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## TRABAJO DE FIN DE GRADO

Margery Kempe and Luisa de Carvajal y Mendoza,  
eccentric or independent women?  
Female writing, religion and travel

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## ABSTRACT

Margery Kempe and Luisa de Carvajal y Mendoza lived in a society in which the man was the dominant character who was the responsible for the labour market, held the authority, and controlled the finances; while the woman was restricted to the household and to the childcare. With deep religious beliefs, Margery Kempe in the Middle Ages, and Luisa de Carvajal y Mendoza in the Early Modern period, tried to get their goals moving away from the stereotypes and habits that their epochs established for women's role. They were criticised by a society which did not accept what they did, accusing Margery Kempe of heresy, and blaming Luisa de Carvajal y Mendoza for endangering the peace between states. Both women fought throughout their lives in order to improve a situation which lasted until the eighteenth century, when women started advocating their rights and ability to deal with any public or private matter.

Keywords: *Luisa de Carvajal y Mendoza, Margery Kempe, religion, social criticism, stereotypes, women.*

## RESUMEN

Margery Kempe y Luisa de Carvajal y Mendoza vivieron en una sociedad en la que el hombre era el personaje dominante, se encargaba del mercado laboral, ostentaba la autoridad y controlaba las finanzas; mientras, la mujer estaba relegada al ámbito doméstico y al cuidado de los hijos. De profundas creencias religiosas, cada una de ellas, Margery Kempe en la Edad Media y, Luisa de Carvajal y Mendoza en la Edad Moderna, trataron de perseguir sus ideales alejándose de los estereotipos y de las tradiciones que sus épocas establecieron para el rol de la mujer. Fueron criticadas por una sociedad que no admitía lo que hacían, acusando de herejía a Margery Kempe y, culpando a Luisa de Carvajal y Mendoza de poner en peligro la paz entre Estados. Ambas lucharon a lo largo de sus vidas por mejorar una situación que no llegó hasta el siglo XVIII, cuando las mujeres comenzaron a defender sus derechos y la capacidad para ocuparse de cualquier asunto público o privado.

Palabras clave: *Crítica social, estereotipos, Luisa de Carvajal y Mendoza, Margery Kempe, mujeres, religión.*



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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Throughout history, women have been segregated in a society where they could not do anything without the authority of a male figure. From childhood they depended on their fathers or brothers if the former had died, and once women married they depended on their husbands whom they must obey and respect. Until the eighteenth century approximately –if not later–, women were confined to the private sphere, which was the household, and they could not enter the public sphere formed by men who were the responsible for all the issues related to the labour market and finances among others.

Before women began to enter in the public sphere, they had limited roles and fates within society; it was assumed that women had to marry or to enter a convent. If they chose matrimony they had to be at home taking care of their husbands, children and doing the housework, and in order to be good wives and mothers, they received a specific training and education which were based on learning tasks such as how to sew and knit. Although this situation remained similar until the eighteenth century, this does not mean that women did not fight for their rights and wishes. Some of them challenged the social rules and carried out a completely different live by which they received many criticisms. Within this aspect, we can point out two important women: Margery Kempe and Luisa de Carvajal y Mendoza who are going to be the central figures of this dissertation.

This study is divided into different parts where I am going to deal with different themes: in the first one, I am going to analyse the social context of women during the Middle Ages and the Early Modern period; and in the second part, I will analyse Margery Kempe and Luisa de Carvajal y Mendoza's lives in particular where I am going to focus on the aspects of marital status, religion and the society's reaction towards their behaviour, themes that are going to serve to achieve my aim. In order to develop the analysis, I am going to work with *The Book of Margery Kempe*, and with a collection of letters written by Luisa de Carvajal y Mendoza, *Epistolario de Luisa de Carvajal y Mendoza*. After analysing the previous points for which I am going to use the two previous sources as main bibliography, the aim of the last part of this dissertation is to make a comparison between these two women in order to find the answer to the question formulated in the title of this dissertation about if they are eccentric or independent women.





## **2. WOMEN IN THE MEDIEVAL AND EARLY MODERN SOCIETY**

In this part, I will begin with a brief summary about Margery Kempe and Luisa de Carvajal y Mendoza's lives, and after that, I will talk about the situation and role of women during the Middle Ages and the Early Modern period. Although this section is especially focused on women, I will also add a brief explanation about two important historical events such as the Black Death, which was important for women's lives, and the Gunpowder Plot, which will serve to the development of Luisa de Carvajal y Mendoza's analysis.

Margery Kempe was an English mystic who was born around 1373 in Norfolk, England, and died in 1438. She belonged to the Middle Ages period and came from a bourgeois family. Her father was an important figure in Norfolk and thanks to his public positions, his family's economic situation was better than in other bourgeois families. Although some women from bourgeoisie received education, Margery Kempe was never instructed. She married John Kempe, and they soon had their first child; however, after the labour, she began to behave in a different way due to a great illness of which she was saved by God. Since that moment she felt bound to Him, and she began a series of pilgrimages to know more about our Lord; thereafter, she received many criticisms.

Luisa de Carvajal y Mendoza was born in Spain around 1566 and died in 1614 in London, during the Early Modern period. She came from a well-off family, her parents were Francisco de Carvajal y Vargas and María Hurtado de Mendoza y Pacheco, but unfortunately they died very early and her daughter spent almost all her life with her uncle Francisco Hurtado de Mendoza and his wife. She received an ascetic and strict education, which was important and influential in the decision of her lifestyle. She was associated with the Society of Jesus and supported it in one of its more important goals: converting the Protestant England to Catholicism.

After presenting our two women, I will talk about the situation and role of women during the Middle Ages. As Margery Kempe belonged to the bourgeoisie I will refer to women from this social sphere; during this period, women's social class was defined by birth and also by marriage because the social class could change depending on her husband's. Women have been dominated and subordinated by their fathers, brothers or husbands, and this idea can be reflected on women's properties: before marrying, a male figure had to control women's properties, and when they married, this control was from

their fathers to their husbands because women had no authority on the public sphere just power on the private one (Vega, 1992: 4-12).

The bourgeoisie was a social group which lived in towns and managed the business and craftwork. These workers were grouped in guilds from the same businesses, and women could work in their families' trades. We may also find women in those guilds dedicated to dressmaking and textile labours; besides, in some businesses, they acted as masters who hired people, paid salaries and sold the product. Although sometimes they worked outside home, they never abandoned their housework where they had to take care of children, clean and cook for the family. There were some female's jobs which could be performed at home such as spinning; thus, they could combine these tasks with those considered proper ones at home. Due to the economic and political crisis of the late fourteenth and beginning of the fifteenth centuries, married women and widows suffered work restrictions; the former could not be hired to learn the trade, and the latter could not continue with their husbands' business if their sons did not want to receive education about the labour. That way, men controlled the labour market. In the Middle Ages, some women had the desire of starting businesses by themselves and not working on their husbands' ones, but men did not agree with this idea, so in order to avoid a conflict, women's access to guilds was banned (Vega, 1992: 22- 27). Regarding to education, some girls from merchant or artisan families could learn their family's business, and they could attend to city elementary schools (Corleto, 2006: 663-665).

