

**“Ye that heres and sees this vision”: Imagined Readers, Imagined Reading in Late
Medieval English Devotional Writing**

by

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ABSTRACT

Drawing on a range of Middle English devotional writings from ca. 1370 to ca. 1435, including a confessional manual, revelatory visions, an autobiography, and lives of Christ, I argue that writers in these genres imagine a vast and variously literate lay readership. This project investigates how texts and writers engage with readers. At the same time, it uses manuscript evidence to examine the different ways in which historical readers came into contact with devotional texts.

The first chapter uses the *Parson's Tale* in Longleat MS 29, a compilation of devotional texts where the Parson appears alongside Walter Hilton and Richard Rolle, to construct a reading of the tale as a lay-oriented penitential manual for self-directed devout readers. With Chaucer's name cut from the tale and the work presented in an unambiguously religious context, the manual fosters independent spiritual edification for its readers while continuing to direct them to the institutional church for the sacrament of confession.

In the second chapter, this project moves to Julian of Norwich's Short and Long Texts. Readers here are imagined as allies and students; their engagement with the text is envisioned as a dramatically multimedia— in particular visionary— experience, which calls on their familiarity with sacred and secular images. This chapter explores the text's image-based pedagogical strategies by putting Julian's well-known literary imagery into conversation with site-specific research in Norwich and its surroundings. The result is a shared visionary experience in which readers are taught to read the material conditions of their lives devotionally.

Nicholas Love's *Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ* anticipates a more complicated reception in the third chapter, situating its imagined readers in a stew of divergent literary interpretations of Christ's life and acknowledging the inevitability of differing readings. Inherent to these competing and coexisting lives of Christ is variety in form and mode of reception. Juxtaposing the *Mirror* and a unique lyric meditation on the life of Christ extant in British Museum Addit. MS 11307, this chapter uses close reading and manuscript study to investigate how imagined readers are invited to work through both texts with a degree of spiritual autonomy.

The fourth chapter moves later into the fifteenth century with *The Book of Margery Kempe*. The *Book* is both a record of reading and an instructional text on how to read; as Margery reads religious texts and comes into her own spiritual authority, her body and behavior are read and misread by the communities around her. As Margery herself becomes text, she develops a reading practice that trusts the surface meaning of texts.

The coda returns to Julian's Long Text and the medieval devotional texts compiled in British Museum Addit. MS 11307. MS 11307 and Fonds Anglais 40 are separately remade for a post-Reformation and post-manuscript readership, and their new manuscript and print contexts embroil them in controversies about England's religious past and the value of preserving old texts.

INTRODUCTION

Imagined Readers and their Multimedia Literacies in Late Medieval England

Jhesu Kyng of heuene and helle
Man and womman I wole þe telle...¹

As a kind of legal agreement, a charter requires multiple parties. Here, *The Long Charter of Christ* calls up Christ and the people to whom he is speaking— “man and womman” and the indeterminate Þe and Þou addressed throughout the *Charter*. Christ is an ever-present narrator and speaking voice, the *Charter*’s broker and source. How, he considers, can his bargain with humankind be remembered, and by how many people? In what forms will it endure? How can the crucifixion be made present even after it has happened? Naturally, the Christ of the *Charter* has an answer:

Another help was in my þouzt
More syker þe to make
Ageyn þi fo ful of wrake
Heuene and erthe in present
To make a chartre of feffement
In such a manere byhoueþ to be
þat I moste 3yuon my lyf for þe. (38-44)

Christ creates a legal document. Unlike a self-contained declaration or proclamation, it is the sort of document that requires an active reception: its audience is to receive the message and to consciously agree to it. On the one end is Christ, author, and at the other end are Þe and Þou—

¹ From British Museum Addit MS 11307 *The Long Charter of Christ* (ed. Mary Caroline Spalding [Bryn Mawr: Bryn Mawr College, 1914], 1-2).

the parties whose acceptance of the Charter defines its existence. The publication, circulation, and usage of the Charter relies on that collaboration.

The Charter's relative popularity is evinced by its surviving copies, where it is extant as both the *Short Charter* (24 manuscripts) and the *Long Charter* (14 manuscripts), with little regularity within Short and Long.² Emily Steiner locates the "fictive documents" at "the point at which the stuff of documentary culture (charters, seals, coffers) and its agents (grantors, notaries, witnesses) were being translated into the rhetoric and ideologies of popular piety."³ Yet extant manuscripts, provenances, and circulation histories do not convey the fullness of the audience summoned into being in the *Long Charter's* opening lines.

Abideth and lokeþ with 3oure ye
And redeþ on þis parchemyn
3if eny serwe be lyk to myn...
Wiþstondeþ and hereþ þis chartre. (94-97)

Christ is speaking to every possible recipient of the Charter, and to those recipients' diverse literacies. Þe and þou might read the text or else hear it read, and in either case fluency in visual images of the crucifixion is assumed. The audience Christ calls up is vast, various, amorphous; the material facts of the Charter's circulation exist independent of this world of imagined readers.

Drawing on a range of texts and multimedia reading practices from Chaucer's *Parson's Tale* and Julian of Norwich's first *Vision* in the 1370s to fifteenth-century lives of Christ and Margery Kempe's autohagiography, I argue that vernacular religious texts of this period create,

² George Shuffelton, "Item 29, The Short Charter of Christ: Introduction" (*Codex Ashmole 61: A Compilation of Popular Middle English Verse*, Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2008). See also Spalding, xiii-xvi. According to Steiner, the *Short Charter* is extant in "at least twenty-five manuscripts." The *Long Charter* survives in "at least twenty manuscripts and was continuously copied until the end of the fifteenth century, usually in lyric collections and pastoral miscellanies" (*Documentary Culture and the Making of Medieval English Literature* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009], 195).

³ Emily Steiner, *Documentary Culture and the Making of Medieval English Literature*, 193.

imagine, and teach a wide, diverse community of readers. Faced with limited production technology and circulation as well as with rising demand for religious texts in English, these texts construct tropes of readers to take into account a wider and less conventionally literate segment of reading public than material, technological limitations allowed.

This project investigates on the one hand the rhetorical, literary labor involved in creating, within the text, imagined readers; on the other hand, it uses manuscript evidence to examine the different ways in which historical readers came into contact with these texts. Literature is one part of a complex system of medieval religious devotion, and it does not constitute the largest part of that system. Medieval people of all backgrounds venerated images and statues of saints, watched and participated in religious drama, and heard sermons in their local churches—but many did not come into direct contact with material texts. Although I focus primarily on literary texts, studying imagined and historical reading practices necessitates a wider understanding of what it meant to be literate and of what forms of popular media it was possible to “read”. Imagined readers, encountering textual culture in a range of aural, visual, and textual media, form a community within the text we can better see by incorporating diverse modes of reading. Imagined readers are a synecdoche for their historical counterparts, both active in a mutable and vibrant textual culture.

Reader-response criticism lays some groundwork for what I am calling imagined readers. Readers and readers’ interpretations are fundamental to the meaning-making of a text, where “one can study narrative structure not only in terms of concrete textual features but also in terms of the shared interpretive strategies by which readers make sense of them.”⁴ Susan R. Suleiman writes of a literary text as “a form of communication,” inherent to which are both sender and

⁴ Peter J. Rabinowitz, *Before Reading: Narrative Conventions and the Politics of Interpretation* (Ithaca: Cornell U.P., 1987), 1.

receiver— and where, in a function of suspicious reading, reading is “a process of decoding what has by various means been encoded in the text.”⁵ In his reading of the novel as a genre, Iser investigates readers’ roles in actualizing a text; theirs is “an active part in the composition of the novel’s meaning, which revolves round a basic divergence from the familiar.”⁶ For Wolfgang Iser, the term “implied reader” “incorporates both the *prestructuring of the potential meaning by the text*, and the reader’s actualization of this potential through the reading process” (emphasis mine).⁷ Umberto Eco, also exploring this moment of textual existence prior to reading, writes that “an open text is a paramount instance of the syntactic-semantic-pragmatic device whose *foreseen interpretation is a part of its generative process*” (emphasis mine).⁸ A text— in this instance, a Baudelaire poem— “not only calls for the cooperation of its own reader but also wants this reader to make a series of interpretive choices which even though not infinite are, however, more than one.”⁹ A relationship exists between text and readers where the text anticipates its interpretation and readers validate the text through their own interpretations.

This text-reader interaction is enmeshed in the *Charter*, which is not just a text to be read but a shared agreement between Christ-the-narrator and you-humankind. Active participation is required of both addresser and addressee. I am choosing to call readers at this stage of pre-reading imagined readers to signal a capaciousness in the definition that encompasses both a text’s construction of its readers’ modes of reading and their interpretive practices; they are readers as the text imagines them, and the historical reality of the texts’ reception is a related but separate matter. The technologies of manuscript cultures set limits to the achievability of real

⁵ Susan R. Suleiman, *The Reader in the Text: Essays on Audience and Interpretation* (Princeton: Princeton U.P., 1980), 7-8.

⁶ Wolfgang Iser, *The Implied Reader* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins U.P., 1974), xii.

⁷ *Ibid.*, xii.

⁸ Umberto Eco, Introduction to *The Role of the Reader* (Bloomington: Indiana U.P., 1979), 3.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 4.

widespread readership, as Christ considers in the *Charter*:

Ne myzte I funde no parchemyn
ffor to laston wel and fyn
But as loue bad me do
Myn owne skyn y zaf þer to. (51-54)

Parchment is ephemeral; there are any number of reasons why it might stop circulating. But the existence of imagined readers within a text shows that text— indeed, many texts— engaging with a heterogeneous community of readers independent from any likelihood of reaching those readers.

The texts I examine date roughly to between 1370 and 1440, a period marked by growing vernacular literacy amongst English laity. I have chosen these texts for their variety and for the unexpected ways in which they work in concert with one another; I want, for example, Chaucer’s *Parson’s Tale* to resonate with unambiguously devotional texts, as it does in Longleat MS. 29. The texts experienced divergent circulations due to an array of material, cultural, and political factors, but they nonetheless imagine encountering a vast world of readers. These are not model or ideal readers, but an unruly crowd of careful readers, favorable readers, misreaders, hostile readers, readers who give up halfway through— in any of the diverse media in which it was possible to read. Independent of the historical readership a text could reasonably expect, from popular genres like lives of Christ or penitential manuals to a laywoman’s autohagiography, these Middle English religious texts simultaneously imagine being read by and instructing a diversely literate readership.

Writing of the period between 1350 and the introduction of print in England in 1476, Alexandra Gillespie and Daniel Wakelin connect literary production with textual production, where “the lengthening shelf of self-consciously ‘literary’ works in English was met by a sharp

increase in the production of manuscripts of that literature.”¹⁰ In other words, this is a time in which texts that imagine being read as a rhetorical device or literary trope have unprecedented access—in theory—to historical readers. Nicole Rice attributes this trend to several significant factors:

From the thirteenth century onward, the written word had become increasingly important for bourgeois laypeople in ‘pragmatic’ realms such as administration and the law, and that growing experience with texts may have facilitated a transition from purely pragmatic to more ‘cultivated’ reading practices in Latin and increasingly in French. Along with bureaucratic culture as a spur to literacy, religious initiative may have played an equally foundational role, particularly among women.¹¹

Reading practices were multilingual, vernacular and Latin, and both secular and religious textual cultures were spurring increases in reading and readership. Early on, they were also located most often amongst members of the aristocracy; Parkes argues that this changes during and after the twelfth century, as pragmatic literacy becomes increasingly vital to business and the middle class.¹² Recreational literacy gains importance as over the course of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries English replaces French as the vernacular of choice in legal and literary settings.¹³

At the edge of fourteenth and fifteenth centuries in England reading was complicated by an association with heterodox and heretical ideologies. To Lollards, access to the Bible in English permitted devout people to bypass fallible and corrupt church authorities and enabled them to more directly pursue their own spiritual edification. As Margaret Aston writes, to Lollard

¹⁰ Alexandra Gillespie and Daniel Wakelin, *The Production of Books in England 1350-1500* (New York: Cambridge U.P., 2011), 4. As Gillespie and Wakelin cite, ASG Edwards and Derek Pearsall as well as Michael Sargent have investigated some of the statistics that show an increased textual output (“The Manuscripts of the Major English Poetic Texts,” *Book Production and Publishing in Britain 1375-1475* and “What Do the Numbers Mean? Observations on Some Patterns of Middle English Manuscript Transmission,” *Design and Distribution of Late Medieval Manuscripts in England*, ed. Margaret Connolly and Linne R. Mooney [York: York Medieval Press, 2008], 205-44).

¹¹ Nicole Rice, *Lay Piety and Religious Discipline in Middle English Literature* (New York: Cambridge U.P., 2008), 11.

¹² M.B. Parkes, *Scribes, Scripts and Readers: Studies in the Communication, Presentation and Dissemination of Medieval Texts* (London: Hambledon Press, 1991), 278-85.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 287-90.

proponents of vernacular scripture “lack of latinity must be no bar to direct scriptural understanding.”¹⁴ Lollard testimonies show the late medieval politicization of literacy, as laypeople are called to confess their reading-related sins at trial, which included attendance at Lollard schools and ownership of books.¹⁵ Indeed, “to admit literacy was to make possible the accusation of being a teacher in a school of heresy; it was more prudent to deny.”¹⁶ But Lollardy was not the only grounds on which a text or possession of a text was suspect, as Kathryn Kerby-Fulton’s investigation of censorship in England in the late fourteenth century has shown.¹⁷ Nor even, Henry Ansgar Kelly has recently argued, is the text widely called the Wycliffite Bible necessarily Wycliffite; its widespread popularity, however, is indisputable even in the face of heresy allegations and institutional suspicion.¹⁸

Associations between devotional reading, access to texts, and heterodox or heretical views are an instance of correlation rather than causation, a radical extension of literacy’s spread outside of clerical latinity. Engagement with vernacular devotional literary culture also worked in concert with the wide range of views and practices falling under the umbrella of orthodoxy, including the institutional Church. In 1215 the Fourth Lateran Council formalized the role of confession in an individual’s religious life, and while it made lay and religious penitents alike dependent upon the Church for the act of confession, it also opened up a new outlet for the reading-inclined devout. Confession- and penitence- related literature, particularly manuals, saw

¹⁴ Margaret Aston, *Lollards and Reformers: Images and Literacy in Late Medieval Religion* (London: The Hambleton Press, 1984), 197.

¹⁵ Aston cites Foxe (201). Hudson cites testimony of “John Skykan, William Hardy, Edmund Archer, John Skilly, Thomas, and possibly even Hawisia Mone” (*The Premature Reformation* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988], 186).

¹⁶ Anne Hudson, *The Premature Reformation*, 186.

¹⁷ Kathryn Kerby-Fulton, *Books Under Suspicion: Censorship and Tolerance of Revelatory Writing in Late Medieval England* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame U.P., 2006). As Aston writes, the orthodox texts called into question at heresy trials garnered suspicion in part due to “a general ecclesiastical obsession about the dangers of works written in English when read by the wrong sort of people” (*Lollards and Reformers*, 208).

¹⁸ Hugh Ansgar Kelly, *The Middle English Bible: A Reassessment* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016).

to those new pastoral needs.¹⁹ Eamon Duffy cites primers, “didactic treatises on the virtues or vices, saints’ lives, rhymed moral fables, accounts of visions or visits from or to the afterlife, and collections of prayers and devotions” and argues that such texts were meant to be read aloud to laypeople by clergy.²⁰ Meanwhile, meditations on the life of Christ were popular across European vernaculars and in the Pseudo-Bonaventurean Latin.²¹

Changing modes of piety influenced lay and religious people’s consumption of texts, as “looking inward” became an important part of devotional expression and edification. Reading, particularly silent reading, is widely seen by present-day scholars as an inducement to this kind of devout introspection. In her study of devotional reading and the devout individual, Jennifer Bryan argues that Middle English religious literature proliferated “not because late medieval English readers were dull and pious, as has often been assumed, but because they were eager to know about and to improve what they took to be their deepest, truest, and most important selves. They were looking for ways of thinking and feeling that would help them to live better lives.”²² Paul Saenger traces the development of private prayer in his study of books of hours, where the status of private prayer relative to public prayer was not always agreed upon in Europe by the fifteenth century but where private prayer was increasingly seen as superior. “Silent prayer” could offer a “higher state of spiritual awareness” and existed symbiotically alongside the kinds of private reading fostered by books of hours.²³

¹⁹ Rita Copeland and Marjorie Curry Woods, “Classroom and Confession” in *The Cambridge History of Medieval English Literature*, ed. David Wallace (New York: Cambridge U.P., 1999): 390.

