana of Norwich portrays Jesus in her narrative from a feminine perspective, contrary to tradition characterizing him as male. Thus, Juliana presents the figure of Christ as a mother, using metaphors that attribute a maternal character to him. Thus, Norwich parallels the figure of Christ as both father and mother of humanity, for "[...] from Him springs our life, and His protecting love shelters us and accompanies us incessantly" (Norwich, 2018, p. 160 quoted in Nunes, 2023, p. 59).

Kempe also transcends the parameters of medieval female writing by bringing forth her experiences as a woman who encounters the Divine, while attempting to mold her image as that of a holy woman. This fact places Margery Kempe's work as both an autobiography and a hagiography. Thus, we can consider that Kempe's experiences with the sacred make her a figure ahead of her time, achieving autonomy, even to leave her family and lead a life of pilgrimages through England and Europe after having visions that led her to pursue a spiritual life.

However, it is relevant to emphasize these women, as well as others in similar situations who were also victims of persecution due to their conduct, as they were outside the expectations of society for women. Margery Kempe, for example, was accused and imprisoned for Lollard heresy due to the way she connected with the divine through her visions, as she "[...] caused astonishment among her contemporaries, expressing herself through cries, screams, and contortions" (Nunes, 2023, p. 54).

Thus, we see how the three theoretical perspectives (religious perspective, feminist literary criticism, and women's history) combined with translation studies—foundational elements of Fernanda Nunes's research—intertwine to produce knowledge and understanding of the works of Norwich and Kempe. Understanding religion as a predominant factor both in the exclusion and inclusion of women in the literary canon is essential. Feminist literary criticism demystifies the essentialist gender character that has been imposed and naturalized for so long

regarding the female image as a presumed fragility. Women's history helps to rewrite history and challenge the narratives established by patriarchy. Regarding translation, we observe that its role is intertwined with the feminine.

Therefore, revisiting the discussion on translation, Nunes (2023), citing Chamberlain in her work *Gender and the Metaphorics of Translation* (1998), explores the relationship between translation and the feminine by noting that the act of translation is often seen as secondary, inferior, and less prestigious. Thus, according to Chamberlain (1998), Fernanda Nunes points out that the semantic load carried by many metaphors has a negative value through the sexualization of translation.

This pejorative nature attributed to the act of translation is embodied in the figure of *les belles infidèles*. Considering this, while translations are beautiful and assist readers who do not know the original language of the text—enabling them to read something that would otherwise be difficult to access—they are also considered unfaithful for not being the original. Therefore, the metaphorical expression that the label evokes parallels fidelity in translation with fidelity in marriage, with blame always falling on the woman.

Having made the necessary references to Translation Studies and its relationship with Gender Studies, Nunes (2023) highlights the importance of translation in constructing History and its connection with memory. This interlingual and intralingual exchange is crucial for gaining deeper insights into the Middle Ages and the women who were silenced for so long.

Concluding *O livro de Margery Kempe: análise e tradução da primeira autobiografia escrita em Língua Inglesa*, Fernanda Nunes (2023), through a comprehensive effort, presents us with a translation of *The Book of Margery Kempe*, divided into Book 1, Book 2, and Chapter 1. Her translation, based on the sole manuscript from 1438 available at the British Library, offers an unparalleled opportunity to know and understand the Middle Ages and the women who lived during that period through the feminine voice of Margery Kempe, as well as through the considerations made by the author regarding Juliana of Norwich. In summary, Nunes (2023) urges us to rethink the Middle Ages and the reductionist representations of that era and the women who made history during it. Therefore, Fernanda Nunes's (2023) contributions to Gender Studies, Literature, Translation, and History immerse us in the history of women who, through religious praxis, managed to break stereotypes of feminine fragility, constituting, above all, political actions against the female figure.

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Declaração Ética

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