I have been talking about widows and married women, but those who finally did not marry had the possibility of taking the veil. There was a great proliferation of convents in the medieval period thanks to those women who entered a convent due to their devotion to God, or because it was their last stand to survive (Vega, 1992: 15-19). The following quote is from Eulalia de Vega's book *La mujer en la historia*, where this idea about the number of existing convents is represented:

Las comunidades monacales femeninas fueron numerosas en la Europa medieval. Únicamente en Inglaterra se calculaba la existencia de unos 130 conventos ricos, dueños de granjas y de grandes extensiones de terreno, en los que la orden monástica ejercía su dominio como señor feudal (1992: 15).

There were many female monastic communities in medieval Europe. Only in England could exist around 130 rich convents which were the owners of farms and larges areas of lands. In those convents, the monastic order exercised its power as feudal lord.<sup>1</sup>

Due to the short life expectancy of married women, the option of entering a convent seemed to be better. Women had many children and sometimes mothers were so old that, combined with the awful health conditions, died very early or during the labour. Next, we can see reflected this idea in a quote from Anne Laurence's book:

The risks of death in childbed increase with the number of pregnancies, especially after about the fifth. However, mothers in their later pregnancies are also older, and risks to the mother increase with age, so that a mother of forty [...] will be at greater risk than one of twenty five (2002: 76-77).

These terrible health conditions got worse with the apparition and spread of several diseases during the fourteenth century which caused the death of many people. Around 1346, a terrible disease known as Black Death appeared in some Asian countries from which it was spread by many merchants through the Silk Route until it arrived at Europe two years later. Almost all the European cities were surprised by the arrival of this disease until the end of 1350s when the main focal point disappeared, but it remained active until the seventeenth century. In London the percentage of deaths was very high (Sanchez-David, 2008: 133-135) as we can appreciate in the following quote:

La Muerte Negra llegó a Londres en el otoño de 1348 causando una peste neumónica durante el invierno [...] La Muerte Negra fustigó a Londres hasta finales de la primavera de 1350. El balance fue desastroso: falleció el 40% de las gentes, cifra que algunos investigadores elevan al 50% (Sánchez-David, 2008: 134).

The Black Death arrived at London in the autumn of 1348 which caused a pneumonic plague during the winter [...] London suffered the consequences of the plague until the spring of 1350. The assessment was disastrous, around the 40% of the population died, but some investigators raised that number to the 50%.

The Black Death decimated the population, so there were no enough men to cover all the jobs; this situation, though terrible, was positive for women who could accede to those works previously performed by men. They were still working at home, but they could help and work in their family's business and in some other jobs to gain an extra income

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<sup>1</sup> This translation from Spanish to English as well as all hereinafter are mine.

for their families' economy; nevertheless, women received lower salaries than men as used to happen before this plague. Thanks to this opportunity to work, women tended to marry later so they had less children than before. The more affected areas were the rural ones, so their inhabitants had to migrate to the towns where the number of available jobs was higher (Mate, 1998: 51-57).

After knowing women's life during the Middle Ages, the next step is to present how life developed in the Early Modern period. Luisa de Carvajal y Mendoza was born in a noble Spanish family, so I will analyse women from this social level. Their main goal was to marry and to have children; nevertheless, it was frequent that in well-off families the nursemaids worked taking care of the children, which caused that the emotional bonds between mothers and kids were almost non-existent. Upper-class families used to have servants who made everything at home while the owners just said them what they had to do (Vega, 1992: 34, 44). A similarity with the previous period was the way in which women social status was defined; however, in this Early Modern period, this status also depended on the amount of lands, the patronage, and on the ancestries. If your relatives had a significant status or relevance within the society, you also got the same prestige. Finally, if we talk about property issues, we can also find another coincidence; women could be the owners of their lands but they had many limitations if they wanted to use them (Laurence, 2002: 15-16). During this period, women were very interested in reading and in playing some instruments; besides, they were responsible for teaching their children how to read, and for instructing their daughters how to sew and embroider (Fraile Seco, 2004: 85-86). In general, high-class women dealt with some affairs related to the house and to the estate, those belonged to the private sphere, while men were mainly responsible for those issues from the public one. Sometimes, men did not want to leave all the family affairs in women's hands, but others had no problem to trust their wives (Clark, 2013:16).

Regarding education, noble women were taught at home by tutors employed by families, and frequently, children were sent to other noble houses where they received education about mathematics and languages among other subjects (Laurence, 2002: 167). Thanks to this formal education, women sometimes wrote diaries, biographies and autobiographies, but not all these writings were from high-classes. We may also find some of them from middle-class women, and sometimes those writings were narrated to other people who were the responsible for publishing them (Prior, 1985: 182-183).

As Luisa de Carvajal y Mendoza was living in Spain before moving to London, it is important to show some aspects of Spanish women. They could marry or enter a convent, and if they did not take either of those options, they were criticised by the society. These married women could not be with other men, while Spanish men, especially from high-classes, could have many mistresses (Fernandez Álvarez, 2002: 109, 136). In Spain it was typical that women from high classes could go out when they went to the church or they gathered at their friends' houses. These meetings were private, previously organized, and exclusively for women, and they could talk about whatever they wanted without restrictions (Deleito y Piñuela, 1946: 32-37).

During the Early Modern period, one of the most important and serious religious conflicts in England took place: the Gunpowder Plot in 1605. This was not something planned in a few days, the bad situation started with the instability in the country mainly under the Elizabeth I's reign. She had many problems with Mary I due to the religious faith: while Mary I was Catholic, Elizabeth I was Protestant. When Elizabeth I was crowned as queen of England, she had already had some problems with Catholics because she had been excommunicated by the Pope, so she led England to the Protestant side, dividing the country into different religious parts; finally she managed to keep Protestantism as the official religion in England (Simpson, 2001: 43-51). As she did not marry, people were concerned about the new crown's heir; one of the candidates was James VI of Scotland, a great faithful of Protestantism which was a great point for Elizabeth I to have in mind. During the reign of Elizabeth I, some laws against Catholics were imposed: they could not go to Catholics mass, but they were obliged to attend to the Protestant services. In 1603, the year when James was crowned king of England, as James I, the Catholics' situation was even worst: they were not allowed to celebrate any mass in any part of the country, and if they attended to a mass, they could be imprisoned or punished with fines. In order to resolve this situation, Catholics wanted to imprison the king until he promised them an absolute tolerance; this was known as "The Secondary Treason" while "The Main Treason" consisted in eliminating the king and proclaimed queen to his cousin Arbella Stuart (Fraser, 2004: 55-61, 108).