²⁰ Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England c. 1400-c.1580* (New Haven: Yale U.P., 2005), 68-69.

²¹ “Literally hundreds of manuscripts survive of the original Latin text and the various vernacular translations...Fisher described 113 surviving manuscripts of the Latin *Meditationes*, including forty-four (the largest single national group) in English libraries” (Sargent xix). Michelle Karnes puts the *Meditationes* at “more than two hundred [extant] manuscripts” (9).

²² Jennifer Bryan, *Looking Inward: Devotional Reading and the Private Self in Late Medieval England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 3.

²³ Paul Saenger, “Books of Hours,” *The Culture of Print: Power and the Uses of Print in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Roger Chartier et al. (Oxford: Polity Press, 1989), 150.

It is worth clarifying what this project takes reading and literacy to mean, since we know that premodern and present-day literacies are not the same. As Joyce Coleman has argued, “rather than imposing universal, self-validating categories of ‘oral’ and ‘literate’ style on texts, we should work outwards from given texts and literary environments to develop culture-specific descriptive systems.”²⁴ The latinity that determined literacy in the medieval period is, M.B. Parkes suggests, “too restricted to be profitable in an investigation into an age that is characterized by the emergence of written vernacular literature.”²⁵ Examining medieval literacy in practice, Parkes distinguishes

Three kinds of literacy: that of the professional reader, which is the literacy of the scholar or the professional man of letters; that of the cultivated reader, which is the literacy of recreation; and that of the pragmatic reader, which is the literacy of one who has to read or write in the course of transacting any kind of business.²⁶

At the same time, historical literacy resists quantification. “What counts as literacy? What range of skills? What level of ability?” ask James Raven, Helen Small, and Naomi Tadmor. There “can be no clear-cut procedure for the historical measurement of functional literacy,” and present-day scholars must counter their own ingrained and text-centered sense of what it means to be literate.²⁷

Studies of text-based literacy and literary production in late medieval England have opened up our understanding of who was engaging with literature in this period. This has been especially true of women’s roles in the production and consumption of both religious and secular writings.²⁸ Investigations of medieval reading practices and circulation networks have widened

²⁴ Joyce Coleman, *Public Reading and the Reading Public in Late Medieval England and France* (New York: Cambridge U.P., 1996), xii.

²⁵ Parkes, *Scribes, Scripts and Readers*, 275.

²⁶ *Ibid*, 275.

²⁷ James Raven, Helen Small, and Naomi Tadmor, *The Practice and Representation of Reading in England* (New York: Cambridge U.P., 1996), 10.

²⁸ A by no means exhaustive selection of studies of women’s reading practices and involvement in literary/textual culture: Catherine Sanok, *Her Life Historical: Exemplarity and Female Saints’ Lives in Late Medieval England*

the scope of our understanding of readership and reading to include people, especially lay and religious women, whose literacies and modes of textual consumption might be unconventional by present-day standards. Approaches oriented around material and documentary evidence pose challenges, however, centering us on medieval people privileged by chance and circumstance to have had their contact with literary production entered into the historical record.

When we study manuscripts, we study extant manuscripts and make inferences about their own and their no-longer-extant contemporaries' circulation; we come to know what we can of their provenances, and the rest of their origins and transmission is an open and usually unanswerable question. Literacy's extratextual forms have long been a subject of discussion and examination, however, and this is especially so in manuscript cultures where access to physical text was constrained in part by manuscript technologies and in part by illiteracy (in terms of the written vernacular word). Brian Stock takes a long view of transition between oral and written traditions in England in *Implications of Literacy* and elsewhere; in the early medieval period, he cites a kind of "interdependence" between oral and written where "oral discourse effectively began to function within a universe of communications governed by texts."²⁹ In this way, "what eventually came about was the simultaneous existence of different provinces of meaning based upon logical and linguistic considerations, each having its own assumptions about how knowledge was communicated."³⁰

The Charter explicitly calls up different ways of encountering the text, speaking to an audience of "Ȝe men" to "withstondeth and hereth this chartre/ Whi I am wounded an al for-

(Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013); Carol M. Meale, Helen Wilcox, and Vivien Jones, eds., *Women and Literature in Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Diane Watt, *The Paston Women: Selected Letters*. Woodbridge (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2004); Rebecca Krug, *Reading Families: Women's Literate Practice in Late Medieval England* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2008).

²⁹ Brian Stock, *The Implications of Literacy: Written Language and Models of Interpretation in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005), 3.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 4.

blad” (97-8). The Charter and its Christ-narrator ellide forms of reading and reception, and, as we will see, is far from alone in doing so. Cheryl Glenn makes the useful distinction that fifteenth century England [specifically in relation to Margery Kempe] was yet “text-based” rather than “text-dependent”. In other words, in a text-based society (and here Glenn speaks of Kempe specifically), “the use of memory, the persistent habit of reading aloud, and the preference, even among the educated, for listening to a statement rather than scrutinizing it in script comprised popular literary practices.”³¹ Being read to was the “centerpiece of medieval literacy practices at all levels of expertise.”³² Thus when written texts are read aloud to Kempe, her self-declared inability to read or write text is immaterial—rather, she is engaged in the literacy practices of her own time.

Mark C. Amodio calls this setting of both oral and textual literacy “the medieval oral-literate nexus,” where scholarly investigation

must take into account not only the wide variety of uses to which texts were put during the period but also the audiences for which they were intended, as well as the manner in which they were produced and received, because access to culturally essential knowledge and membership in a textual community were not restricted solely to those skilled in encoding and/or decoding written texts but were much more broadly available.”³³

Where paleography, codicology, and provenance can sometimes show how a text was used or interpreted, the oral-literate nexus makes space for aural readings that are not attested to by codicological or other historical record. Literary evidence is one way of digging more deeply into difficult-to-record reading practices. Katherine Zieman, examining the role of the liturgy in late medieval England, argues that the liturgy “participated simultaneously in the worlds of both

³¹ Cheryl Glenn, "Medieval Literacy Outside the Academy: Popular Practice and Individual Technique," *College Composition and Communication* 44, no. 4 (1993), 498.

³² *Ibid*, 499.

³³ Mark C. Amodio, *Writing the Oral Tradition* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2004), 11-12.

orality and literacy,” a “hybrid textual practice.”³⁴ D.H. Green finds oral culture in the constant rereading of texts, “a repeated refashioning of old stories, not merely those from antiquity (Troy, Alexander), but also medieval themes (Tristan, Parzival).”³⁵ Karl Reichl points to the two conflicting descriptions of Beowulf’s battle with Grendel and his mother as an important reminder that though orality and textuality coexisted, they do not map neatly onto one another, and that “the fact that a work belongs to an oral rather than a literate milieu entails a different kind of aesthetics.”³⁶ For Green, continental medieval literary culture is a “bimedial” one, where aural and textual reading coincide in a definition of literacy that does not rely on the presence of a text to the exclusion of all other media.³⁷

A phrasing like the Charter’s “withstondeth and hereth” calls into being a body of imagined readers presumed to be encountering the text in such a manner, stand-ins for potential historical readership. The Charter imagines being audited, read aloud and absorbed by listening readers. Their reasons for listening— perhaps due to social setting, or because the reader or readers cannot read or do not have access to the physical text— are not considered when the Charter explicitly makes room for reading through hearing. In any case, readers are imagined to be encountering the Charter in an environment in which reading text and hearing text are common occurrences of equal value.

But if medieval reading was both aural and textual, how do vibrant traditions of visual image— both material and imagined or contemplative— fit into what it meant to read? Here, I

³⁴ Katherine Zieman, *Singing the New Song: Literacy and Liturgy in Late Medieval England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), x.

³⁵ D.H. Green, *Women Readers in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 2007), 69.

³⁶ Karl Reichl, *Medieval Oral Literature*, ed. Karl Reichl (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2012), 13.

³⁷ *Ibid*, 13.

will move backward from the imperative to “withstondeth and hereth this chartre” to the passage immediately preceding it:

Streyned to drye up-on a tre
As parchemyn oveth for to be
Hereth now and ye shulle weton
Hou this chartre was y-wryton
Upon my neb was mad the enke
Of iewes spotel on me to stynke
The pennes that the lettres wryton
Weron scories that I with was smyton
How many lettres ther-on ben
Red and thou maist weton and sen
Ffive thousand CCC fifty and ten
Woundes on me bothe rede and wen
To shew you alle me loue-dede
Miself I was the chartre rede
ye men that gon forth be the weye
Abideth and loketh with youre ye
And redeth on this parchemyn
yif eny serwe be lyk to myn.
Withstondeth and hereth this chartre
Whi I am wounded an al for-blad. (79-98)

At the beginning and the end of this passage, readers are asked to hear— even as the Charter’s parchment materiality is also called to the forefront. It is this materiality that shifts the Charter from bimodal along an aural-textual continuum to multimedia. In the reading or hearing of the text, readers also employ their understanding of extant visual depictions of the Crucifixion and augment these with their own imaginings. The passage makes use of the Charter’s premise, that the Charter is the body of Christ, in a visceral and literal way: as the Charter’s parchment is hung and strained, so too is Christ’s body. In an orthographic, anti-Semitic detail, the charter is written on his face with onlookers’ spit as ink with pens as scourges. The devout and perhaps excessive specificity of the wounds’ number recalls not just the bodily wounds people meditated over but the thousands of prickings and scrapings of written-upon stretched and dried parchment skin. The “red” and “rede” merges both the red of blood and the verb to read, as the wounds are both

red and to be read. Christ is both the charter red with the blood of fifty thousand wounds and the charter to be read. The crucifixion scene called and recalled by the Charter is one that sees Christ's body and the body of text in the same tortured terms.

Even beyond the conflation of holy body and holy text, the passage is situated within a matrix of medieval passion imagery. By the late medieval period in Europe, argues Gertrud Schiller, "the process of secularization...was reflected in the depiction of detail and vivid realization, as well as in individual invention of devotional images which no longer illustrated biblical events, with the result that lines of demarcation disappeared."³⁸ The Charter revolves around a set of image types with which imagined readers are assumed to be familiar— images the text imagines already have an emotional pull over readers. In the absence of manuscript illumination, readers must hold these images in their mind or seek them out in religious iconography. Readers are asked to read the Charter and to read Christ's wounds— indeed, the Charter and Christ's wounds seem to be the same. Christ is the Charter, and readers are summoned to abide and look with their eyes, to stand and hear, and to work through the visual spectacle provided within the text. The text imagines its readers encountering it aurally, textually, and it imagines being read as a mental or material image would be read.³⁹

I am proposing and utilizing multimedia literacies to encompass the diverse ways in which it was and is possible to "read." On the one hand, medieval literacies are multimedia in a

³⁸ For a comprehensive study of the Passion in medieval art, see Gertrud Schiller, *Iconography of Christian Art* *Iconography of Christian Art: The Passion of Jesus Christ*, trans. Janet Seligman (Greenwich, Conn: New York Graphic Society, 1971). Schiller writes that the Passion "also occupies the largest area within Christian art." The Passion as depicted in art is dense subject matter for scholarly study: "There are so many variations among images of the Passion, and several pictorial types so often combine and impenetrate that it is difficult to organize the material systematically and to trace the evolution of single motifs and groups through every period" (ix).

³⁹ I defer here to art historians Elizabeth Sears and Meyer Schapiro (cited in Sears, 3). Sears defines "reading" in a visual sense as interpretation, where "to read a work is to submit it to close visual analysis, informed by a knowledge of the specific historical context in which the work functioned, a familiarity with relevant pictorial conventions and their associations, and a grasp of visual genres" ("'Reading' Images," *Reading Medieval Images: the Art Historian and the Object* eds. Elizabeth Sears and Thelma K. Thomas [Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002], 1).

literal sense because medieval people were reading through image, text, and auditory experience, as we have just seen. On the other, I am also arguing that the experience even of text-dependent reading is a fundamentally multimedia one; it is no accident that a dominant experience of reading Julian of Norwich's text is to be captivated by the text's use of strange and familiar imagery, and such multimedia literacy is a fundamental part of the Charter's body/body of text elision. Readers' capacities for reading in multiple media give that text-body premise its emotional, devotional weight. As W.J.T. Mitchell writes, "all media are mixed media, combining different codes, discursive conventions, channels, sensory and cognitive modes."⁴⁰ Mitchell asserts this is the case even in a text-dependent rather than text-based society, "where there are *purely* visual and verbal media, pictures without words and words without pictures."⁴¹

From the standpoint of the visual or the verbal, the medium of *writing* deconstructs the possibility of a pure image or pure text, along with the opposition between the "literal" (letters) and the "figurative" (pictures) on which it depends. Writing, in its physical, graphic form, is an inseparable suturing of the visual and the verbal, the "imagetext" incarnate.⁴²

At a basic, orthographic level, writing is a mixed media. That mixed media are inherent to manuscript culture is widely established, and manuscript culture with its forthright combination of image, text, and stylized script on the manuscript page is posed within the imagetext framework.

In the context of late medieval devotional life, impacted by imagination-heavy methods of meditation and contemplation, imagetext's cognitive multimediality is especially useful.⁴³

⁴⁰ W.J.T. Mitchell, *Picture Theory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 95.

⁴¹ Ibid. Mitchell is drawing on "the equivocal status of writing as image/text" from Derrida's *Of Grammatology*, and he goes on to offer his own objective in using the term to foster "interartistic comparison," where image/text "offers the figure of the image/text as a wedge to pry open the heterogeneity of media and of specific representations" (100).

⁴² Ibid, 100.

⁴³ See Michelle Karnes's foundational study of the medieval imagination and gospel meditations, *Imagination, Meditation, and Cognition in the Middle Ages* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011).

Green identifies “literal” reading (the text-centered or text-adjacent), and “figurative” reading, for example “in which meditation takes the form of imagining Christ’s body at the Passion as a book to be read by the devout beholder, even if uneducated and unable to read in the literal sense.”⁴⁴ But textual illiteracy was not the only reason for visual reading, and alternate forms of literacy should not be organized along a spectrum from uneducated to educated. “The carefully fabricated aural-visual synaesthesia (often including the other senses too) common in medieval arts articulate and supports, among other things, a psychological need to make mnemonically rich images,” Mary Carruthers argues of medieval uses of mental pictures.⁴⁵

Michael Camille proposes instead of Mitchell’s “pictorial turn” a “sensorial turn,” where “before they were detached from one another in modernity, the senses functioned together on the manuscript page to produce meaning...Reading a text was a charged somatic experience in which every turn of the page was sensational.”⁴⁶ If *imagetext* is one word for the material page, then encountering that page occupies multiple senses on the reader’s part. Scholars have otherwise theorized the readerly consumption end of textual production generally on either an aural-textual or visual-textual spectrum. Kumler regards visual object and textual object both as texts to be read in his study of Mass tract in BnF fr. 13342, which “constructs the Eucharistic rite as a space for shared, sacralized vision and—through text and image—it proclaims the reality and efficacy of such seeing to its lay reader-viewer.”⁴⁷ Image and text are inseparable on the manuscript page.⁴⁸

⁴⁴ Green, *Women Readers*, 45.

⁴⁵ Mary Carruthers, *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture*, 2nd ed. (New York: Cambridge U.P., 2008), 291.

⁴⁶ “Sensations of the Page,” *The Iconic Page in Manuscript, Print, and Digital Culture*, eds. George Bornstein and Theresa Tinkle (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1998), 38.

⁴⁷ Aden Kumler, *Translating Truth: Ambitious Images and Religious Knowledge in Late Medieval France and England* (New Haven: Yale UP, 2011), 145.