After these treasons, Catholics wanted to overthrow king James I, and their intention was to blow up the Palace of Westminster the day of the Parliamentarian session and to kill the king, his family, and the lords. This session was postponed some times because of the reappearance of the Black Death, finally the chosen day was the 5<sup>th</sup> of

November 1605. However, the attack could not be carried out because the conspirators were discovered and arrested (Fraser, 2004: 139-157). After this attempt to blow up the English Parliament, the Catholics' situation was awful because of the many persecutions they suffered. Around 1606, those persecutions were in their highest point, and many people were imprisoned and executed. This bad situation for Catholics living in England lasted until the mid-eighteenth century when their situation improved slightly (Trevelyan, 1996: 72-74).

### **3. MARGERY KEMPE AND LUISA DE CARVAJAL Y MENDOZA AS UNIQUE CHARACTERS**

In this part I am going to analyse the lives of Margery Kempe and Luisa de Carvajal y Mendoza from the perspective of their marital status, their activities and acts dealing with religion, and last but not least, how the world saw them and how it reacted to their behaviour. Although in some points Margery Kempe and Luisa de Carvajal y Mendoza are going to coincide, these chapters are going to serve to present some differences which lead us to the final conclusion.

#### **3.1 Women's marital status**

In this chapter, I am going to present the characteristics of marital life during the Middle Ages and the Early Modern Period. Margery Kempe married while Luisa de Carvajal y Mendoza did not, a fact which had a lot of influence on their personalities and was a source of criticism. For this reason, it is significant to present the notion and aspects of married and single women to understand those criticisms that Margery Kempe and Luisa de Carvajal y Mendoza received for not following the typical standards of the time.

Regarding medieval married women, we must highlight the most important obligations they had as wives: they must have children, the future heirs who could inherit the family's patrimony and contribute to keep the lineage; wives must obey, respect, be faithful to their husbands, and make them happy in order to guarantee the couple stability. Besides, married women had to follow their husbands' advice and do whatever they wanted, and especially they had to behave appropriately in order to fulfil their obligations and not to disobey their husbands. This good behaviour was also bound to the fact that married women had to dress and brush adequately according to their social status and age, and they could neither pay attention to the society's gossips and tell them to other people, nor be alone with other men different from their husbands. All these women's duties were important to avoid damaging their husbands and families' reputation (Haro Cortés, 1995: 460-463). Marriages from that time also had some specific characteristics which are important to take into account: they were a kind of business or agreements between families to preserve their properties and the economic stability; it was frequent that these marriages were between close relatives, but there were also alliances established between different families to guarantee a good future both for the bride and groom, and for the

future generations. These arranged marriages were usually between people from the same social status, preferably high-classes which had a wealthy patrimony and economic stability; for that reason, marriages from lower social classes did not follow these types of agreements. Although these negotiations had the purpose of guarantying families' properties, married women lost the authority over their patrimony and they only could recover it when their husbands died. As those marriages were usually arranged between parents without taking into account bride and groom's opinions, the lack of romantic love within the couple was frequent (McCarthy, 2004: 51-59, 92).

As I have previously said, these arranged marriages were especially between high-social classes, so marriage was the most common future for high-class women. We can see this idea, together with the one of lack of love, reflected in one chapter about high-class women from Eulalia de Vega's book: "En la Edad Media era totalmente inconcebible un matrimonio por amor, y a menudo, las diferencias de edad entre los contrayentes eran muy grandes" (1992: 11) [In the Middle Ages, it was inconceivable to marry for love, and there was usually a big age gap between the bride and the groom]. Therefore, marriage was important to preserve medieval families' properties and to guarantee a good future for women because they had to be under a male figure since they were born. During their childhood they were under the authority of their fathers or brothers, and during their adulthood, under the authority of their husbands. On the other hand, if women did not marry they had the opportunity to enter convents, but once again, high-class women were the ones who had this opportunity because the dowry that the families had to pay to the convent was very high for those families from lower-classes. Thus peasant, artisan, and urban women used to stay at home helping their parents in their businesses or in the field (Power, 2013: 14,116).

After considering the medieval notion of married women and marriage, I can analyse the marital life of Margery Kempe as well as her behaviour as spouse. As many medieval women from well-off families, she married a man who belonged to her same social class, the bourgeoisie, but he was not as important as her father, who had a more prestigious position in society (Windeatt, 1987: 10). This caused some problems in the couple especially for Margery Kempe's reputation:



And when her husband used to try and speak to her, to urge her to leave her proud ways, she answered sharply and shortly, and said that she was come of worthy kindred – he should never have married her – for her father was sometime mayor of the town of N., and afterwards he was alderman of the High Guild of the Trinity in N (Kempe, 1987: 43-44).

We can observe how Margery Kempe reacted against her husband, John Kempe, when he tried to correct her behaviour, on the grounds that she came from a more respectable and important family than him, and suggesting that he should have married another woman. As I have explained before, married women had to obey and especially to respect their husbands, but we can see how Margery Kempe was not like the others because sometimes she did not do so and she did what she wanted as we will see later in one of this chapter's sections about her businesses. At the age of twenty she married and she soon had her first child, so she began to behave as the other medieval married women whose obligations, among others, were to have children; however, after giving birth, she suffered a serious spiritual crisis of which she was saved by God, according to her. From that moment, she recovered her health and felt as she was obliged to her Lord (Kempe, 1987: 41-42). In the following quote we can appreciate the moment when Margery Kempe was saved:

‘Daughter, why have you forsaken me, and I never forsook you?’ And as soon as he had said these words, she saw truly how the air opened as bright as any lightning, and he ascended up into the air, not hastily and quickly, but beautifully and gradually, so that she could clearly behold him in the air until it closed up again. And presently the creature grew as calm in her wits and her reason as she ever was before [...] (Kempe, 1987: 42-43).

These were the words that God pronounced to save Margery Kempe, and an explanation about how that moment was. From that moment, she started to change her behaviour, and even she rejected to have sexual relations with her husband since one night she heard a beautiful melody as if she were in heaven, and she felt more bound to God. She had the desire of living in chastity and giving all her love to God (Kempe, 1987: 43-46). This idea of living in chastity was common since the very beginning of the Middle Ages period when the medieval Church rejected lust which represented sin, vice and ignominy, and it supported chastity as an important virtue for women. Saint Jerome stated that for him the perfect state for a woman was to keep herself virgin, and he said that although married women had to fulfil the obligation of being mothers, if they kept chaste, they could also reach the perfection. Besides, other authors such as Thomas Aquinas

claimed that the carnal desire could be understood as an offense to God, so the idea was that chastity would have to be adopted by everybody as life's role model (Cabanes Jiménez, 2003: 1-3). Those chaste married women could have children but they had some restrictions: passion was not accepted in the sexual act, so they could not enjoy it, and sexual relations were prohibited if women were pregnant, during menstruation, Lent, mourning days, and holidays (Haro Cortés, 1993: 156).

As we can see, this idea of chastity was not a new thing or something that only Margery Kempe practiced, but it was common during this medieval period. She took the decision of being chaste because she knew that for God chastity was the perfect state for a woman (Kempe, 1987: 84). On the contrary, her husband did not support her choice and as she was under his authority, she could not take immediately the vow of chastity. However, some years later, as she did not change her opinion, John Kempe finally let her make the vow of chastity. With this behaviour, we can appreciate that Margery Kempe did not fulfil her first obligations as wife: she had to obey her husband, but soon, she started to do what she wished without taking into account her husband's opinions and advice; and she neglected her children because she preferred going to church and praying. Besides, as a good wife, she must also make her husband happy all the time, but as she was a chaste woman she could not give pleasure to him during the sexual relations, so he was not satisfied (Kempe, 1987: 44-47).

Margery Kempe was criticised for not fulfilling her obligations neither as wife nor as mother, but she received more criticisms when her husband fell down stairs and almost died; people said that it was her fault for not being with him. After making the vow of chastity, they ceased to act as a couple and they stopped living and sleeping together, so people thought that if he died she had to be punished for not attending her husband as she must have done. In order to avoid criticisms, she prayed God in order to save her husband's life, and God said her that she should take care of him. Although she did not want to do that, she finally looked after him because it was God's wish, so once again, she obeyed God, who for her was more important than her husband (Kempe, 1987: 219-221).

On the other hand, we have to present and analyse Luisa de Carvajal y Mendoza's life and her situation in the noble society which she belonged to. First of all, it is important to highlight the two possible fates of Spanish women during the Early Modern period to see how society reacted to Luisa de Carvajal y Mendoza's choice, and then to explain the

notion of married and unmarried women because, as I have explained at the beginning of this chapter, Luisa de Carvajal y Mendoza never married. Women had two different options: to marry or to become nuns, and those who did not follow either of these fates were criticised by the society in which they lived. If we focus on married women, the situation was the same that in the medieval ages: women depended on their husbands; marriages were also a kind of agreement between families; and married women could only recover their properties after their husbands' death (Hernández Bermejo, 1987: 176,180-184).

Women who neither married nor became nuns remained single, and those unmarried women had to keep themselves virgins. The notion of virginity has been very important since the ancient times; this state was seen as the way to reach salvation, heaven and to be free from male domination and from other evil things, such as the pain that a woman has in labour, imposed over Eve after being expelled from the paradise, according to the Bible. Besides, some Church Fathers presented the idea that virginity was superior to matrimony and that it would be the way to equal women's position to men's (Lacarra Lanz, 2003: 415-417). Independently of the social-class, the virginity concept was the same for every women, but the notion of single women was different. As Luisa de Carvajal y Mendoza belonged to aristocracy, it is important to analyse the situation of single women from this social-class. They often lived with their parents or other relatives, and although they had not the same economic situation of those married women, they received either enough amount of money to live as aristocratic women or some lands which guaranteed them an economic stability to live (Harris, 2002: 88-91).

After explaining the notions of married and unmarried women, now I can analyse Luisa de Carvajal y Mendoza's life. Considering that women needed to be under a male's authority, it was inconceivable that they did not marry; thus, those single women were criticised. However, Luisa de Carvajal y Mendoza confronted her society and decided to remain single, which disappointed her brother. She did not need a man because she was aware of her autonomy and strength; besides, she wanted to be free from the male domination and do what she wished without taking into account men's opinions or restrictions. After rejecting the idea of matrimony, she still had another option, to enter a convent, but she also refused this choice. For those reasons she was criticised by the noble society (García-Verdugo, 2004: n.p.). Although her uncle incited her to read religious books and pray for many hours, he wanted to look for a good man for his niece; however,

since her childhood, Luisa de Carvajal y Mendoza knew that she did not want to take the way of marriage. She was more concerned about religious issues such as visiting poor and sick people and thinking about the idea of creating a religious community, which she could do after her uncle's death (Teijeiro Fuentes, 2011: 26-28). After rejecting both fates, Luisa de Carvajal y Mendoza converted into a single woman, and as she did not live with her family but alone with some maids, she received much more criticisms. This degree of independence was due to the ascetic education she received, and thanks to that, she could begin her own way and life (García-Verdugo, 2004: n.p.).

When she came of age, she decided to lead her way towards a secular life, which was the only way by which a Spanish noble woman could avoid criticisms and be respected by everybody (García-Verdugo, 2004: n.p.). If we look for the definition of *secular*, it makes reference to the clergy or priest who does not live bound to any religious or monastic vows, but lives in the civil society (Nueva enciclopedia Larousse, 1981: 9002). Luisa de Carvajal y Mendoza wished this type of life because she did not want to be under the protection of a convent. Although she wanted to follow a contemplative life, she wanted to combine that with the freedom outside the walls of a nunnery where she could not achieve what she wanted. For this reason, she managed to avoid criticisms because she was going to live a religious life and at the same time helped to the most disadvantaged people. However, there were still some people from high and low classes that expressed their disapproval towards her behaviour because they did not understand how her family, a wealthy one, had let her live alone, move and be in public without anyone's protection or authority (Redworth, 2008: 62-63).

Finally, after analysing Margery Kempe and Luisa de Carvajal y Mendoza's marital lives I can conclude that Margery Kempe received more criticism by her neighbours and society than Luisa de Carvajal y Mendoza. This was due to the fact that although Margery Kempe married and had children, she soon decided to abandon them and lived a completely different life dedicated to God and to travel around many places to know more about Him instead of being and taking care of her husband and children, which were her obligations as married woman. On the other hand, it is true that Luisa de Carvajal y Mendoza was criticised because she did not marry nor entered a convent and because she challenged the social rules, but as she soon decided to follow a kind of religious life where she was going to offer her help to those poor and sick people, society respected her because it was seen as an humanitarian act.

### 3.2 Religion

The religious situation during the Middle Ages began to destabilize almost at the end of this period, around the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, when one of the most important events, the Western Schism, took place causing serious problems for the Roman Church. During this period there were two popes at the same time, one in Rome and the other one in Avignon. This Western Schism had its origins on the difficult relationships between the Roman pope Boniface VIII and the French king Philip IV the Fair, who wanted to limit the power of the Papacy. The French king ended up imposing his will, and the Papacy was moved to Avignon. This situation lasted until the papal conclave on 1378 when Urban VI was elected as the new pope of Rome. There were some cardinals who did not agree with the reforms the Pope proposed for the Roman Church, so they elected a new pope, Clement VII, who established his see in Avignon. At that moment, there were two Popes at the same time which contributed to the Roman Church's decline, causing a rupture and the apparition of a new Church as we will see in the section on the Early Modern period (Verdoy, 1994: 47-72).