⁴⁸ For example: Laura Saetveit Miles’s tracing of Annunciation iconography, “The Origins and Development of the Virgin Mary’s Book at the Annunciation,” *Speculum* 89.3 (July 2014): 632-669 and

In multimedia literacy, I bring together scholarship on the textual-oral and textual-visual continuums. This is both a more fitting depiction of premodern reading than those situated on two dimensional oral-textual or visual-textual axes, and it is a depiction of premodern reading that expands the reach of literary, textual culture beyond those who would have had contact with material texts. The Charter is thinking of these alternatives to direct contact when it imagines being read—a multimedia understanding of how readers engaged with literary and devotional texts, due to material limitations, educational and political constraints on readers' literacy, and social norms that valued the communal consumption of a text.⁴⁹ Since texts imagine being read by many and by few, imagined readers can be both synecdoche for those historical readers/absence of historical readers and a way to understand how texts perceive themselves/define themselves in relation to readers with or without historical evidence of reading. Multimedia literacy—practiced by both writers and readers—is a driving force behind the imagining of acts of reading.

Through multimedia literacy, texts engage a vast and variously literate imagined readership. My goals in this study are twofold. I aim to make space for less conventionally literate people in study of Middle English literature, because they were plainly thinking about texts and texts were plainly thinking about them. Moreover, I argue that texts in this popular genre were thinking of being read, and that imagining being read (poorly, well, hostilely, favorably, and across media) was a priority and an interest and a fundamental part of pedagogy across the spectrum.

Dorothy Kim, "Matthew Paris, Visual Exegesis, and Apocalyptic Birds in Royal MS. 14C VII," *Electronic British Library Journal* (2014).

⁴⁹ See Joyce Coleman's study of reading aloud in upper-class settings in England, France, and Scotland, where readers "were indisputably literate, and they were reading publicly, until at least late in the fifteenth century" (*Public Reading*, 179).

These chapters explore a variety of imagined readers and acts of imagined reading. In the first chapter, I use the *Parson's Tale's* inclusion in Longleat MS. 29, a compilation of devotional texts where the Parson appears alongside Walter Hilton and Richard Rolle, to construct a reading of this single Canterbury Tale as a lay-oriented penitential manual for benign and self-directed devout readers. Manuscript research shows how material conditions—what devotional or secular texts are included in the manuscript alongside the tale, how the compilation might have been used and by whom, etc.—reinforce or push against Chaucer's imagined readers.

In the second chapter, this project moves to Chaucer's close contemporary, Julian of Norwich, to examine her c. 1375 *Vision* and c. 1415 *Revelations*. Here, too, readers are imagined as allies and students rather than ideological or interpretive adversaries; however, their engagement with the text is envisioned as a dramatically multimedia—in particular visionary—experience, calling on readerly familiarity with sacred and secular images. In the shorter and more biographical early “draft” of what would eventually evolve into the more often studied *Revelations*, Julian introduces a universal audience alongside her developing theology of universal salvation. This chapter explores the text's image-based pedagogical strategies by putting Julian's famous literary imagery into conversation with site-specific research in Norwich (then the second-largest city in England) and its surroundings to analyze the relation between Julian's literary, pedagogical imagery and contemporaneous visual culture.

Nicholas Love's *The Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ* (ca. 1400) imagines a more complicated reception, situating its imagined readers in a cultural stew of divergent interpretations of Christ's life and acknowledging the inevitability—and also the danger—of differing readings. Inherent to these competing and coexisting lives of Christ is variety in form and mode of reception, as the *Mirror* explicitly makes space for when asking readers to read and

hear. Juxtaposing the *Mirror* and a unique lyric meditation on the life of Christ extant in British Library, MS Additional 11307, the third chapter uses close reading and manuscript study to investigate how tropes of reception in this genre work through lay demands for more spiritual autonomy within the scope of orthodoxy. I argue that both the *Mirror* and the *Meditations* construct lay readers as figures of authority independent of conventional church and literary hierarchies.

The fourth chapter moves later into the fifteenth century and further into the overlap between reading and hearing in *The Book of Margery Kempe*. It also moves further into questions of what it means to read well or poorly, amicably or hostilely. The *Book* is deeply invested in religious texts, including its own textuality, as it presents reading well as a crucial part of holy living. *The Book of Margery Kempe* is both a record of reading and an instructional text on how to read; as Margery reads religious texts and comes into her own spiritual authority, her body and behavior are read and misread by the communities around her. As Margery herself becomes text, she develops a kind of charitable reading, an orthodox practice that trusts the surface meaning of texts rather than seeking out heterodox and potentially subversive interpretations.

What happens to imagined readers and manuscript texts when remade with print technologies in a changed devotional and reading culture? In the final chapter, I return especially to Julian's Long Text and the *Charter* and lyric *Meditations* of British Museum Addit. MS 11307, the two manuscript traditions in this project with a historical reception outside of the late medieval period. The post-Reformation but pseudo-medieval construction of the manuscript Bibliothèque Nationale MS. Fonds Anglais 40 is loyal to its no-longer-extant source text even when the language and mode of production are archaic to its later makers and readers, who felt

themselves to be among Julian's imagined "evencristene." British Museum Addit. MS 11307 was rebound in a facing-page transliteration by antiquarian Joseph Haslewood (1769-1833), and was embroiled after his death in a viciously public dispute over the purpose, accessibility, and preservation of old works. Both manuscripts were remade in world the texts themselves could not have imagined. Both rely on by-hand manuscript work rather than print technology and engage with devotional and linguistic nostalgia as they preserve the texts' original Middle English: one as an act of recusancy, and the other as a Protestant but generally secular act of historical preservation. In the texts' drastically altered new realities, what remains of imagined readers? Quite a bit, I argue. As MS 11307 and Fonds Anglais 40 are remade for a post-Reformation and post-manuscript imagined readership, imagined readers traverse literacies, technology, geography, and an utterly changed religious landscape.

CHAPTER I

Penitence, Confession, and the Devotional Reader

When the Parson is at last called upon to speak at the end of *The Canterbury Tales*, he makes the now-well-known promise to “telle a myrie tale in prose” (ParsP 46). The penitential manual that follows flaunts Harry Bailey’s instructions to “hasteth,” first expounding into subdivided minutiae on confession and then walking through each of the seven deadly sins—as many have remarked, a tale neither myrie nor brief. But the Parson also promises that his contribution is suited (ironically or not) to a particular imagined readership:

For which I seye, if that yow list to heere
Moralitee and vertuouse mateere,
And thanne that ye wol yeve me audience,
I wol ful fayn, at Cristes reverence,
Do yow plesaunce leeful, as I kan. (36-41)

For the individual or individuals who compiled the *Parson’s Tale* into a single volume of religious prose and verse around 1420, this was evidently the sort of mateere desired. Longleat MS 29, originating with a merchant family in London, is singular in its presentation of the tale for how very literally it takes the Parson.⁵⁰ Collocated with material from Richard Rolle and Walter Hilton as well as a significant amount of anonymous prose and verse in English and

⁵⁰ For the most in-depth study of this codex, see its description in the EETS volume *Richard Rolle: Prose and Verse*, ed. S.J. Ogilvie-Thomson (Oxford: Oxford U.P., 1988) xvii-xxxi. Longleat is the basis for Ogilvie-Thomson’s EETS edition. See also Derrick Pitard, “Sowing Difficulty: *The Parson’s Tale*, Vernacular Commentary, and the Nature of Chaucerian Dissent” in *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 26 (2004): 299-330. Longleat also figures into Charles Owen’s argument against Chaucer’s authorship of the *Parson’s Tale* in “What the Manuscripts Tell Us About the *Parson’s Tale*,” *Medium Aevum* 63 (1994): 239-249.

Latin, this copy of the tale is doubly fascinating because compilers or scribes have seen fit to anonymize it. Someone has taken the Parson's objectives and cut out the middleman—or men. For readers of Longleat 29, neither Chaucer nor the Parson is present.

If Longleat is a unique case, its marginal paratext is less so. The Tale's mise-en-page situates it well within the manuscript tradition, as this chapter will later explore. Longleat attests to the fact that some historical readers, at least, gave the Parson exactly the sort of reading he imagines in the tale's prologue. This chapter will investigate what that reading looks like. Using close readings of how the tale interacts with and instructs imagined readers as well as how it constructs a narrative voice independent of its source material, I explore how the penitential manual shapes its imagined readers' reading experiences. I will also call on manuscript evidence to delve into the relation between imagined and real readers, where historical record complicates and complements the text's own sense of potential readership. Ultimately, the Parson's professed aims make for what is better fitted to a manual than a tale, an orthodox guidebook to repenting that imagines its readers have sinned mundanely or extraordinarily. The text equips readers for religious self-care, familiarizing them with sin and giving them tools and license to evaluate their own sins. In the *Parson's Tale*, readers are imagined doing pastoral work themselves or through the text rather than through their parish priests. The tale's now-undisputed orthodoxy imagines readers engaged in reflective, independent self-evaluation where neither the parish priest nor the Parson himself necessarily plays a crucial role.

One manuscript cannot be leaned on to recover wide trends in reading and interpretation, but the Longleat codex provides a test case for examining the relation between imagined and real readers. Reception studies and tropes of readers need not be forced to intersect. Before that, however, I look to the *Parson's Tale* in its *Canterbury Tales* context and alongside another

manual with a rather different imagined readership: John Mirk's *Instructions for Parish Priests*. In my examination of how both texts construct the penitential process and in particular the penitential benchmark of confession, I find that *The Parson's Tale* expects its readers to exhibit a significant measure of self-sufficiency before and after seeking out their parish priest. From there, I use the Parson's speaking voice to orient the tale in relation to its principle source texts and Mirk's *Instructions*. The Parson's combination of scholarly tools and plain speaking make the character into a priestly intermediary both within and outside of the tale. I close by bringing both the tale's sense of its imagined readers' penitential autonomy and that authoritative voice to its presentation in Longleat, where the tale—now an anonymous manual—resonates with other texts in the compilation to offer penance-minded readers a nearly full-service guide to devotional life, sin, and penance. The tale's rigorous inward-looking model of penitence is amplified when compiled alongside the other works in Longleat. With this manuscript, historical readers bear out one of the text's imagined readings, attesting that “manye been the weyes” constituting even and perhaps especially orthodox readings.

Longleat gives us an opportunity to see a group of imagined readers materially realized in the tale's early reception. In the 1988 EETS edition of Richard Rolle's writing that provides the most in-depth published study of the manuscript, S.J. Ogilvie-Thomson uses the fifteenth-century signature “Goldewell” on fol. 168r (the second-to-last page) and its arrival in the Thynne library at Longleat to hypothesize the manuscript's early owners.⁵¹ The Goldwell family were

⁵¹ On dating, Ogilvie-Thomson suggests a “probable *terminus a quo* of 1422...provided by the last item in the manuscript, the revelation described as occurring in ‘the yere of oure lord MCCCCXXII’. Internal evidence from the text of the exposition on the Lord's Prayer indicates that this limit may be reduced to 1429. The paleographic evidence suggests a *terminus ad quem* of not later than the middle of the century” (xxi). Signatures of John Thynne are written on both fol. 2r and fol. 166r, John Thynne (c. 1515-80) being the “first knight of the name and builder of Longleat House” (xx). A catalogue of the library's contents, then 85 books, lists the manuscript at 73 and 74: “ ‘A ladder to heauen in inglishe. An expositioun of the pater noster in lattin and inglishe. The forme of a confessioun in inglishe and ‘Tractatus’.’ The two entries are bracketed, and a marginal note in the same hand states ‘albounde together in written hande’. This is beyond dispute the volume now known as MS 29” (xx).

London mercers and daughter Elizabeth Goldwell married into the Pole family in the fifteenth century. The Pole family's established connections to the Thynnes via both friendship and marriage eventually may have led for the manuscript to pass into the Thynne family when Elizabeth Goldwell married Richard Pole, whose granddaughter was married to the steward of Longleat by 1567. Ogilvie-Thomson conjectures a course of events such that "in this way Goldwell property could have come into possession of the Pole family, and the present volume have been given to John Thynne as a friendly contribution to the great new library at Longleat."⁵² However the manuscript made its way from the Goldwell who signed 168r to the Thynne library at Longleat House where it remains today, its provenance shows that the manuscript circulated in the kinds of non-courtly lay circles for which Chaucer is known.⁵³ In these civil service- and merchant- related contexts, Longleat's straightforward reading of the *Parson's Tale* was evidently an available interpretive option.

In Derrick Pitard's words, "the texts in Longleat are flawlessly orthodox," a mixture of affective reading and of didacticism.⁵⁴ The *Parson's Tale* sprawls through the center of the generically eccentric compilation, the longest single text in a volume that features a significant amount of Richard Rolle's corpus. Longleat contains Rolle's *Form of Living*, *Ego Dormio*, *The Commandment*, *Desire and Delight*, *Ghostly Gladness*; Walter Hilton's *Mixed Life*; anonymous lyrics as well as lyrics by Rolle; one anonymous Form of Confession in English and another in

⁵² S.J. Ogilvie-Thomson, *ibid.*, xx-xxi.

⁵³ On Chaucer's early audiences, see Paul Strohm, "Chaucer's Fifteenth Century Audience and the Narrowing of the Chaucer Tradition," *SAC* 4 (1982): 3-32. See also Malcolm Richardson, "The Earliest Known Owners of 'Canterbury Tales' MSS and Chaucer's Secondary Audience" in *The Chaucer Review* 25.1 (1990): 17-32. Richardson uses two of the earliest-known *Canterbury Tales* manuscript owners to explore Chaucer's "'secondary' audience, his readers in the years immediately following his death in 1400 (17). He finds that "their social circle can scarcely be described as primarily literary or artistic...And while it is unwise to generalize from two examples, this audience plainly contained the elements, at least, of a more diverse, more permanent audience than Chaucer enjoyed in his lifetime. This segment of his secondary audience—men in the civil service—was literate, secular in its interests, urban, and, above all, perhaps, word-oriented" (18).

⁵⁴ Derrick Pitard, "Sowing Difficulty: *The Parson's Tale*, Vernacular Commentary, and the Nature of Chaucerian Dissent" in *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 26 (2004): 306.

Latin; and other texts in both languages. Though listed in two parts in the 1577 cataloging, the manuscript itself is written mostly by one hand.⁵⁵ And it is mostly in English: Pitard argues that the persistent vernacularity of this devotional manuscript shows “that orthodox lay readers who use the vernacular during this century have begun to believe that English can sustain the spiritual and intellectual complexity necessary for valid religious devotion independently from Latin.”⁵⁶ For Pitard, the *Parson’s Tale* in Longleat is “fundamentally an academic reference work, to be referred to for learning, though not used during the actual moment of confession.”⁵⁷ In my view, the manuscript functions in academic and affective readings, its miscellaneous inclusion of a variety of genres and styles allowing both devotional modes to resonate within the tale. Readers can become more learned on the subject but also apply the text to their own practices.

If the *Parson’s Tale*’s debatably out-of-character affiliation with Chaucer (disputed by some but not credibly) is troublesome, Longleat removes that possible dissonance by presenting the tale in complete anonymity.⁵⁸ Where Richard Rolle and Walter Hilton are named both in the table of contents and at the top margin of every recto page, the *Parson’s Tale* is simply a work on penitence by an unnamed vernacular author. It seems unusual that in the generation after Chaucer’s death a compiler or the maker of an exemplar would be inclined to divorce a text from his name, but as Longleat and a second fragment of the tale in Bodleian MS Latin misc. C.66 show, this anonymous manuscript presentation was extant and circulating; no attribution to Chaucer is made in the Longleat text, either by hand A or in marginalia, and its 18th century

⁵⁵ Ogilvie-Thomson identifies that primary hand as A, with two lyrics on fols. 143v-146v attributed to contemporary hand B and “three short items as space fillers, a macaronic poem on fol. 3r, the Latin Pentecostal hymn ‘Veni creator spiritus’ on fol. 16v, and seven Latin maxims attributed to St Bernard on fol. 57r” (xix).

⁵⁶ Pitard, “Sowing Difficulty,” 306.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 308.

⁵⁸ Discussion of the tale’s authorship is largely resolved, but for dissenting voices see Charles A. Owen, “Pre-1450 Manuscripts of *The Canterbury Tales*: Relationships and Significance,” *Chaucer Review* 23 (1988): 95-116. See also Manly and Rickert, *The Text of The Canterbury Tales: Studied on the Basis of all Known Manuscripts* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1940), 527.

rebinding names Rolle and Hilton on its spine alongside “A Treatise on Penance etc. XV Cent.”⁵⁹ At the time of its compilation and again in the 18th century, the manuscript’s owners or compilers prioritized authorship enough to name two of its well-known authors but not the third. Manly and Rickert identify Longleat as containing the *Parson’s Tale*, the Chaucer connection having been made in the nineteenth century.⁶⁰

This presents us with two possibilities, among others: one, that Chaucer’s authorship was known to the compiler and left off for reasons unknown, or two, that the *Parson’s Tale* was circulating in some fashion sufficiently separated from its *Canterbury Tales* origins that the compiler was unaware of its authorship. Regardless, the result is a compilation that presents the *Parson’s Tale* as exactly the manual the Parson professes it to be. In Longleat, the *Parson’s Tale* is read just as another vernacular religious text would have been. For the compiler or compilers of this manuscript, the tale could quite clearly be read for its surface meanings, apart from the deeper ironies of its inclusion in *The Canterbury Tales*.

Scholarship in recent decades has moved beyond questions of the tale’s genre and origins as a translation of several texts as well as beyond questions of Chaucer’s orthodoxy or Lollardy. The latter can be especially beguiling in the *Parson’s Tale*. As Karen Winstead writes, while Chaucer himself was hardly a Lollard, “the *character* of his orthodoxy, the extent of his sympathy with Wycliffite views, is far from settled. A figure crucial to understanding that orthodoxy is the elusive Parson—a pilgrim much admired by generations of critics, but one who, paradoxically, recounts one of Chaucer’s least-admired tales.”⁶¹ Derrick Pitard finds in the Parson’s vernacularity an orthodox text in then-controversial Middle English, the Parson

⁵⁹ Ogilvie-Thomson, introduction, xvii–xviii.

⁶⁰ Ibid., xxxi–xxxii.

⁶¹ Winstead, “Chaucer’s *Parson’s Tale* and the Contours of Orthodoxy,” *The Chaucer Review* 43.3 (2009): 239.

undertaking the kind of path-breaking that, as Pitard argues, nonetheless falls within the expansive bounds of orthodoxy.⁶² David Raybin also works within that expansive view, his study of collection-wide and Parson-specific imagery arguing similarly that “Chaucer goes far beyond simply implying the universality of human failing to revel in the beauties produced by the variety that defines the human” (78).⁶³ Raybin, Winstead, and Pitard arrive at a capacious understanding of orthodoxy as exhibited by the *Parson’s Tale* and later religious texts in English. I use this understanding of orthodoxy to study the tale in its devotional Longleat context.

Siegfried Wenzel has outlined “teleological” and “perspectivist” readings of the tales, where the *Parson’s Tale* is either a culmination or simply another tale in the anthology.⁶⁴ I loosely align myself with a perspectivist approach, particularly in light of research on medieval reading practices that suggests compilations, anthologies, books of hours, and other kinds of text were read in “piecemeal” fashion to suit an individual’s needs and preferences.⁶⁵ This does not mean that the tale’s placement at the end of the collection is without significance; it is at least somewhat fitting that a text revolving around pilgrimage end with a devotional installment—the

⁶² Pitard, “Sowing Difficulty.”

⁶³ David Raybin, “‘Manye been the weyes’: the Flower, its Roots, and the Ending of *The Canterbury Tales*” in *Closure in The Canterbury Tales* (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2000): 42.

⁶⁴ “In the attempt to relate *The Parson’s Tale* to the other tales and the pilgrimage framework and to reconcile its obvious differences in tone, style, and subject matter, the reader has, I think, two basic options: one is to read *The Parson’s Tale* as one among twenty-four tales in which Chaucer has a wide variety of characters tell tales that, to say the least, fit their narrators’ professions and personal characteristics, and may do so in an ironic vein; the other is to read *The Parson’s Tale* as in some fashion set apart. I will call the former view *perspectivist* and the latter *teleological*, that is, having an orientation toward a goal” (“*The Parson’s Tale* in Current Literary Studies” in *Closure in The Canterbury Tales: The Role of the Parson’s Tale* [Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2000]: 5-6).

⁶⁵ From Ryan Perry, in reference to Nicholas Love’s “pragmatic prediction of the piecemeal way in which his text would be used (‘take the partes therof)...[being] a reasonable appraisal of the functions of his text among even the most spiritually aspirational readerships” (“‘Some sprytuall matter of gostly edyfycacion’: Readers and Readings of Nicholas Love’s *Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ*” in *The Pseudo-Bonaventurean Lives of Christ*, ed. Ian R. Johnson and Allan F. Westphall [Turnhout: Brepols, 2013]: 122).

Tales' compilers placed it last deliberately—but the tale does not carry the teleological weight present-day readers might assign a final chapter.⁶⁶

A perspectivist outlook also eases some of the pressure on the Parson to present the kind of subversive or wry material other pilgrims have. Theresa Tinkle has shown that the Wife of Bath, whose prologue's exegesis is also regularly glossed in manuscript commentary, offers the collection one such boldly subversive perspective. Here is a laywoman freely and frequently making use of scripture when such translation as a layperson and a woman was at best controversial and at worst heretical. Tinkle argues that the manuscript tradition, somewhat surprisingly given the state of scriptural translation in the late fifteenth century, reinforces the Wife of Bath's knowledge "usually by copying into the margin some part of the original Latin, creating a *mise-en-page* that highlights her acts of vernacular translation."⁶⁷ So while the Host smells "a Lollere in the wynd" in response to the Parson, the most suspect pilgrim is the one whose tale immediately follows that exchange—Alison (*Man of Law's Epilogue* 1173). The Parson himself is instead one representative of the plurality of perspectives bound up in mainstream religious culture outside of out-and-out heresy. His brand of heterodox orthodoxy, characterized by a wide range of views and practices existing within orthodoxy, offers a model for penance that revolves around the lay penitent acting with a striking degree of spiritual self-sufficiency. When the Parson himself is absent from the tale, as he is in the Longleat manuscript, that self-sufficiency grows to something close to autonomy from the institutional church.

Without the Parson frame as intermediary, the devout individual evaluates and then changes the

⁶⁶ See David Lawton's argument that the tale's placement shows that either Chaucer or his fifteenth-century editors judged that the tale was a "suitable ending to the Canterbury pilgrimage" ("Chaucer's Two Ways: The Pilgrimage Frame of *The Canterbury Tales*" in *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 9 (1987): 12. See also Lee Patterson, "The 'Parson's Tale' and the Quitting of the 'Canterbury Tales,'" *Traditio* 34 (1978): 331-380.

⁶⁷ Theresa Tinkle, *Gender and Power in Medieval Exegesis* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 101.

behavior that led to sin and educates themselves on appropriate mixed spiritual living. But for the act of confession, penitential work can be done privately and without clerical guidance.

Imagined Sinners

The Parson begins by quoting Jeremiah and then paraphrasing the quote in order to segue into his chosen topic:

“Manye been the weyes espirituels that leden folk to oure Lord Jhesu Crist and to the regne of glorie./ Of whiche weyes ther is a ful noble wey and a ful convenable, which may nat fayle to man ne to womman that thurgh synne hath mysgoon fro the righte wey of Jerusalem celestial;/ and this wey is cleped Penitence, of which man sholde gladly herkennen and enquire with al his herte/ to wyten what is Penitence, and whennes it is cleped Penitence, and in how manye manneres been the acciouns or werkynges of Penitence,/ and how manye spesces ther been of Penitence, and whiche thynges apertenen and bihoven to Penitence, and whiche thynges destourben Penitence. (77-83)⁶⁸

In other words, this particular “weye” the Parson will be outlining in the divided and subdivided expounding to follow is for those who have sinned. And the speaker is not subtle about what course of action lies before said sinners, who should not just pursue but gladly (and exhaustively) pursue everything about penance. Thus begins the “myrie tale in prose”—not as the sort of tale we have come to expect based on its predecessors, although the *Parson’s Tale* is not alone in the collection in its prose format or in its less-than-swashbuckling subject matter, but as a manual (46). The manual’s imagined readers are also imagined sinners, and the Parson makes a heavy penitential workload available to them.

⁶⁸ All Parson’s Tale quotations from *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Larry D. Benson (Oxford: Oxford U.P., 1988). With the obvious exceptions of narrative frame, Memorandum, retraction, and some end material, the Longleat *Parson’s Tale* is a relatively faithful copy. In Manly and Rickert’s words, it is “intact” (see *The Text of The Canterbury Tales*, vol. 1 [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1940]: 343-8).

The manual presents itself as the answer to how to follow through with that work, the source that will provide all necessary penance-related instruction. A person should hark and inquire to learn what penance is and how to attain it, but the Parson makes no explicit suggestions as to where to look or who exactly to seek out for guidance. Harkening to the text supplies answers to those inquiries. Given that penance includes priest-led confession, this is a curious stance for a clergyman to take. In the Parson's descriptions of confession, the text outlines a fundamentally self-reflective process—in this particular case, one that takes place primarily within the soul (ostensibly with the aid of the Parson's Tale) and secondarily in conversation with parish clergy.

Penitence, with certeyne cicumstances, is verray repentance of a man that halt hymself in sorwe and oother peyne for his giltes./ And for he shal be verray penitent, he shal first bewaylen the synnes that he hath doon, and stidefastly purposen in his herte to have shrifte of mouthe, and to doon satisfaccioun,/ and nevere to doon thyng for which hym oghte moore to biwayle or to compleyne, and to continue in goode werkes, or elles his repentance may nat availle. (85-9)

In the text's view, sin eventually leads to emotional and psychological turmoil, necessitating penitence. Self-recognizing inner pain and its roots in sin, the sinner must then "stidefastly purposen in his herte" to be confessed and to never again do what led to sin in the first place. The sinner must do so while pursuing good works instead of their unspecified previous behavior, and they must continue in this vein indefinitely. Confession by priest is important here, but it is one part of a whole; "he shal first bewaylen," "stidefastly purposen," and "continue in good werkes" foreground the sinner as the agent who precipitates penitence. Even the sinner's purposing "to have shrifte of mouthe" emphasizes their capacity for putting sin and self-reflection into words, making no mention of the clerical party auditing and dispensing that shrift. The act of confession is less significant than the sinner's steadfastly desiring confession in their heart—a pressure to confess that comes from within rather than from external social or institutional conditions.

Meanwhile, the Parson turns his presence into a textual presence, speaking to imagined readers at a distance and orchestrating the illusion of his immediacy; the result is a text-based way to penance.

Another manual, unencumbered by frame narrative and with a bona fide clergyman writer, provides perspective on this model. In his early fifteenth-century *Instructions for Parish Priests* John Mirk outlines a confession protocol that relies on not just the priest's presence but his engagement with the confessor. The priest prompts the confessor's disclosure of sins through a series of questions that establish the confessor's doctrinal proficiency before homing in on one or more of the deadly sins:

Be-leuest thou schalt I-hoseled be?
Leuest also in fulle a-tent,
How that holy sacrament,
Is I-yeue to mon kynne
In remyssyone of here synne;
Be-leuest also, now telle me,
That he that lyueth in charyte
Schale come to blysse sycurly,
And dwelle in seyntes cumpany? (837-848)

Here, the penitent is prompted first to affirm their belief that they will be shriven, affirming also their adherence to church structures and confessional practices. They are prompted to then affirm their belief in confession as a sacrament.⁶⁹ Following this, the penitent and priest advance to the next level: identifying and learning about sins, followed by penance. The priest ostensibly imagined to be reading Mirk's manual is the active party, and the lay person (for whom the manual is not imagined as a direct audience) is a passive participant in the interrogation and is subsequently directed toward the appropriate forms of penance.

⁶⁹ Here, as with the Parson's Tale, emphasis on oral confession is in opposition to Lollard and Wycliffite views on the subject, which prioritized the individual's confession to God over confession to a fallible church representative (Anne Hudson, *The Premature Reformation: Wycliffite Texts and Lollard History* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988]: 294-9).

The Fourth Lateran Council in 1215 formally routed laypeople seeking penance through their parish priests by mandating annual confession, starting a growth industry of confessional texts in England. Writing of the opportunity for further religious education bishops and archbishops saw in this decree, Rita Copeland separates the manual genre in two: one side for confessors and one side for lay penitents. She cites Bishop William of Blois “call[ing] for priests to catechize the lay penitent both before and after confession, with a careful distribution of the subject matter: before the confession the priest should teach the Articles of Faith as contained in the Apostles’ Creed, and afterwards, he should instruct the penitent in the Seven Deadly Sins and their species, ‘ut facilius revocet ad memoriam in qua specie peccaverit’ [so that he may easily call to memory the specific type of sin he committed].”⁷⁰

In his conclusion to *Sin and Confession on the Eve of the Reformation*, Thomas Tentler writes of confession as providing “a comprehensive and organized system of social control” in which priests enjoyed a special “dominance.”⁷¹ “The confessor’s expertise bolstered this superior status, for he was provided with a huge store of technical information that helped him to master the situation...they advised a confessor to refer to learned books and wiser authorities if he found he did not have the requisite knowledge (although in this instance it is the priest, not the penitent, who normally had access to this special knowledge).”⁷² The spread of manuals such as Copeland describes, and such as the *Parson’s Tale* purports to be, complicates the confessor-parishioner hierarchy by dispersing that special knowledge. Readers or hearers of a manual could come to possess some of that knowledge independently, with a priest’s aid, or in a group. Moreover, by the late fourteenth century the church’s ability to be that penitential intermediary had repeatedly

⁷⁰ With Marjorie Curry Woods, “Classroom and Confession” in *The Cambridge History of Medieval English Literature*, ed. David Wallace (New York: Cambridge U.P., 1999): 390.

⁷¹ Princeton: Princeton U.P., 1977, 345.

⁷² Tentler, *Sin and Confession*, 345-6.

been called into question.⁷³ The power dynamics of the confessional scene placed authority in the hands of the priest at a time when individuals were weighing the value of their confession to corrupt and sinning officials.

The *Instructions* directs the religious experience of identifying and remedying one's sin through priests as doctrinally correct intermediaries, where the Parson's introduction to penance follows Jeremiah in emphasizing the multitude of ways a person might take to salvation. Penitence, of which confession is unmistakably a part, is figured as just one of those ways. Like a set of nesting dolls, the Parson depicts penitence as containing "manye spesces" within itself (82). These ways include the orthodoxically correct confession to a priest, but the *Parson's Tale* envisions the scene differently from Mirk's *Instructions*. The readers imagined here are the sinners themselves, reading the *Parson's Tale* for religious guidance:

First shaltow understonde that Confessioun is verray shewynge of synnes to the preest./ This is to seyne "verray," for he most confessen hym of alle the condicions that bilongen to his synne, as ferforth he kan. Al moot be seyde, and no thyng excused ne hyd ne forwrapped, and nocht avaunt thee of thy goode werkes. And forther over, it is necessarie to understonde whennes that synnes spryngen, and how they encreesen, and which they been. (316-20)

Taken more or less directly from Raymond of Peñafort's source text, the tale's first framing of confession speaks to readers as potential sinners.⁷⁴ The priest is an essential part of the devotional act as a listening but apparently passive party, but the instructions center on how

⁷³ As Hudson writes, skepticism of priest-led confession was an especially Wyclif-derived tenet: "Though Christ committed to Peter two keys, taken by Wyclif in common with most medieval commentators as the keys of knowledge and power, his use of the second must be dependent upon the accord of the first with the knowledge of God. Hence a priest's role was purely declarative at best; at worst, when the priest's decision was at odds with the knowledge of God, it was of no force and was a misleading and blasphemous arrogation of divine power. This last argument was repeated over and over again by Lollard texts and Lollard suspects alike" (*The Premature Reformation*, 294).