On the other hand, it is important to highlight the situation in England with the figure of John Wycliff who was an English priest whose main aim was the Church's reform. He thought that the Church was a corrupt institution and that it could be only reformed by the State, so for this reason he was against the pope's power and the ecclesiastical prestige. John Wycliff did not agree with some of the Church's dogmas such as the transubstantiation, the conversion of either the bread or the wine into Christ's body and blood, respectively. When he died his followers, who belonged to the religious movement of Lollardy, wanted to break up the clerical society and participated in the Peasant's Revolt. Finally, these disciples were persecuted because they were against the Church's power and they followed the reformist ideas of John Wycliff, so those persecutions caused the apparition of the Inquisition in England provoking more problems to the Catholics. As I have previously said, the Western Schism helped to the apparition of new heterodox groups and thanks to this Wycliffite movement, the social sensibility and the support to those groups increased among the population (Verdoy, 1994: 117-123).

Apart from these problems which would lead eventually to one of the most important conflicts for the Western Christianity, it is important to highlight other aspects related to religion and to the Middle Ages. During this time pilgrimages were one of the

most common activities for Christian people, who wished to visit the Holy Places where God was born, died and resurrected. These religious journeys were done not only by men but also by women; the earliest female pilgrims dated from the beginning of the fourth century and women visited places such as Jerusalem, Rome and Bethlehem (Bertini, 1991: 61-35). Margery Kempe also travelled to the Holy Places in order to know more things about God; these journeys were important for her because she felt bound to God. She had a great devotion towards God, and even she obeyed Him when He ordered her to stop having children and go to different cities to talk about her experiences and about the fact that she could talk with God. She was always disposed to go to those places, but she also knew that it could be difficult because she was a weak woman who had not much money (Kempe, 1987: 47, 67). However, God promised He would help her with that and during her journeys in order to assure her safety, as we can see in the following quote:

I shall send you enough friends in different parts of England to help you. And, daughter, I shall go with you in every country and provide for you. I shall lead you there and bring you back again in safety, and no Englishman shall die in the ship that you are in. I shall keep you from all wicked men's power (qtd in Kempe, 1987: 67).

According to Margery Kempe, if she had any problem during her trips God would help her in everything, and in every city she found some people who helped her economically or gave her the necessary to live. One day, while she was climbing up Mount Quarentyne with some companions, she asked them for help because she could hardly go up, but anyone wanted to help her. However, thanks to her praying to God, one man finally helped her. She had God's word that she would come back home safe if she made everything He wanted; as for example the white clothes that He wished Margery Kempe to wear despite the criticisms she could receive by the meaning of these garments, as we will see in the last chapter of this part (Kempe, 1987: 110-112). Margery Kempe had enough courage to travel even under dangerous situations, always trusting God's help. She was willing to do whatever she wished such as spreading the God's word and telling holy tales without giving much importance to all the criticisms and insults she received in each place she went. During the first travels her husband was with her, but he soon decided to leave her alone in her adventures; however, she did not mind that, she was happy with her way of life. She did not want to be a simple married woman who was always at home with her children and husband, but she wanted to do more things and stand out over the rest of her neighbours.

During these travels and pilgrimages, she used to preach God's words and some holy tales, and even she went to some priests' houses to do that. However, this practice had a few issues due to the restrictions established on women's sphere of authority: they had no access to a theological learning, so they started to read visionary writings which helped them to learn something, and although they wanted to tell about their knowledge, they could not because they had neither spiritual nor intellectual authority to divulge any type of doctrine. These restrictions were very common during the Western Schism period (Dinshaw & Wallace, 2009: 96, 97, 228). Nevertheless, despite those obstacles women had to confront, our visionary and mystic Margery Kempe did not stop disseminating what she knew, and even people associated her with Lollards because she was connected with God and she could communicate with Him. Besides, she suffered many criticisms by this behaviour and sometimes her life was in danger, as I will explain in the last chapter of this part.

She carried out these practices in several places such as Norwich where she visited the house of a Vicar with the idea of talking about her devotion to God and the different revelations and secrets He, and sometimes the apostles, told her while praying. Initially, the Vicar was surprised that a secular woman wanted to deal with these themes because they were usually concerns of priests or nuns, but he was pleased to listen to her (Kempe, 1987: 74-75). Her travel to Norwich was not a mere coincidence, she was there to know and talk with another important English mystic, Julian of Norwich (1342-1416). We know her by this name because she was an anchoress at St. Julian's Church from Norwich. At the age of thirty she had a great illness during which she had around sixteenth visions of Christ at the cross, which were told in the book titled *Sixteen Revelations of Divine Love* (Dinshaw & Wallace, 2009: 210, 240-241). These experiences were the reason why Margery Kempe visited Norwich, she wanted to take some advice of this famous mystic as well as to tell her about her visions, God's revelations, and about her spiritual experiences in general. Besides, she wanted to know if Julian of Norwich considered that there were some deceptions in those visions because she was an expert in those experiences. We can find two common points between these two women: they had visions during a serious illness and those visions were about the same person, God (Kempe, 1987: 77).

The pilgrimages she did, the many criticisms she tolerated, and her obedience to God proved her Christian devotion. Although every Christian must obey God, not

everybody could communicate with him as Margery Kempe did, so her situation was different. Besides, she also had to accomplish some God's wishes such as going to specific places, dressing from a specific form, or having those sobbing each time she prayed or had any vision. As a mystic person, she was pleased with her behaviour and all the things she did, and she did not mind the opinions of those people who said that she was mad and that everything she said was false. What she was doing was to show her love and devotion towards God. However, at some point, those sobbing were more frequent and intense and people did not want to be with her, so Margery Kempe began to feel alone and more discriminated. For that reason, she asked God for help in order to avoid sobbing when she was in public, but He answered her that it was His wish and that she should obey Him as she used to do before. She could have insisted on this matter but as she was a very mystic person whose real desire was to be bound to God and reach a perfect union with Him, she continued with the same behaviour. Since God saved her from the spiritual crisis, she started to live a mystic experience which changed her life forever, and it helped her to see the world from a different perspective. She noticed that she could do many things without the permission of her husband, and that there were different ways to be happy. This new way of life let her know many people and share her experiences with everybody, up to the point of collecting them in her book, *The Book of Margery Kempe* (Kempe, 1987: 47, 222).