⁷⁴ See Kate Oelzner Petersen's comprehensive side-by-side text of the Parson's Tale and its two primary sources, Raymond of Peñafort's *Summa de Casibus Poenitentiae* (1226) and Guilielmus Peraldus's *Summa seu Tractatus de viciis* (c. before 1261) (*The Sources of the Parson's Tale* [Boston: Ginn & Company, 1901]: 16). Oelzner Petersen and Liddell seem to be at the forefront of identifying these two sources, as previous studies name the 13th century *Somme des Vices et des Virtus* by dominican friar Laurent d'Orléans (Oelzner Petersen 1).

readers must properly confess their sins. This responsibility of the sinner is stated, restated, and stated again. Moreover, to paraphrase the translation, behind the straightforward speech required of the confessor must lie a deeper comprehension of the origins and types of sin.

In the Parson's reckoning, readers bring this comprehension with them into confession. *Instructions for Parish Priests* does not assume such background knowledge, as the questions Mirk scripts out take priest and confessor through a checklist of possible sins. Pilcrowes mark out individual lines of questioning: "Hast thou honowred by thy wyt/ Father and moder, as god the byt?" (903-4); "Hast thou stolen any thyng,/ Or ben at any robberyng;/ Hast thou, by maystry or by craft,/ Any mon hys good be-raft?" (937-40); and so on. The Parson's expectation that readers who have made it as far as the confessional can already identify and assess their sins offers a convenient opening for the exploration of the seven deadly sins that follows. Where Mirk's confessional scene is a fundamentally pastoral one—the sinner is prompted, educated, even nurtured—the Parson's Tale imagines readers doing that pastoral work themselves and then seeking out confession as a formal benchmark.

Almost one thousand lines after the Parson begins speaking, he returns to confession. Once more, the Parson emphasizes honesty and accuracy, and adherence to orthodox doctrine is introduced. Confession is not just necessary to penitence, it is "laweful" to receive it once a year:

Thow shalt nat eek peynte thy confessioun by faire subtile wordes, to covere the moore thy synne; for thanne bigilestow thyself, and nat the preest. Thow most tellen it platly, be it nevere so foul ne so horrible./ Thow shalt eek shryve thee to a preest that is discreet to conseille thee...Thow shalt nat eek renne to the preest sodeynly to tellen hym lightly thy synne, as whoso telleth a jap or a tale, but avysely and with greet devocioun./ And generally, shryve thee ofte...And certes, oones a yeere atte leeste wey it is laweful for to been housled, for certes, oones a yeere alle thynges renovellen. (1021-27)

The Parson and Mirk share a sense of confession's sacramental power, Mirk by recalling its origins and tacitly demanding acknowledgment of that power and the Parson by chastising lay

penitents to behave with some decorum. Mirk's solemn imagining of the scene contrasts somewhat with the Parson's, which instructs against mincing words while also condemning those who do not treat the occasion with sufficient respect. The image called up here lightens the admonishment's tone. That readers are not to run to their priest at any time of their choosing but are to confess only within the structures of that sacrament calls to mind an eager Margery Kempe; it also sets the act of religious confession apart from any more informal encounters with the priest.

The Parson's equation for confession (honest speech, understanding of sin, and respecting and participating in the sacrament eventually equal penitence) takes into account both enthusiastic and lukewarm readers, each one a potential confessor and penitent. The promise of annual renewal through confession is the outcome of properly observing confessional decorum and of putting oneself through the real possibility of discomfort in baring one's sins. The readers imagined by this and the earlier confession-oriented passage are assumed to have some sin to disclose to their priests and have just finished the Parson's lengthy exploration of what those sins might be. Between the reminder that annual confession is obligatory and the continued urging to tell the truth as clearly as possible, the Parson implies that not all readers might feel a strong drive to confess those sins.

The tale's interest in plain speaking makes it a case of an orthodox text using methods we might in recent decades call heterodox or Lollard. Ann Hudson, Peggy Knapp, and Steven Justice have all remarked on Lollard resistance to fables and tale-telling in general, a resistance the Parson shares first in the tale's prologue and then in the tale itself, which contains "no

interpolated story that might qualify as a fable.”⁷⁵ In his description of a Lollard writing style, Justice writes that “the rejection of images and ornament is not, as it would be in later centuries, a mark of radical dissent...less a violent condemnation of ornament than a bourgeois desire to promote an ethic of action and work over the mimicry of aristocratic leisure.”⁷⁶ In this, too, the Parson’s prose—functional, imperfect, and nonmetaphorical—shares characteristics with Lollard writings. To Lollards and the Lollard-adjacent, “the central theme of the Lollard classroom was the notion that the literal sense as a pedagogical tool can be reclaimed as an instrument of hermeneutical control.”⁷⁷ As Justice argues and as the *Parson’s Tale* shows, a plain and literal style of writing spanned a range of devotional allegiances. The Parson applies that style not just to the penitential manual but to the act of confession.

Mirk relates the matter of unadorned confession as potentially a gendered one, as his detailed instructions on confessing women show. Mirk provides special instructions for encouraging the confessions of reluctant women, reminiscent of the Parson’s exhortation to confess accurately until they instruct the priest to reassure via a kind of confessional *quid pro quo*:

And when heo stynteth & seyth no more,
Yef thou syst heo nedeth lore,
Thenne spek to hyre on thys wyse,
And sey, ‘take the gode a-vyse,
And what maner thyng thou art guilty of,
Telle me boldly & make no scof.
Telle me thy synne, I the praye,
And spare thow not by no waye;
Wonde thow not for no schame,
Parauentur I haue done the same,

⁷⁵ Peggy Knapp, “The Words of the Parson’s ‘Vertuous Sentence’” in *Closure in The Canterbury Tales*, 99. See also Anne Hudson, ed. *Selections from English Wycliffite Writings* (New York: Cambridge U.P., 1978), especially “The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy” (75-82).

⁷⁶ Steven Justice, “Lollardy” in *The Cambridge History of Medieval English Literature*, ed. David Wallace (New York: Cambridge U.P., 1999): 679-80.

⁷⁷ Rita Copeland, *Pedagogy, Intellectuals, and Dissent in the Later Middle Ages: Lollardy and Ideas of Learning* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 139-40.

And fulhelt myche more,
Yef thow knew alle my sore,
Wherfore, sone, spare thow nocht,
But telle me what ys in thy thought” (785-98).

Where confession is imagined from a priestly perspective, however, the necessity for plain speaking is reciprocal. To the Parson, sinners speak plainly so as to not deceive the priest or themselves; to Mirk, priests naturally perceive unclear confession and push parishioners to plain speech by modeling it for them. The strategy outlined here, together with the confessor’s persistent lines of questioning, force clarity from the sinner. The text trusts that the confessor knows when the parishioner is withholding information.

The *Parson’s Tale* is unflinchingly directive to hesitant readers of unspecified gender, phrasing confessional practices in the imperative “thow most” and “thow shalt,” as in “thow most tellen it platly, be it nevere so foul ne so horrible./ Thow shalt eek shryve thee to a preest that is discreet to conseille thee...Thow shalt nat eek renne to the preest sodeynly to tellen hym lightly thy synne, as whoso telleth a jap or a tale, but avysely and with greet devocioun” (1022-24). The “thow” imagined here is capable of complex reactions, from shame and deceit to impulse to confess outside of the sacrament from too much zeal or from shallow misunderstanding of the sacred confessional space. It is assumed that the reader will attempt to obscure the severity of their sins when speaking them aloud—but the Parson’s caution against this makes it a matter of self-reflection rather than deceiving the priest. With the sinner at the center of confession, the problem is less that the priest is deceived and rather that the sinner is in denial and unable to fully carry out the penitence the *Parson’s Tale* prescribes. When the sinner is charged with evaluating their sins and correcting their behavior, confessing the sin without obscuring it from the priest requires facing it themselves.

Translation, Invention, and the Parson

As early scholars of the tale have noted, the *Parson's Tale* owes much of its existence to the translation of Peñafort and Peraldus. Many have noted that the translation—as well as the prose style more generally—is sometimes a shaky one of “faulty or incorrect transitions” and “blatant errors,” but as Patterson writes, “on the whole these errors are local matters of style and organization. The larger structural and thematic coherences of the work remain untouched by them, and while there is nothing particularly daring or *au courant* in the theology, neither are there any blunders.”⁷⁸ Independent of translation and prose mistakes, the story contest's frame is all new. The frame necessitates a speaker, an on-page personality taking part in the competition and pilgrimage and narrating the tale. While the translation takes many liberties with the source material, the Parson himself must be largest. It is certainly an insistent one, the Parson's first person interjections a beat reminding readers that the tale's narrator is a character in his own right. When the tale speaks to readers as “thow,” it does so with an identifiable speaking voice.

The Parson's frequent references to his pilgrim audience within the frame and to imagined readers outside of it are accompanied by his own presence in the text, but that speaking voice is short on autobiographical detail. In a passage paraphrasing Jonah, tonally reminiscent of John Mirk's advice on confessing reluctant women, an exception is made at the point of contrition: “And forther over, contricioun shold be wonder sorweful and angwissous; and therefore yeveth hym God pleylnly his mercy; and therefore, whan my soule was angwissous

⁷⁸ In the *Riverside Chaucer*, Benson writes of “faulty or incorrect transitions and blatant errors....Often only comparison with the suggested sources will clarify Chaucer's meaning, and its compositional flaws may be due to hasty work or a faulty source text or Chaucer's extracting material from a much longer work of complex structure”, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1987), 956. Lee Patterson, “The ‘Parson's Tale’ and the Quitting of the ‘Canterbury Tales,’” *Traditio* 3 (1978), 353.

withinne me, I hadde remembrance of God that my preyere myghte come to hym” (304).⁷⁹

Though readers see him through other eyes in the *General Prologue* and links between tales, this marks one of few such autobiographical instances in the tale itself. Where Mirk encourages priests to match a woman’s sins (“Parauentur I haue done the same,/ And fulhelt myche more”), the Parson here focuses not on the sin itself but on its emotional and psychological aftermath. The drive for penitence comes from the emotional turmoil within.

The Parson’s involvement elsewhere in the manual functions at times as a navigational device, introducing a new sin or referencing a previous point. Interjections like “I seye” and “I speke” point to the tale’s orality while foregrounding the Parson as speaker:

Now shal a man understonde in whih manere shal been his contricioun. I seye that it shal been universal and total. This is to seyn, a man shal be verray repentaunt for alle his synnes that he hath doon in delit of his thoght, for delit is ful perilous.
(292)

The Parson intervenes to clarify while also directing attention to his speaking voice, a move that functions in both speech and writing and sets him up as a priestly dispenser of knowledge. The Parson can be that source while also managing some essential signposting:

After Pride wol I speken of the foule synne of Envye, which that is, as be the word of the Philosophre, “sorwe of oother mannes prosperitee”; and after the word of Seint Augustyn, it is “Sorwe of oother mennes harm.” (484)

The narration underscores important points while delivering a clear speaking voice, a source with whom readers can engage and on whom they can depend. It also sets the tale apart from others in the collection: save for the Wife of Bath’s prologue, the *Parson’s Tale* features its narrator to a degree not seen anywhere else. The Parson becomes that devotional guiding voice, as Nicholas Love or Richard Rolle become in their own work.

⁷⁹ From Douay-Rheims, Jonah inside the whale’s belly: “When my soul was in distress within me, I remembered the Lord: that my prayer may come to thee, unto thy holy temple” (Jonah 2:7).

Neither of the two main source texts contain such narration, and the explicit inclusion of a speaker's voice seems unusual in a Latin context but less so relative to Mirk's *Instructions*. Here, the voice is most often implicit: direct addresses imply a source, compounded by the less frequent first person singular. Like the Parson, the speaker of the *Instructions* flags transitions, important points, and other structurally significant areas, but not always by drawing attention to that "I". When used, the voice calls attention to the teacherly purpose of the text, often in demonstration or instruction: "Here ben the artykeles of the fey;/ Preche hem ofte I the prey," "As lo here I do the schowe" (524-5, 561). The "schowe" here is in the demonstrative, rather than visual, sense, as Mirk goes on to script out a baptism. Where Nicholas Love speaks of readers hearing his text and where the Parson emphasizes his own speech, the *Instructions* do not. Mirk's voice is a reminder of textual form and his chosen written medium. The Parson's voice does not limit itself to the page, existing in both text and imagined hearing.

At some points, however, the "I" transfers from Mirk/the speaker to the priest imagined to be reading the text, as when Mirk provides a script. His earlier instructions on the confession of women make the difference between the speaker-voice and the priest-voice clear, but elsewhere that distinction blurs:

I crystene the, or elles I folowe the, .N. In nome of the
fader and the sone, and the holy gost. Amen.
And thagh thou yeue no name to hem,
Ny nempne hem no maner name,
I telle hyt for for no blame,
Hyt may be don al by thocht
Whenne hyt ys to chyrche I-brought,
And thay me say, as they done use,
Sory latin in here wyse, As thus,
I folowe the in nomina patria & filia spiritus sanctia.
AmeN. (562-72)

The opening and closing prayers to this passage make space for a shared sense of “I”—that is, this script to be read silently or aloud speaks for both writer and reader. This perspective splits in lines 564-70, as Mirk digresses from the script to address the imagined priests as “thou.” Here, the audience and the speaker are once more separated as their student-teacher roles are reasserted. Mirk’s admonishment on “sory latin” further divides the two parties before his modeling of proper Latin brings them back together in another phrase the reader can read from their own perspective. Mirk’s voice has readers alternately put in their place and participating alongside him, but in both cases the readers are very much instructed.

While by nature it lacks the multiple characters that populate the other pilgrims’ tales, the *Parson’s Tale* surrounds the Parson instead with the narrative voices of traditional auctorities. The Parson’s disclosure of previous anguish is sandwiched between Augustine: “And heerof seith Seithn Augustyn,/ ‘I wot certeynly that God is enemy to everich synnere’” (301-2); and David:

For soothly, whil contricioun lasteth, man may ever have hope of foryifness; and of this comth hate of synne, that destroyeth synne, bothe in himself and eek i oother folk at his power./ For which seith David: “Ye that loven God, hateth wikkednesse.” For trusteth wel, to love God is for to love that he loveth, and hate that he hateth. (306-7)

The Parson is one voice among many. The constant, diligent citations of respected sources might diminish the contribution of his own voice, but instead the adjacency elevates it. The Parson shows his scholarly credibility (contrary to his earlier protestation, “I am nat textueel”) and puts himself alongside the speaking voices he recounts so liberally (Prologue 57). The Parson is not one of the church fathers he cites, but nonetheless his authority is evident in part because he situates himself so thoroughly within those established sources. He becomes in turn a learned source.

Unlike Mirk, the Parson does not share his voice with an imagined readership. The Parson remains a singular, separate voice for the duration of the tale, neither reader nor traditional auctorite. In this sense, he occupies the role of a parson or parish priest both inside and outside of confession, modeling an orthodox relationship between priest and reader-parishioner. At the same time, the tale provides everything needed for penitence short of actual confession; the interiority-heavy process of self-examination he outlines might end in confession to a priest, but the self-knowledge the process brings about is its culmination rather than the visit to the confessional. If the Parson is a priest stand-in, the tale's way to penitence still goes through the doctrinally mandatory steps while developing a more independent devotional practice.

In some branches of the manuscript tradition, auctorites are underlined, the relevant name in question—Solomon, Job, Augustine, David, and many others—reiterated in the margin alongside the citation. The Parson receives no such special treatment, and the scholarly navigational apparatus this strategy creates sets him apart as a learned source rather than (perhaps understandably) a church father. This practice is repeated in Ellesmere, Egerton 2863, Harley 1758, and Longleat, among others (and also Hengwrt, but much more sparingly). It is not found in Cambridge Library Pepys 2006, the other full copy of the *Parson's Tale* extant without *The Canterbury Tales* frame (though here the *Parson's Tale* is presented with its prologue, title, and authorship and appears alongside the *Tale of Melibee*). The glossing is simple and is not all-inclusive; not every name mentioned in the body is singled out in the margins, or a name might be singled out on some occasions but not others. On one hand, the glossing operates as a marginal skeleton of a navigational device, divvying up the tale into an anthology of auctorite

and allowing readers to search by source. In terms of a scholarly apparatus, it is a light version that also marks each sin and the tale's three separate sections with headings.⁸⁰

On the other hand, the marginal system is a proof of the Parson's learnedness and an argument for his spiritual authority. As Theresa Tinkle has shown in her study of manuscript glossing and the *Wife of Bath's Prologue*, such paratextual choices in the *Tales* can and do add to Chaucer's or the speaker's credibility. Scribes evidently were not as suspicious of the text's authority as modern readers are, and that the glossing persists among both the recognized and fully anonymous versions of the tale suggests that the authority with which scribes endow the speaker these through glosses depends less on Chaucer himself than on the text and its speaker—whether or not that speaker is named as the Parson. The potential for readers to find that moralitee and vertuous mateere rests instead on the penitential manual itself.

In other words, the Parson seeks the best of both worlds: to present himself as a scholarly, well-informed authority, and to speak plainly to the pilgrims as one not so different from them. His frequent citations are a part of his assurance that “I take but the sentence,” exhibiting the kind of non-metaphorical reading and narration that makes its placement among the other tales challenging to present day readers. They also make him into an authoritative textual voice in lieu of, for example, face-to-face discussion of penitence with a parish priest. The tale stops short of the performing confession, but as a penitential manual it offers its imagined readers a penitential “weye” that depends most on their engagement with the text and with themselves.

⁸⁰ In M.B. Parkes's words, a fuller scholarly apparatus would include an “analytical table of contents, text disposed into books, chapters, and paragraphs, accompanied by footnotes and index” (“The Influence of the Concepts of Ordinatio and Compilatio on the Development of the Book” in *Medieval Learning and Literature: Essays Presented to Richard William Hunt*, edited by Alexander, J J G, Gibson, M T, Southern, R W [Oxford: Clarendon, 1976], 135).

Reading the Anonymous Text

So far we have seen that as a figure of doctrinal correctness and church hierarchy, the Parson routes key stages of penitential work through readers rather than parish resources. To an extent, and within the bounds of the Fourth Lateran Council, the Parson stands in for a parish priest in his dispensation of instructions and his prompting to self-reflect. We have also begun to see that the manuscript tradition can support a devotional reading of the tale. How does this bear out when, as in Longleat MS 29, the *Parson's Tale* goes without its frame and without the Parson himself?

Where the Parson concerns himself not with the possibility of misreading the text but of misspeaking during confession, the prospect of readers' capacity for improper confession grows starker in the Parson's absence. The Parson betrays no explicit anxiety over incorrect or unorthodox interpretations of his tale, a fact that is mitigated in part by the frame: the information and instruction the tale provides is given by the Parson character, directly ensuring that the pilgrims are advised by a member of the church and indirectly providing the same service to readers (albeit under the condition that the Parson is as fictitious as each of the other tale-tellers). Without the Parson, the tale's narrator assumes the kind of authority shared by a diverse array of other anonymous, vernacular religious texts. The process of education and self-knowledge the manual outlines functions independently of a church-affiliated source, and its sparing references to formal confession remain as its strongest ties to the institution.

Other anonymous texts beyond the *Parson's Tale* are less sanguine on the prospect of readerly agency and its interpretive hazards. The author of the late fourteenth-century *The Cloud of Unknowing* prefaces the text with a request that conveys how extensively the act of reading has been thought out:

And, over this, I charge thee and I beseche thee, by the autorité of charité, that yif any soche schale rede it, write it, or speke it, or eles here it be red or spokin, that thou charge hem, as I do thee, for to take hem tyme to rede it, speke it, write it, or here it, al over. For paraventure, ther is som mater therin, in the beginnyng or in the middel, the whiche is hanging and not fully declared ther it stondest; and yif it be not there, it is sone after, or elles in the ende. Wherefore, yif a man saw o mater and not another, paraventure he might lightly be led into errour. And therefore, in eschewing of this errour bothe in thiself and in alle other, I preye thee par charité do as I sey thee. (20-27)⁸¹

The *Cloud* author covers every base in a culture of literacy that was not defined exclusively by text.⁸² People encountering the text might read it on a page, write it out perhaps as some kind of devotional work, or hear it read aloud. The text can be misread in every medium, and here the *Cloud* author imagines those readers doing just that. The enjoinder to read the text from start to finish makes a clear a default and correct order of reading, that readers start at the beginning and work their way through (although sometimes not all the way through). This, too, is important to specify when laying out a proper imagined reading; as Ryan Perry and others have noted, with the prominence of books of hours as well as scholarly paratextual apparati to ease navigation in a variety of texts, “piecemeal” reading was not uncommon.⁸³ A reader might start at the beginning and proceed until the end, but a reader could also take a more customized approach. Anthologies and compilations such as *Longleat* might invite piecemeal readings to a greater degree than a volume containing a single work or works by a single author.

⁸¹ From *The Cloud of Unknowing*, ed. Patrick J. Gallacher (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications), 1999.

⁸² The ways in which late medieval people encountered texts and narratives were materially and culturally diverse. Brian Stock takes a long view of transition between oral and written traditions in England in *Implications of Literacy* and elsewhere; in the early medieval period, he cites a kind of “interdependence” between oral and written where “oral discourse effectively began to function within a universe of communications governed by texts. On many occasions actual texts were not present, but people often thought or behaved as if they were” (*Implications of Literacy* [Princeton: Princeton U.P., 1983], 3). Cheryl Glenn makes the useful distinction, complementary to Stock’s “interdependence”, that fifteenth century literacy in England was yet “text-based” rather than “text-dependent” (“Medieval Literacy outside the Academy: Popular Practice and Individual Technique,” in *College Composition and Communication* 44.4 [December 1993], 498).

⁸³ Ryan Perry, “‘Some sprytuall matter of gostly edyfycacion’: Readers and Readings of Nicholas Love’s *Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ*,” 122.

The preface outlines a correct way to read the text that follows as well as a wrong way by which an imagined reader “might lightly be led into error.” A complete reading, from beginning to end, is envisioned as the way to prevent incomplete, and potentially erroneous, readings. From here, however, the possibility of error fades from view and the devotional text unfolds. *The Cloud of Unknowing* starts with its stern request, but goes on to provide readers with a rigorous philosophical and contemplative program that puts the individual’s experience and practice at the forefront of their religious life. These instructions are enough, and the text’s imagined readers can be trusted with the rest if they practice appropriate reading methods that expose them to the text in its entirety. With access to the whole text, the message here is that readers will not go interpretively astray.

Longleat’s unattributed penitential manual, the *Parson’s Tale*, makes no such disclaimers. Without the Parson, the narrator operates as a vaguer, faceless intermediary or instructional figure, lacking church affiliation. Separated from its original compilation, the manual now comes from the same anonymous, devotional, vernacular place as *The Cloud of Unknowing*. Both texts furnish readers with advanced material, and the tale’s apparent inattention to readerly misinterpretation and error becomes only more noteworthy in the situational anonymity of the Longleat *Parson’s Tale*. Readers of the manual in that manuscript are now without even a fictional representative of doctrinal correctness.

The manuscript’s combination of at-times challenging devotional material with an interest in proper mixed-life living imagines ambitious readers motivated to take a firm hand in their own religious direction. A Goldwell, a Pole, or a Thynne reading can find the penitential manual’s lessons in sin compounded by Rolle’s *The Form of Living*, contextualized in the incipit as “Tractatus Ricardi heremite ad Margaretam de Kyrkby, reclusam, de Vita Contemplatiua.”

Aimed explicitly toward Margaret Kirkby and other religious recluses, the *Form* explores in part the ways in which contemplatives fall prey to sin just as laypeople do. Neither the compiler of Longleat nor others of Rolle's writings to Kirkby were deterred by the address to a recluse, suggesting that the texts' original context did not limit other readers who felt they, too, could benefit from it.⁸⁴ Rolle's extensive lists of "synnes of oure herte," "the mouth," "synnes in deede," and "of omysсион" are not singled out and explored sin-by-sin as the Parson's manual does with the seven deadly sins, but the impressive accumulation those lists offer conveys a daunting number of dangers from which recluses are not exempt (329, 349, 364, 381). Each type of sin is subdivided into individual sins almost ad nauseum, as for example "synnes in deede:" "glotony, lechurie, dronkenes, symony, wichecraft, brekyng of haly daies, sacrilege, receyue God in dedly syn, brekyng of voues, apostasie..." and so on (364-6). The exhaustiveness of these passages works in concert with the manual's slower, broader approach; one elucidates many species of sin while the other prepares readers to identify their genus. Both texts offer methods for identifying sin.

For Rolle, the primary means for addressing one's sin lie in remedying the behavior that leads to sin and cultivating a deeper love for God. Here, too, confession stands in the background. The individual's private devotional work is once more at the forefront, though where the manual seeks penitence through self-knowledge the *Form* does so especially through affect and behavioral adjustment:

The thynges that clenseth us of that filthede ben thre, ayeyns they thre manere of synnes. The first is sorowe of hert ayeyns the synnes of thought; and that behoueth to be perfite, that thou wolt neuer syn moor, and that thou haue sorow of al thi synnes, and that al ioy and solace bot of God and in God be put out of thy herte.

⁸⁴ Nicholas Watson describes a wide audience, as befits Rolle's apparent status as "the most widely read English author of the late Middle Ages" (*Richard Rolle and the Invention of Authority* [New York: Cambridge U.P., 1992], 260). In this context, the address to Kirkby could be read as part of the work's authority; Watson traces Rolle's influence in part through the direct responses it elicited from authors in the century after his death (260-4).

The tother is shrift of mouth agayn the syn of mouth; and that shal be hasted withouten delayynge, naked withouten excusynge, and entier without departynge, as for to tel a syn to oon prest and another to another; sey al that thou wost to oon, or al is nat worth. (399-407)

As in the *Parson's Tale*, confession is to be made as plainly and honestly as possible. As the *Cloud* author warns against the dangers of incomplete reading, Rolle warns of incomplete or fragmented confession. In this light, the tale's concern with plain speech and proper confession take on renewed significance as the primary tools by which readers are bound back into the folds of the institutional church.

Those affective processes are amplified in Longleat's other Rolle selections. *The Commandment, Ego Dormio, Desire and Delight, Ghostly Gladness*, and the lyrics focus on the individual's emotional connection to and reverence of God and Christ. The manual reiterates overcoming sin from a private devotional angle that works with behavioral adjustment while teaching imagined readers in greater detail about sin. Rolle and the more scholarly *Parson's Tale* are both inward-looking, but the *Tale* takes a more thought- and analysis- heavy approach that both Rolle and the *Cloud* author skip over in favor of affective models.

The *Parson's Tale* is not the only explicitly confession-related text, however; the vernacular *Form of Confession* scripts out the act in a first person voice: "I knowleche and yeld me gilty to god almyghty and to holy chyrch and to the gostly fader under god...I cri god mercy and ask penaunce and absolucioun of god and of holy chirch and pray the fadyr under god to pray to god of myght for me" (no line numbers given). Also found in Laud misc. 210, Ashmole 1286, and Harley 4172, the *Form* in Longleat folios 24v-29v and 31r immediately precedes a separate Latin form of confession and Rolle's *Form of Living*. The Latin and English forms of confession supply the scripted penitent-confessor dialogue the manual leaves out in its instructions on plain speaking, giving readers a template for this stage of penitence. The reader's

voice and the speaker's voice merge in the act of reading or speaking the text, imagining confession from a layperson's perspective. It is worth noting that in Harley 4172 this *Form* appears alongside 63 folios of a manual for priests—whether that manuscript's readers were clerical or lay, they had access to both sides of confession protocol. The two forms of confession are distinct from one another, two authorities that cannot be matched up and made into a single authoritative source; this is true of the codex's other texts, aligned closely in their mixed-life theme while presenting a range of attitudes on spiritual forms of living.

The Parson—or the manual's anonymous narrator—imagines readers pursuing penitence largely on their own, guided by texts and contemplation. The *Parson's Tale* provides tools for this in its taxonomy of the deadly sins, giving readers a vocabulary of sin and an understanding of its origins in specific behaviors. From where it sits in folios 58v-69r to Chaucer's 81r-128v, Walter Hilton's *Mixed Life* provides a complement in its exhortations to analyze sinful behavior. For the mixed-life readers Hilton explicitly calls up, spiritual good is fundamentally a self-directed endeavor that combines the advantages of lay and contemplative practice. Hilton construes such work on both ghostly and bodily planes as a devotionally vital part of readers' existing community and professional ties, different perhaps in sense but not in meaning from the professionally religious work that "falleth not to thee" (94-5). It is the work of the imagined reader to deconstruct their patterns of behavior and identify their sins, the individual's relationship to the institutional church having little role in the matter. Unlike Rolle's more solitary-minded texts, *Mixed Life* imagines readers fully enmeshed in the fabric of their community, and much of spiritual work it encourages takes place within those bounds. This fits the codex as a whole, aiming for a challenging brand of lay piety reconciling mixed life with serious devotion.

In Longleat, the tale and *Mixed Life* search out practices for living in accordance with that devotion, and they share a term for how they imagine that devotional community: evene-cristene. We will see in the next chapter how Julian of Norwich uses the term in the c. 1373 Short Text and c. 1410 Long Text, and it is worth noting here that the Parson's Tale makes use of the term when it most commonly appears in religious writing. The Parson uses it five times over the course of the Tale to refer to an unscaled community of fellow Christians—but most especially the evene-cristene who stand to be impacted by the imagined reader's sinning.

Despitous is he that hath desdeyn of his neighebor, that is to seyn, of his evene-cristene, or hath despit to doon that hym oghte to do. (395)

And later, more directly to the imagined reader,

EEK thow shalt nat swere for envye, ne for favour, ne for meede, but for rightwisenesse, for declaracioun of it, to the worshipe of God and helpynge of thyne evene-Cristene. (595)

Hilton also imparts imagined readers with a sense of duty to their evene-cristene, advising imagined readers to seek out “good werkes” of

fastynge, wakyng, and in refreynyng of thi fleschli lustis bi othir penaunce doynge, or to thyn even-Cristen by fullfillinge of the dedes of merci bodili or goosteli, or unto God by suffryng of all maner [bodili] myscheues for the loue of rigtwisenesse. (34-9)

Imagining readers as a part of their communities, both the Parson and Hilton lay out strategies for addressing sin that cement readers' ties to those communities. The texts set up a model for mixed life that relies as much on evene-cristene as it does on inner devotional life. The reader is to turn both inward and outward.

If caring for the community is an essential part of remedying sin to both texts, *Mixed Life* also shares the Tale's emphasis on looking inward, directing readers first to bodily and then to

ghostly work to fully address sin. After outlining the fasting, waking, refraining, and good deeds excerpted above, Hilton moves to a stage of self-evaluation:

Breke doun first pride in bodili berynge, and also withinne thyn herte,/thenkyng, boostyng and rosyng of thi silf and of thi deedes, presumyng of thi silf, veyn likyng in thi silf of ony thyng that God hath sent to thee, bodili or goostli. Breke doun also envie and wrap ayens thyn euen-Cristen, whethir he be riche or pore, good or badde, that thou hate him not ne haue disdeyn of him wilfulli, nothir in word ne in deede. Also breke doun couetise of wordli good, that thou for hooldyng o[r] getyng or sauynge of it offende not thi conscience, ne breke not charite to God and to thyn euen-Cristene for loue of no wordli good, but that thou getist to kepe it and spende it withoute loue and veyn likyng of it, as resoun asketh, in worschipe of God and helpe of thyne euen-Cristen. Breke doune as moch as thou mai fleschli likynges, eithir in accidie or in bodili eese, or glotonie, or leccherie. And thanne, whanne thou hast be wel traueiled and and wel assaied in alle sich bodili werkes, than mai thou bi grace ordayne thee to goostli worchyng. (46-62)⁸⁵

Mirk's questions for confession in the *Instructions* are here delegated to the imagined mixed-life reader. The repetition of the imperative "breke doun" offers a remedy to sin that has entirely to do with self-scrutiny, outside of clerical or institutional supervision. The reader breaks down their life independent of such oversight or intervention, exhibiting a self-sufficiency that can carry them through penitence except for dogmatically correct confession. In the *Parson's Tale*, readers come to the confessional with a clear view of their own sins and an understanding of penitence inside and outside of confession. In *Mixed Life*, readers "breke doun" sins and the behaviors that lead to them as they "meedele the werkes of actif liyf with goostli wekes of lif conte[m]platif" (102-3).