As I have explained at the beginning of this chapter, at the end of the Middle Ages there was a religious instability which caused the apparition of new heterodox groups; the situation during the Early Modern period was not very different and there were some events which led to the apparition of a new Christianity's branch, Protestantism. Against that and as a response to these new religious ideas, the Roman Catholic Church initiated some reforms known as Counter-Reformation. Martin Luther, a German monk who wanted to criticise some issues from the Catholic Church, was the originator of this Protestant Reformation which began in Germany in 1517 when the indulgences by which people could get the salvation paying an amount of money to the Church took place. At that moment, Martin Luther defended his 95 thesis in which he claimed some aspects: the human being could only be saved by Faith; priests were no longer necessary to explain the Scriptures because these could be understood by everybody; and there were only two sacraments (Eucharist and Baptism). Furthermore, he denied the purgatory's existence and said that it was not allowed to worship to any kind of religious images. His ideas were



well received and spread in Germany where people wanted to control the Church's properties, but they soon found an enemy, Charles V, the Holy Roman Emperor who tried to achieve Martin Luther's retreat. The German emperor wanted to reach a solution to avoid Christianity's breakup but it was no longer possible and finally, with the Peace of Augsburg in 1555, the total breakup took place (Pérez Blázquez 8-11).

This was the initial Protestant reform, but there were also others in the rest of Europe such as Calvinism and Anglicanism. The former, led by John Calvin, had its origin in France and then it spread to Scotland, Switzerland, and the Netherlands. The main reform's idea was based on the predestination, which meant that God chose who should be saved or who should be condemned. The latter originated in England, and it was more focus on political issues than on religious ones. At that time, the Catholic Church owned many lands and had a great wealth while the English monarchy's possessions were not as numerous, so Henry VIII together with the bourgeoisie wanted to get the Church's wealth in order to improve the monarchy's situation. Despite being a defender of the Faith, Henry VIII did not like the Rome's influence over England, and this enmity increased when the Pope did not grant him the marriage annulment with Catherine of Aragon. After that, the monarchy with the bourgeoisie's help seized the Church's wealth. In 1531, a commission decided that Henry VIII was the head of the Church and he named Thomas Crammer as Archbishop of Canterbury who will grant the king the marriage annulment. Finally, the Pope excommunicated Henry VIII and the total breakup with the Roman Church took place (Pérez Blázquez: 12-13).

As a consequence of these Protestant Reformations, the Council of Trent (1545-1563) was convened as a solution in order to avoid the breakup of the Church, but Protestants were unwilling to become reconciled; thus Catholics started what is known as Counter-Reformation. In this council the Church tried to recover the value of sacraments such as Baptism, Eucharist and Confirmation, and the devotion to the religious images and saints which had been forbidden by the Protestant Reformation (Pérez Blázquez, 1991: 14; Martínez Rojas, 2007: 219-230). On the other hand, at this time new religious orders such as the Jesuit order appeared, whose founder Ignacio de Loyola had as main purpose the "Faith's propagation and defence" (Burrieza Sánchez, 2004: 30). In order to achieve this target, it was important to carry out some habits such as teaching, preaching, and the spiritual assistance to those people who were in hospitals or in prisons; the people

within this order had to spread the Christian doctrine among either old and young people, or children (Burrieza Sánchez, 2004: 31,36).

Luisa de Carvajal y Mendoza was one of these people who helped the Jesuits in order to fulfil its purpose, and as secular religious, she could explain religious teachings to everybody. Although she started to help Jesuits in Spain, her main contribution was carried out in England. Jesuits did not want to create a female company but they accepted either money or any kind of assistance for the order's purposes; Luisa de Carvajal y Mendoza contributed with the money of her parental heritage in order to build a Jesuit novitiate in Leuven (Belgium). She was very involved in this company and although she was not ordered Jesuit, she also took the vows of chastity, poverty, and obedience to God as Jesuits did (García-Verdugo, 2004: n.p.; Burrieza Sánchez, 2004: 37). Her lifestyle, ideas, and decisions were influenced on the one hand and to a large degree by her mother's behaviour, who liked performing humanistic and charitable acts as well as being involved in all kind of religious affairs, and by the education she received (Teijeiro Fuentes, 2011: 14-15). On the other hand, she had started to have a great devotion for the Society of Jesus thanks to her father's request who wanted her daughter to be instructed into spiritual notions by some priests from that company, so her uncle looked for one of the best priests for his niece in order to achieve her father's wish (Abad, 1966: 28).

The Society of Jesus had the idea of invading England during the time of Elizabeth I to support those Catholics living under a Protestant government and to spread their teachings between the Catholics, and during the reign of James I there was still a presence of this group in England. During their stay there, the Jesuits wanted to get that England returned to be a Catholic country, and if they had to invade and to take some political actions to get it, they would do without hesitation. At the time of James I's reign, Luisa de Carvajal y Mendoza thought it would be a good idea to go to England in order to convert people to Catholicism. However, when she arrived there, the situation was not the best neither for Catholics nor for the Spanish people due to the bad relationships between England and Spain after the Anglo-Spanish War (1585-1604), as we will see later. There, she noticed the persecutions, maltreatments, and discriminations Catholics were suffering, and in one of her letters she wanted to represent Catholics' situation within the labour market: "[...] como son herejes todos los que tienen tiendas, porque siendo católico uno, no le consienten tenerla, ni oficio ninguno público" (Carta 90, 1607, Inés de la Asunción, ¶ 4). [[...] the heretics are the ones who have stores, because if you are

Catholic, you are not allowed to have any store or public business]. Catholics could not open their own businesses due to the penal laws imposed by the English government, so they had no liberty to do whatever they wanted.

Luisa de Carvajal y Mendoza lived in London almost nine years until her death in 1614, and during that time she tried to do the best and helped as many Catholic people as she could, or even sometimes she also helped those Protestant people who wanted to convert to Catholicism. In some of her letters, she wrote about these conversions she did such as the one of an old woman who came to her because she needed spiritual help. This woman was advised by God to visit Luisa de Carvajal y Mendoza who could help her to achieve the true religion in order to save her soul. On the other hand, Luisa de Carvajal y Mendoza also visited many Catholics who were in prison, and when they were executed, she tried to get their bodies from a common grave, clean and give them a proper burial. Nevertheless, sometimes, it was difficult to get back the bodies because the Protestants put them as deep as possible so that Catholics could not recover their cadavers. Besides, Protestants usually executed and tore to pieces Catholic bodies, and Luisa de Carvajal y Mendoza was also responsible for sewing the members, placing the cadavers in sepulchres and holding a vigil to them (Carta 111, 1609, Inés de la Asunción, ¶ 3; carta 80, 1607, Magdalena de San Jerónimo, ¶ 5; carta 151, 1612, Marquesa de Caracena, ¶ 5; carta 163, 1612, Rodrigo Calderón, ¶ 9).

While we are reading about this, we notice that she was a good Christian person who followed the principles of helping the others although it could cause her some problems. When she began her travel towards England, nobody thought she would survive during almost nine years in a country where the Spanish and Catholic people were not well welcome. Besides, she did not know any English word which complicated things, but she was able to make herself understood and carried out her purpose (Redworth, 2008: 97). She managed to stand out over the rest of women thanks to her courage and strength to overcome the difficult situations she had to live. Furthermore, what is astonishing is the fact that Luisa de Carvajal y Mendoza was responsible for taking charge of those cadavers. Women were defined as weak and sensitive people, and she demonstrated enough strength to recover all the corpses and to try not to break down while she was sewing the different parts of the body. She did not mind what other people thought about her, the only thing she wished to achieve was to give those Catholics the worthy burial they deserved.