The Parson's Tale nears its close with a passage strongly reminiscent of Hilton's: "Now as to speken of bodily peyne, it stant in preyeres, in wakynges, in fastynges, in vertuous techynges of orisouns," the Parson or the manual narrate (1037). They go on to briefly weigh

⁸⁵ Text from S.J. Ogilvie-Thomson, *Water Hilton's Mixed Life Edited from Lambeth Palace MS 472* (Salzburg: Institut für Anglistik und Amerikanistik, Universität Salzburg: 1986).

each action in that list, as well as the “discipline eek in knokkyng of thy brest, in scourgyng with yerdes, in knelynges, in tribulacions,/ in suffryng paciently wronges that been doon to thee, and eek in pacient suffraunce of maladies, or lesyng of worldly catel, or of wyf, or of child, or other freendes” (1055-6). In the Tale, the sinner directs these actions just as they direct themselves in the passage from *Mixed Life* above. They can now identify their sins and enact their penance; in relation, confession becomes an increasingly secondary part of the business of mixed life. Although confession’s status as mandatory is without question, the proliferation of confession manuals and penitential guides have usurped some of its space in religious practice as readers can independently now prepare for the act.

Surveying its texts alongside what we know of its provenance shows that Longleat is a compilation aimed at instructing and facilitating the reader’s pursuance of a mixed life. The manuscript’s other anonymous texts show how that interest in proper living, sin, and penitence play out on the page: forms of confession in Latin and English, a treatise on the “blessed ‘laddre’ to almyghty god,” an elucidation of nine virtues, and a Latin dialogue “on the nature of good and evil, predestination, prelates, judges, the chosen, and the suffering of children.”⁸⁶ But in addition to penitence and good living, both the tale and the manuscript grapple with what it means, as a lay person, to endure challenge and temptation and to seek penance after inevitable sin.

As a compilation, too, the manuscript puts readers in the position of navigating multiple authorities—even when, as with the two forms of confession, or with Rolle’s, Hilton’s, and the manual’s perspectives on life in community, those authorities diverge from one another. The Parson’s anonymized voice becomes one voice among many. The parish priest’s authority becomes one among many, confession one point in a constellation of penance. The

⁸⁶ Ogilvie-Thomson, introduction, xxii.

multiplication of voices and authorities does not overrule or diminish, but it does ask readers to navigate their options and to see that divergence not as a difference between orthodoxy and heresy but as a natural part of spiritual thought and practice.

In its original anthology, the Parson's flawed tale can be read as a subversive undermining of religious authority alongside other tales' and pilgrims' sharper critiques. It can be read as a later addition, or as a winking joke that elevates the anthology's more secular tales and characteristics. But for the readers of Longleat in the decades after Chaucer's death, it can also be read with a straight face as a notably inward-looking devotional guide to penance and good living. As a penitential manual rather than the *Parson's Tale*, the text develops an alternative identity—but one that existed within it already, only to be underscored by its place in Longleat's constellation of penance- and mixed living- focused works. Parachuted into a different anthology, the text takes on a new life.

That second life was a long one. I have said that this manuscript is unique, but it is not quite alone. In her identification of a 50-line Parson's Tale fragment in gentleman-lawyer Humphrey Newton's commonplace book, Bodleian MS Latin misc. C.66, Deborah Youngs finds the tale once more dropped into an earnest setting. As Youngs writes, Newton wrote and compiled the book himself mostly "during 1498-1506, but items were added until c. 1524."⁸⁷ Here, too, the *Parson's Tale* goes unattributed where it appears in the miscellany's final section, which includes "an Aesop fable, *Secreta Secretorum*, the pseudo-Lydgatian poem *Philomena*, a recipe for inks, *Fortescue's Instructions for Purchasing Land*, and a series of love lyrics purportedly written by Humphrey himself. It was on the penultimate folio of that section—and

⁸⁷ Youngs, "A Newly Discovered Fragment," 208.

hence the manuscript—that Humphrey transcribed lines from the *Parson's Tale*...They comprise 600-21, 626-27, and the first thirteen words of 627. The omission of lines 622-25 appears deliberate as Humphrey ended line 621 with an *etc*...The piece was used as a ‘filler,’ although Humphrey’s increasingly cramped script suggests he had perhaps intended to include more if space permitted.⁸⁸

Humphrey selected not just the *Parson's Tale* but a specific passage to import into the book he was copying for his own use, condensing it to his purposes:

Now certes, sith that sweryng, but if it be lawefully doon, is so heighly deffended, much worse is forsweryng falsly, and yet nedelees.

What seye we eek of hem that deliten hem in sweryng, and holden it a gentrie or a manly dede to swere grete othes? And what of hem tha of verray usage ne cesse nat to swere grete othes, al be the cause nat worth a straw? Certes, this is horrible synne./ Sweryne sodeynly withoute avysement is eek a synne./ But lat us go now to thilke horrible sweryng of adjuracioun and conjuracioun, as doon thise false enchauntours or nigromanciens in bacyns ful of water, or in a brihte swerd, in a cercle, or in a fir, or in a shulderboon of a sheep./ I kan nat seye but that they doon cursedly and dampnably agayns Crist and al the feith of hooly chirche. (600-4)

The excerpt draws a distinction between lawful swearing in the secular world and the sin of swearing hastily, needlessly, heretically, or inappropriately. Humphrey’s position in the gentry makes “gentrie”’s use as an adjective especially intriguing; as a lawyer he might encounter lawful and truly gentry swearing, or he might encounter a false mirror image. Secular swearing then mixes with incantations, ostensibly not the sort a gentleman lawyer might be making but relevant enough to include in a transcription that excises other lines instead.

In a marginal note, Humphrey writes that the excerpt is “taky out of the boke of shrift that the vii dedly sunnys are in & this is taken out of ira.”⁸⁹ Youngs argues and I agree that this shows

⁸⁸ Ibid., 209. “A piece on the evils of swearers and flatterers was highly relevant to Humphrey’s lifestyle as an English gentleman. Gentry preoccupations with ‘correct’ manners are witnessed in the ownership of behavioral texts such as the ‘Mirrors of Princes’ and courtly treatises” (211).

⁸⁹ Youngs, “A Newly Discovered Fragment,” 210.

a familiarity with and access to the *Parson's Tale* in a form similar to Longleat's, and that the tale "was circulating as a book of shrift independently of the *Canterbury Tales*, and that neither the original scribe nor Humphrey knew of its Chaucerian connection."⁹⁰ Longleat remains the only extant complete copy of the tale presented in such a way and in such an especially devotional context, but Humphrey's commonplace book offers another glancing look at the tale's afterlives among the secular audience Richardson describes. Youngs cites the compilation's other texts to show "Humphrey's need of instruction and a concern for his soul," twin needs he shared with the commissioner of the Longleat codex.⁹¹ These two manuscripts signal the existence of an alternative circulation history for the *Parson's Tale*, where it stood independently but (if two manuscripts can be permitted to provide a point for extrapolation) was used by much the same fifteenth-century audience as the *Canterbury Tales* reached.

Humphrey's use of the passage on oath swearing and flattery shows a further repurposing of the *Parson's Tale*. For Humphrey, copying from an unknown exemplar into an eclectic and largely secular miscellany, the tale is a piece of conduct literature to shape the behavior of discerning gentlemen. Though its origins in a book of shrift go acknowledged, penitence and confession are both absent from this iteration of the text, reshaping the *Parson's Tale* yet again. From circulation as a Canterbury tale to manual to Humphrey, it shifts genre and form. In each case, mixed-life living is at the text's center, even as that center moves further and further from the Parson and the institutional church. Humphrey's recopying shows a reader judging for themselves what is sinful and what is not without the priestly guidance Mirk and the Parson offer—and doing so outside of the context of penitence.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 211.

⁹¹ Ibid., 212.

In Longleat Marquess of Bath MS 29 and Bodleian MS Latin misc. C.66, historical readers corroborate the text's devotionally-minded imagined readers. The tale's shortcomings as a translation and theological inaccuracies have been noted, making it a less than ideal authority on penance even as it seeks to elevate itself. But the text has a life of its own, and these manuscripts are evidence that the *Parson's Tale* had the capacity to be read devotionally for this very purpose, often but not always working parallel to institutional structures in favor of private reading and private religious practice. With confession as the point at which the individual converges with the institution, the *Parson's Tale*—inside and outside of its manuscript tradition—makes space for an inward-looking lay spirituality and delegates the work of penitence to its imagined readers.

In the next chapter, we will see the delegation of spiritual edification to imagined readers in a new context. Where the Parson's penitential manual provides an open-access pre-confession and guide to living, Julian of Norwich's series of abstract and visually striking images function as an open-access and interpretively demanding visionary experience. Like the manual, the *Revelations* evinces little concern over misreading while making space for complex, individualized imagined readings. Where *Parson's Tale* structures a self-reflective and self-pastoralizing process, the *Revelations* structures out an affective, visually intense experience where imagined readers *experience*— and in turn they become the visionary as for the *Parson's Tale* the reader becomes their own auctoitee.

CHAPTER II

Readers of an Adaptable Image

As Julian of Norwich's corporeal body deteriorates in early sections of the Short Text, visions crowd into the sickroom through the crucifix a priest places at the foot of her bed. Only after these have begun does Julian back away from a singular focus on her body, her sight, her experience: "Alle that I saye of myself, I meene in the persone of alle mine evencristene... And ye that heres and sees this vision and this techinge that is of Jhesu Criste to edification of youre saule, it is Goddes wille and my desire that ye take it with also grete joye and likinge as Jhesu hadde shewed it yowe as he did to me."⁹² The text pauses here and turns outward, framing what follows as a kind of open-access narrative where Julian is interchangeable with an unseen and uncounted readership instructed to "take it [the vision] with als grete joye and likinge as Jhesu hadde shewed it yowe as he did to me" (9-10). Readers are present everywhere in Julian of Norwich's *Vision Showed to a Devout Woman* and *Revelations of Divine Love*—except, it seems, in those texts' actual reception.

With this first mention of the evencristene, the Vision establishes itself as an ambitious project aimed not just toward one or two readers, but toward any "evencristene"-identifying reader. This chapter attempts to reconcile the materially unattainable "evencristene" with the text's multimedia rhetorical and pedagogical strategies. Those images render the text's theology more concrete while stopping short of interpretive certainty. Though manuscript evidence

⁹² *A Vision Showed to a Devout Woman*, ed. Nicholas Watson and Jacqueline Jenkins (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006): 6.1-10.

suggests the evencristene her theology calls up did not encounter her texts in much of a real sense, these images are an appeal to the devotional background and culture of that audience—one with high expectations for readers' ability to grasp abstract concepts as the images form a focal point for theological edification and affective devotion. Crossing between church and home, the text uses sacred and secular images to offer up visions imagined readers are encouraged to consider their own. The result is an experiential, vision-based pedagogy predicated on imagined readers' familiarity with and ability to interpret images that trains imagined readers to read both sacred and secular sources devotionally.

We saw in the last chapter how some texts' directives on correct reading contrast with their generic peers, and that some texts are quite sanguine on the subject of misinterpretation and misreading. Imagined readers lie at the edges of ongoing discussions of late medieval religious writing and its heretical hazards, where as a literary trope they can help suss out how writers adequately control potential readings.⁹³ In this way, imagined readers are related to what Lynn Staley has termed "the trope of the scribe," though rather than obscure authorship and authority they provide grounds for contemplating the interpretive acts of potential readers.⁹⁴ Their existence is ephemeral, lasting for the duration of the text (or shorter) and created anew from text to text. They are peripheral to medieval book history, where the limitations of manuscript technology mean that the readers a writer might aspire to might never be realized. Their only record is in the texts themselves, in the ways readers are called up explicitly into being as a trope the text uses to think through readings and misreadings.

⁹³ For example, as the next chapter will show, Nicholas Love's frequent engagement with a body of readers is traditionally read as a suppressive or regulatory strategy enforcing orthodox hierarchies (though this has been changing more recently).

⁹⁴ Lynn Staley, "The Trope of the Scribe and the Question of Literary Authority in the Works of Julian of Norwich and Margery Kempe," *Speculum* (66.4) 1991: pp. 820–838.

Imagined readers permit the Short and Long Texts to develop a theology centered around a community of evencristene and to speak to them directly. Julian is adamant that her visionary persona stands in as proxy for any reader, any evencristene, and that reading her visions effectively reconstitutes the experience anew for each reader. In both texts, tropes of imagined readers can be used to trace the strategies at work in educating imagined evencristene. This trope of imagined reading models productive and devout interpretations of the visions, where the visionary persona is one among many readers who must make sense of the experience and text. As a way to direct imagined readings, the trope produces a model of reception that bypasses simple parroting and fosters reinterpretation and adaptation of devotional objects, images, and experiences. Imagined readers reveal a pedagogy that avoids stagnating in what Rita Copeland calls the "literal sense" of a reading by first urging those readers to see the immanence of spiritual meaning in daily materials and then to see the ways in which that spiritual meaning transcends or cannot be contained by those same materials.⁹⁵

Although the texts' fifteenth-century reception history is sparse, it is not altogether nonexistent. In his detailed exploration of extensive fifteenth-century edits made to the earliest extant (and incomplete) copy of the Long Text in Westminster Cathedral Treasury MS 4 (the Westminster florilegium), Hugh Kempster has shown that "when considering the audience of a fifteenth-century contemplative Middle English text it cannot be automatically assumed that the audience was '*ex professo* contemplative.'"⁹⁶ This is especially true of this c. 1500 Westminster copy of the Long Text, excerpted alongside sections from psalm commentaries *Qui Habitat and*

⁹⁵ See Rita Copeland's work on the literal sense, the binary of surface/depth paralleling childhood/adulthood, and its controversies in *Pedagogy, Intellectuals, And Dissent in the Later Middle Ages: Lollardy and Ideas of Learning* (New York: Cambridge UP, 2001).

⁹⁶ Kempster, "A Question of Audience," *Julian of Norwich: A Book of Essays* ed. Santra J. McEntire (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1998): 268.

Bonum Est as well as *Scale of Perfection*. Kempster argues that the documented rise in mixed-life book ownership alongside these edits, which align the Long Text more closely with the writings of Walter Hilton and simplify some more theologically advanced moments, open up a possibility for historical lay readership. Even so, definitive signs of that readership are unlikely to be found. The Short Text's circulation on the proposed relatively wide scale of the Westminster Florilegium remains at best unlikely (Kempster, mindful of the "clear difficulties in making confident assertions concerning authorial or editorial intention," argues for the "possibility of an active lay audience for W.").⁹⁷ As with the wills mentioning Julian and her companions between the 1390s and 1410s, the manuscripts themselves are one sign of the exchange of ideas between the anchorhold and the outside world.⁹⁸ The bequests and the information they explicitly provide are the enduring material signs of a life coming into direct and indirect contact with other lives. The pedagogies aimed toward those *evencristene* show an evolution from one text to the other not just concerned with orthodoxy but above all with reaching an imaginary or real reception such as that to which the wills partially attest.

That Julian's vision sequences are realized in part through her deployment of vivid imagery speaks to her pedagogical approach, which forges imagery into a concrete tool to make abstract comprehension possible. This practice is entrenched in contemporary religious practices and modes of transmission, as Julian herself attests to from her own experience of having

⁹⁷ Kempster, "A Question of Audience," 284.