### 3.3 Society's reaction

In this chapter, I will analyse how Margery Kempe and Luisa de Carvajal were seen by the society and the criticisms they received by their unusual behaviour and lifestyle. As we have seen in previous parts of this dissertation, they did not act as women from their time should behave, so for this reason they were regarded in a different and, unfortunately, negative way. Both Margery Kempe and Luisa de Carvajal y Mendoza were very religious and had a great devotion towards God, but each of them were criticised by different things as we will see below.

Firstly, as I explained in the *Women's marital status* chapter, Margery Kempe totally changed her behaviour after being saved by God from her spiritual crisis. Since then, she started to behave strangely without respecting neither her husband nor her marital status' rules, which made her liable to criticism for not complying with the role socially established for women. For example, male population did not see well that a woman created her own businesses (Vega, 1992: 25), and Margery Kempe wished to do that when she recovered from her illness; so she received criticisms by her neighbours as well as by her husband, who opposed to her goal. However, she disregarded his orders and tried to carry out some jobs such as brewing and a horse-mill. Those soon failed due to strange circumstances that nobody could explain because the things became worst suddenly without any logical explanation; for example, the animals used in the second job did not carry out the tasks and they did not move as if they were ill, but they were in perfect conditions (Kempe, 1987, 44-45). Thus people rejected working for her again and they began to draw their own conclusions about the failures: "Then it was noised about in the town of N. that neither man nor beast would serve the said creature, and some said she was accursed; some said God openly took vengeance on her; some said one thing and some said another" (Kempe, 1987: 45). Each person had a different opinion about the origin of those strange events, but almost everybody agreed that this happened due to the influence of the devil or God.

Margery Kempe was a very proud person because she was convinced that she could do whatever she wished without anybody's help, and she did not give much importance to her husband or neighbours' opinions. When her businesses failed, she did not return home to take care of their children or to do the housework, but she continued behaving differently from the ideal wife and mother. She began to go to church every day where she spent many hours praying and talking with God, so people began to criticise

her by the type of rigid life she had chosen. They agreed neither with her unusual behaviour nor with the habits she had and repeated every day (Kempe, 1987: 47). Those criticisms became worse during her pilgrimages to the Holy Places and her visits to the church where she had visions about God's life, which provoked her great sobbing. Sometimes, when she was praying, she talked with the apostles instead of with God, and her reaction got worse (Kempe, 1987: 62-75) as we can read in the following quote:

[...] These conversations were so sweet, so holy and so devout, that often this creature could not bear it, but fell down and twisted and wrenched her body about, and made remarkable faces and gestures, with vehement sobbings and great abundance of tears, sometimes saying 'Jesus, mercy', and sometimes, 'I die.' And therefore many people slandered her, not believing that it was the work of God, but that some evil spirit tormented her in her body or else that she had some bodily sickness (Kempe, 1987: 75).

People thought that something was happening inside her or that she was accursed, so she was soon abandoned by many people even by her husband. This brought some negative consequences because people thought that Margery Kempe was the one who had abandoned her husband and that she went to the different cities in order to persuade other women to abandon theirs, as we can appreciate in the following quote from a conversation between Margery Kempe and a bishop: "My Lady herself was well pleased with you and liked your talk, but you advised my Lady Greystoke to leave her husband [...]. And now you have said enough to be burned for" (Kempe, 1987: 172). Apart from trespassing the social rules because she did not fulfil the obligations of a married woman, she also overstepped the religious ones since medieval women had not authority to divulge neither God's words nor any spiritual practice. They could only go to church to attend mass or to pray, which were the common practices for women (Díaz de Rábago, 1999: 112-123).

It was not the first time that she was threatened with being burned; as she said that she could talk with God, have visions about His life, and know the sins about people, everybody started to consider her a witch and a heretic who should die. During the Middle Ages, the belief in the devil and the accusations for heresy were very present, and heretics were considered to have a deep understanding in the Christian practices and teachings. At that time, if society saw that someone's behaviour was unusual or he started to behave in a different and uncommon way, they thought that he was possessed by the devil (Russell, 1972: 266). Margery Kempe's behaviour was strange due to her sobbing and convulsions which people believed they were associated with the presence of the devil in

her body, and as she was always talking with God and knew many things that nobody except Him could know, she had that deep understanding; as a consequence, she was accused of heresy. Although there were many people who supported that idea, there were others, such as priests, who helped her against all the criticisms. Coming up next, in her own narrative, she tells us what she was accused of: “On the next day she was brought into the Archbishop’s chapel, and many of the Archbishop’s household came there scorning her, calling her ‘Lollard’ and ‘Heretic’, and swore many a horrible oath that she should be burned” (qtd in Kempe, 1987: 162). But this was not the only time she was called heretic; she also had to suffer these insults when she started to wear white clothes, by God’s request –according to her–, which represented virginity. Each colour represented both the social class and the marital status of a person. Thus if you wore a garment or a colour which did not correspond with the social rules, you were violating them. As Margery Kempe was not virgin but chaste because she had children, those white clothes were not suitable for her because they were associated with unmarried women who had to remain virgins. Thus people said she was a maiden, but she could not prove she was married because she travelled without her husband’s company, so verifying her real marital status was difficult. Although she could have denied to wear those garments, she preferred obeying God (Kempe, 1987: 141-142; McCarthy, 2004: 124-125). Besides, she also received criticisms by the strange and extravagant clothes she used to wear, which were not appropriate for bourgeois women. As we saw in the section entitled *Women in the medieval and early modern society*, women had to dress according to their social status, but Margery Kempe did not respect that rule (Kempe, 1987: 43).

Whereas our English mystic had to overcome many criticisms for different reasons, those judgments that Luisa de Carvajal y Mendoza received were almost always triggered by the conversions to Catholicism that she made to the Protestants. As I have explained in other sections, she arrived in London in an unsteady situation which began during the reign of Elizabeth I, and with the discovery of the Gunpowder Plot the things became worst with more persecutions, not only against Catholics in general but also against Jesuits in particular. People in London knew that Luisa was bound to the Jesuits, and the English Government saw her as a threat against the Protestantism’s stability, so she was also in danger of being persecuted. She not only received negative comments from the English people, but also from the Spanish ambassador in London, who advised her to leave the country because if she continued with her wish of converting Protestant

people, she could ruin the peace treaty of 1604 between England and Spain (Abad, 1966: 185-200). Although that treaty was signed by both countries to finish the Anglo-Spanish War, it was not sufficient in order to finish with the previous enmities between both countries; therefore, Spanish people continued without being well welcome in England. When the English noticed Luisa de Carvajal y Mendoza was Spanish, they rejected her making her situation more complicated. She wrote a letter to Father Joseph Creswell asking him to send a pair of scissors to work with gold and get some money since the financial aids were almost inexistent for Spanish people due to the hate towards them (Carta 93, 1608, Padre José Cresvelo, ¶ 16). Now, if we think about the situation of Luisa de Carvajal y Mendoza if she were a man, we can think that the criticisms received would be less hard. A man could receive criticisms because he would be trying to change the religion of many people in England which would cause a religious instability, but as a woman at that time was relegated to a secondary role whose duties in the public sphere were almost inexistent, the society would criticise her due to her meddling in the male sphere.

The conversions of Protestant people to Catholicism and the aid to those Catholics who lived under the strict rules of the English government were the main reasons by which Luisa de Carvajal y Mendoza was in the spotlight. She loved talking about Roman Catholic Religion, but she was seen as a trouble maker due to the comments she said about Protestant Religion. This was an offense for those Protestant people who said that their religion was the true one, while Luisa de Carvajal y Mendoza questioned it as well as the Church's institution, organization and dogma. In order to avoid conflicts with Protestant people due to her opinions, she did not go out if it was not absolutely necessary. But one day she had to go out, and she noticed how some people followed her in order to see if she talked about religion; suddenly, some court clerks appeared to take her to the judge's house where she was accused of talking against Queen Elizabeth I and against Protestant Religion. From there, she was taken to prison, being the first time she was imprisoned (Abad, 1966: 269-272).

Although it is important to represent the opinions of the English society because it was against the practices of Luisa de Carvajal y Mendoza, in some moments it is also significant to portray the image that the Spanish society had about her. After signing the peace treaty between Spain and England, one of the clauses did not let Spain convert England in a Catholic country, but Luisa de Carvajal y Mendoza's task was that so it

could cause a new conflict between both countries. For this reason, Spanish government wanted her to change her behaviour and to stop saying things against Protestant religion. Thus although this situation also implies religious issues, it is mainly a political one (Abad, 1966: 275). Nevertheless, she neither changed her behaviour nor Spanish government expatriated her from the country, but she had to go away from the city centre in order to avoid conflicts.

She wanted to return to downtown, but her friend Don Pedro advised her not to go to the town in order to avoid greater problems. He thought that if English people saw her they could kill her, but Luisa de Carvajal y Mendoza did not fear because she trust God who will protect her (Carta 96, 1608, Padre Lorenzo da Ponte, ¶ 20). She had a great faith on God, and she did not fear anything because she was sure that if something bad happened, He would save her. When we read her letters, we see many mentions to God whom she prayed and asked for the good health of her relatives and friends. After overcoming the several and serious diseases she had, she said it was God's will to remain alive.

Luisa de Carvajal y Mendoza still continued converting people to Catholicism, and as consequence, the English archbishop Abbot ordered to arrest her and enter her house to discover evidences of a possible monastery she had founded there. The English court clerks found neither those evidences nor luxurious things; she and her maids lived poorly. This fact confirms that Luisa de Carvajal y Mendoza wanted to convert people to Catholicism without making any profit. In one of her letters to Duke of Lerma, she told him that she had been accused of founding monasteries for nuns and that she had converted many Protestants to Catholicism; but the archbishop could not prove those accusations (Carta 178, 1613, Duque de Lerma, ¶ 4). Even though she had been charged of converting many people to her religion, other many Protestants by themselves had turned to her to change their religion. Finally, it is important to highlight that despite all the problems and maltreatments she had to suffer, she did not leave the country and lived there until her death (Abad, 1966: 322-329).



#### 4. CONCLUSION

In this dissertation, we have noticed women's discrimination especially within the public sphere, as well as the limited role they had during the Middle Ages and the Early Modern period. At the beginning of this research paper, I thought that I was going to find a great change in the women's role and situation from one epoch or social class to another, but this is not the case; for example, they still suffered restrictions in the public sphere, and from the perspective of their role within society, women had to marry and be good mothers and wives who had to obey and respect their husbands. Margery Kempe and Luisa de Carvajal y Mendoza decided not to follow those social standards and tried to have a different life.

Through the analysis of their lives, some common points can be appreciated; for example, they challenged their society in order to achieve their goals independently of the criticisms they might receive. Margery Kempe disobeyed her husband and oriented her life to religious issues, being the most important the union with God, which was also very significant in the life of Luisa de Carvajal y Mendoza. This was due to her great religious faith in Catholicism and her desire to convert people to that religion. Both of them trusted God because He provided them security; they knew that if something bad happened God would help them. Margery Kempe relied on His help in order to accomplish her wish of spreading the word of God and travelling to the Holy Places, and Luisa de Carvajal y Mendoza felt protected by God against the threats of Protestants. There are also differences which have been found thanks to the deep analysis within the different aspects of marital status, religion, and society's criticism. For example, Margery Kempe followed the social rules: she married and had children, but then she did not fulfil the obligations of a married woman; however, Luisa de Carvajal y Mendoza rejected the two possible fates for a Spanish woman: to marry or enter a convent. Furthermore, the former only told her religious experiences, while the latter tried to convert Protestant people to Catholicism. These dissimilar aspects and others obtained during the analysis will serve to give an answer to the question about if they are eccentric or independent women.

From my point of view, Margery Kempe can be considered an eccentric woman especially for her behaviour which was uncommon for medieval women. People thought she was mad due to the great sobbing she had during the visions and by her conversations with God. Besides, she was seen as a rebel woman because she did not follow the social

rules imposed by the medieval and bourgeoisie society. She challenged her society without minding the criticisms, as for example when she wore white clothes which were not appropriate for a wife. Another point to explain her eccentricity and the criticisms she received is that her acts were typical of anchoresses who lived away from the society and their opinions did not influence on it. Her extravagant behaviour caused her serious problems, but she continued with her life in order to manage the perfect union with God. It is important to say that although it seems that she is an independent woman because she travelled around many cities and overcame some problems without her husband's company, she always had God's help who provided her enough money and people who would help her.

Luisa de Carvajal y Mendoza, on the contrary, can be seen as an independent woman because she decided neither to marry, in order to avoid being under a man's authority, nor enter a convent where she could not act freely to carry out her purposes. She achieved her wishes by herself, without anybody's help, and she had her own money to travel and to help the Society of Jesus. She overcame criticisms and moved to England to convert people to Catholicism, and although sometimes she asked for help or money to some Spanish relatives and friends, almost all the times she looked for her own solutions. She also had the advice of some people, but she decided what to do at all times; and during her stay in London, she was never at the Spanish embassy neither to find assistance in order to solve a problem nor to protect her life due to the Protestant's threats.

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