⁹⁸ From Watson and Jenkins: "These wills also say something about her local reputation and her wide (and lofty) social and religious connections... Roger Reed, rector of St. Michael's, Coslany, Norwich, gave two shillings when he died in 1393/4; Thomas Emund, a chantry priest in Aylesham, Norfolk, gave twelve pence in 1404/5, as well as eight pence to a certain 'Sarah, living with her'; John Plumpton, a Norfolk merchant, gave forty pence in 1414 to 'le ankeres in ecclesia sancti Juliani de Conesford in Norwice' (the anchoress in the church of St. Julian's Conesford, in Norwich), as well as bequests to her serving maid and to her former maid, Alice... Isabel Ufford, an aristocratic nun at the great house of Campsey in Suffolk and daughter of the Earl of Warwick, have the sum of twenty shillings to 'Julian recluz a Norwich' in 1416, when Julian was in her seventies" (Introduction to *The Writings of Julian of Norwich* [Philadelphia: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006]: 5)

“leeved sadlye alle the peynes of Criste as haly kirke shewes and teches, and also the paintings of crucifexes that er made be the grace of God aftere the techinge of haly kyrke to the liknes of Cristes passion, als farfurthe as manes witte maye reche” (*Vision* 1.9-12). Julian’s recounted experience of religious images goes beyond a modern conception of seeing, as sight in this period was understood in especially participatory and even tactile terms. Susan Stanbury writes of medieval seeing that “in looking we are connected physically to the object we see by the agency of species, or visual rays. Images, through their species, literally touch us, linking us physically with them in ways that underwrite the dramatic physicality of late medieval affective piety.”⁹⁹ So, too, does the reader-viewer’s role go beyond using an image to access devotional knowledge and ritual in lieu of textual study. In this case, however, the image is not a physical presence but a literary one: the images created by a text for prospective readers. In contemplating the visions recounted here, readers gain not just spiritual edification but multimedia access to the divine.

More than oral culture, late medieval visual culture has gained prominence in literary studies in part through the field’s ongoing work with image-skeptic or iconoclastic threads of Wycliffitism and Lollardy active throughout Julian’s lifetime.¹⁰⁰ Stanbury points to the controversial nature of images in late medieval religious culture and argues that ekphrasis is “notably absent...except as transformed, as in Julian’s texts, into visions.”¹⁰¹ Deployed in this

⁹⁹ Stanbury, *The Visual Object of Desire in Late Medieval England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008): 6.

¹⁰⁰ See Shannon Gayk, *Image, Text, and Religious Reform in Fifteenth-Century England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010) and Sarah Stanbury, *The Visual Object of Desire in Late Medieval England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008).

¹⁰¹ *The Visual Object of Desire in Late Medieval England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008): 100. James Simpson sees a similar restraint: “Throughout the period of this history the visual is characterized as the realm of the unlearned because it is restricted to the corporeal and fleshly. The visual is deployed in official religious practice to provoke powerful feelings of devotional piety and penitential regret, but precisely as such it precludes abstract thinking. Julian herself appears to accept these strictures” (*Reform and Cultural Revolution* [Oxford: Oxford UP, 2002], 442). Simpson might be useful in the body of the chapter. I have trouble figuring out how you mean to use him, just based on this note.

way, images are meant to provide one stable reading to an audience of visual “readers” who were not thought capable of processing more challenging subject matter. I propose that the images used by both Short and Long Texts are pedagogical devices along the lines of those set out by Rita Copeland’s study of Hugh of St. Victor, where “a literal sense...is secured in place for ever-more complex hermeneutical exposition.”¹⁰² The literal sense of reading is a first and essential step into more complicated meaning, an interpretive beginning rather than an interpretive dead end.¹⁰³

The looming question of what Kathryn Kerby-Fulton terms “self-censorship” goes beyond images. Many scholars have noted one of the starkest differences between Short Text and Long: where the Short Text is an autobiography-heavy account of Julian’s visions, where her presence within the text as a female visionary is its cornerstone, “by the time she created her Long Text, she had moved ever more deeply into speculative mysticism.”¹⁰⁴ To Kerby-Fulton, the Long Text’s effacement of Julian’s presence as both a visionary and a woman is at least partially attributable to contemporary politics where “women...could provoke suspicions of Free Spirit influence or other kinds of speculative mysticism.”¹⁰⁵ I do not reject Julian’s self-censorship, but examining these texts in terms of readers rather than writer moves us away from the question of authorial self-censorship and toward the prospect of reader self-censorship.

That Julian is involved in this long weighing of religious images is fitting for this chapter, which will use the multimedia sensibilities the texts present to imagined readers to examine their

¹⁰² Copeland, *Pedagogy, Intellectuals, And Dissent in the Later Middle Ages*, 91.

¹⁰³ Mary Carruthers describes the literal sense as “a mnemonic cue for the reader, a foundation which must then be realized by erecting a mental fabric that uses everything which the ‘citadel of faith’ tosses up, then coloring over the whole surface” (“The Poet as Master Builder: Composition and Locational Memory in the Middle Ages,” *New Literary History* 24 [1993]: 892).

¹⁰⁴ Kerby-Fulton, *Books Under Suspicion: Censorship and Tolerance of Revelatory Writing in Late Medieval England* (South Bend: Notre Dame U.P., 2006): 301.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 311.

involvement in contemporary religious culture. I do not wish to reject the controversy—the texts themselves are records of it—but I rather I want to complicate the unlearned:image::learned:text value judgments that play a part in medieval attitudes toward images.¹⁰⁶ In the *Vision* and the *Revelations*, images and the reading of images occupy a central place in what it means to be functionally literate regardless of social status, and devaluing image use shortchanges both the text's literariness and its contemporary devotional impact. Image use and the wider scale of multimedia literacy it opens out to are a link between Julian's abstract theology and the tools texts can draw from the material world.

The texts' commitment to the visual is a crafted pedagogical strategy drawn from the contexts of late medieval visual culture—not just religious visual culture, but the banal and quotidian signs of late medieval home life. For the orthodox or relatively orthodox, textual illiteracy necessitated image use in ecclesiastical, educational settings. Julian adapts this multimedia approach to literacy, making use of lay fluency in images and translating that fluency into text form. Where Chaucer's life and work took him into elite and upwardly mobile social circles and ultimately helped secure him the audience he desired, Julian's anchoritism, gender, and "unletterde" status did not facilitate circulation.¹⁰⁷ But Julian's engagement with the lay community outside her anchorhold is reflected in her image-based pedagogical program. The

¹⁰⁶ Kumler sums up complex late medieval attitudes to images in Europe more widely: "images were generally held to be lesser order artifacts...In medieval Europe, religious images were often considered crutches for—or worse, the bad habits of—the theologically uninitiated: non-Christians, novices, illiterates, and women. At their most dangerous, religious images were thought to divert *latría*, the worship reserved for God, from the Logos, promoting themselves, through an aggressive aesthetic appropriation of proper veneration, into idols, the usurpers of Judeo-Christian traditions of textual authority. More innocuously, images could define a salutary starting point, an initiatory terminus for the journey to verbal theology or else the anagogical destination of pure, even apophatic, encounter with the Divine" (*Translating Truth* 1).

¹⁰⁷ As professed in *A Revelation*, Julian is "a simple creature unlettered" (2.1) The text's dating of her vision, 13 May 1373 (at which time according to the text she is 30 years old), makes her a close contemporary of Chaucer.

visions' vibrant experiences realize the universalism inherent in her invention of the term "evencristene" on a rhetorical level if not a historical one.¹⁰⁸

Image and Abstraction

Whether, at age 30, the Julian presented in the Short Text was still a layperson or had taken vows is unclear. The Julian who narrates that text twenty years later positions her visions as a logical next step for one who had "leeved sadlye alle the peynes of Criste as haly kirke shewes and teches, and also the paintings of crucifexes that er made be the grace of God aftere the techinge of haly kyrke to the liknes of Cristes passion, als farfurthe as manes witte maye reche" (1.9-12). Her desire "for the passion and of the seekenes" comes from religious devotion that remains unclassified as either lay or religious, and her desire for "thre woundes in my life time" is inspired by the popular figure of "Sainte Cecille, in the whilke shewing I understode that she hadde thre woundes with a swerde in the nekke, with the whilke she pinede to the dede" (1.30-41).

Setting out Cecilia as an exemplum here further locates the Short Text within a spectrum of lay, contemplative, and mixed lives wide enough to suit the evencristene. Cecilia's popularity was widespread; aside from Cecilia being one of Chaucer's few forays into hagiography in the *Second Nun's Tale*, late medieval "hagiographers and moralists repeatedly exhorted audiences—and especially female audiences—to imitate saints such as Cecilia."¹⁰⁹ In her investigation into

¹⁰⁸ For more on the importance of the visible and embodied in devotional practices (East Anglian especially), see Gail McMurray Gibson, *Theatre of Devotion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989): "To feel Christ's arms reaching down in physical embrace from the Cross, to see Christ's heart blood 'renne in my sleve,' to see the Word made Flesh in the image of a moving statue or a player's feigned bloody hands—these are the concrete and incarnational devotions of the fifteenth century" (18).

¹⁰⁹ Sanok, *Her Life Historical: Exemplarity and Female Saints' Lives in Late Medieval England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007): 2.

late medieval women's engagement with the virgin martyrs as exempla, Catherine Sanok underscores the ways in which virgin martyr exempla no longer directly suited contemporary models for women's devotion and social roles. But at the same time, "for Julian, and perhaps for other audiences, to read the legend as exemplary is to understand it not as a prescription but a comparandum for contemporary practice."¹¹⁰ As Sanok shows, Julian's reading of Cecilia is not a terribly literal one and demonstrates the flexibility with which these seemingly rigid models were adapted by lay and religious women.

Julian's reading of Cecilia begins with affectively pious devotional practices of reading and contemplating on an image, imagining oneself as present in the scene as Julian invites readers to be present in her vision sequence. But the past-Julian described in this passage goes beyond contemplation, desiring "thre woundes in my life time: that es to saye, the wounde of contrition, the wounde of compassion, and the wounde of wilfulle langinge to God" (1.39-41). Reading Cecilia's legend inspires creative adaptation, as past-Julian seeks not the corporeal pain of Cecilia's wounds but a different kind of spiritual pain altogether. Instead of modeling a more imitative reading of Cecilia's life and death, past-Julian reinterprets the role of the legend in her own life and forges it into a second, non-imitative use. The three wounds initiate a new, independent devotional experience.

Together with Julian's earlier description of her devotional habits—having studied crucifixes, paintings, and church teaching—Cecilia provides a record of the text's cultural, devotional milieu. In her study of images in the visions, Cate Gunn suggests that images were essential to a deeper learning than previously thought, where "the images she was familiar with

¹¹⁰ Ibid, 5.

may have acted as rememorative signs for Julian.”¹¹¹ Images such as Cecilia’s held affective and authorizing significance as well, as Susan Hagen writes. The martyr “might well provide comfort for a devout, yet common, fourteenth-century woman embarking on the disclosure of her intimate exchanges with Christ,” but the legend’s function for Julian is secondary to its function in the opening moves of her visionary account.¹¹² Sara Salih sums up saints’ place in popular culture, describing them as “at once the superheroes and celebrities of medieval England. They pervaded the landscape: their names, images and narratives were attached to buildings, geographical features, parishes, guilds and towns. Saint-cult was multimedia and interactive. Every church displayed paintings and sculptures of the saints; their feast days were celebrated with liturgies, readings, plays, processions and feasts.” Stretching across media, utilizing all the senses, saints’ cults and their widespread popularity set up a precedent for the Short and Long Texts’ vivid remediation of Books of hours, which customarily included images of saints, are one manifestation of saint cult closer in textual medium to the Short Text itself. Cecilia and the signs of religious devotion Julian puts alongside her while recording the visions in the decades after her illness show an anchorite still fluent in the religious practices going on outside of the anchorhold, in the communities both directly outside her window and well beyond it.

The visionary narrator takes care to model appropriate methods of seeing, inviting affective responses to the visions while shaping them along orthodox lines. The crucifix a priest places by Julian’s sickbed is the gateway to these visions, which grow in her “ghostly” sight as her bodily sight begins to fail. The bodily sight of Christ’s bleeding head leads to “a gastelye

¹¹¹ Cate Gunn, “Images of Medieval Norwich” *A Companion to Julian of Norwich* ed. Liz Herbert McAvoy (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2008): 35. See also the work of V.A. Kolve, *Telling Images: Chaucer and the Imagery of Narrative I and II* (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 1984 and 2011).

¹¹² Susan K. Hagen, “St. Cecilia and St. John of Beverly: Julian of Norwich’s Early Model and Late Affirmation” in *Julian of Norwich: A Book of Essays*, ed. Sandra J. McEntire (New York: Garland, 1998) 92.

sight of his hamly lovinge” that figures Christ as “oure clothinge, that for love wappes us and wines us.” The transition from that vision of being clothed in Christ leads to a Christ showing Julian “a litille thinge the quantite of a haselle nutte, lygande in the palme of my hande, and, to my understanding, that it was rounde as any balle” (4.7-9). The vision operates under a kind of dream-logic, with Christ’s form unstated and unclear—at one moment, Christ is clothing, and at the next he is showing Julian “alle that is made” in the quantity of a hazelnut (4.10). Where the crucifix in the sickroom is resolutely and even grotesquely corporeal, the Christ of this vision is abstract. Christ’s body on the sickroom cross is replaced by his speaking voice and the “gastelye sight of his hamly lovinge,” something that does not recall a corporeal form (4.2). Instead, dream-Christ is realized by both that hamly sentiment and by the clothing that surrounds the unspecified numbers of “us.”

The dream-world of the vision adheres to important delineations between bodily and ghostly sight, and Christ’s abstraction in this first vision separates the physical world from the vision. The text is careful to specify what Julian is seeing “in min understandinge” and what is physically present in the sickroom, two planes of sight that exist simultaneously (3.22). “Bodily sight,” “ghastly sight,” and “min understandinge” cue for readers where and how Julian is seeing, while statements that “this vision was shewed me” remind readers of the passive role visionaries play in this text: in Julian’s model, the visionary’s task is to witness and recount, making that witnessing experience accessible to readers. Even so, ghostly and bodily sight seem not to exist in nonintersecting parallels, as the crucifix begins to bleed in bodily sight and initiates the ghostly seeing (4.1-2). While the important visionary work is taking place in ghostly sight (something the text frequently reiterates), the material world is the catalyst for that work.

When signifiers from the material world feature in the visions, they are altered in distinct ways. The thing in Julian's palm is not literally a hazelnut but is *like* a hazelnut, and unlike a roughly round hazelnut, it is "as rounde as any balle." Laura Saetveit Miles describes the "little thing" as "a most small and quotidian object, and yet it operates on a boundless scale of metaphor" as the ghostly stand-in for an infinite everything.¹¹³ The hazelnut metaphor is then a compromise between abstract vision-sight and making "all that is made" into a concrete, viewable, comprehensible form. It realizes an infinite, ineffable concept in a medium that stops just short of being fully recognizable. It nods to both image-based church pedagogies and the strong cautions against relying on them, complicating the image's authority by emphasizing it as an imprecise metaphor. As Sarah Stanbury writes, Julian stays clear of the kind of unthinking image use that might have generated criticism.¹¹⁴ Though in Julian's narrative the image springs from traditional devotional images, its resistance to a literal reading means it is not quite of the same category.

But it is also, as Barbetti argues, an ekphrasis: not of the kind Chaucer uses in the near-contemporary *House of Fame*, but the kind of visual key used in churches and by Julian herself as she enters the vision through the bodily sight of the sickroom crucifix.¹¹⁵ Denise Nowakoski Baker proposes that Julian "found both the verbal and visual teachings about the Passion inadequate to her own spiritual needs.... While contemporary devotional art certainly shaped what Julian saw, such images were not the primary catalyst for her visionary experience."¹¹⁶ In this case, the image is less a catalyst than a mutable and constantly shifting visual key that never

¹¹³ Laura Saetveit Miles, "Space and Enclosure in Julian of Norwich's *A Revelation of Love*" in *A Companion to Julian of Norwich* ed. Liz Herbert McAvoy (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2008): 157.

¹¹⁴ Sarah Stanbury, *The Visual Object of Desire in Late Medieval England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008): 100.

¹¹⁵ Claire Barbetti, *Ekphrastic Medieval Visions: A New Discussion in Interarts Theory* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

¹¹⁶ *Julian of Norwich's Showings*, 44.

quite unlocks a stable meaning. The limits of concrete image-reading play with and against the open potential of abstraction. The image is frail, but it signifies more than itself. On one hand, this undermines the vision—or how the text chooses to convey the vision. On the other hand, highlighting the frailty of metaphors for the divine expects more of readers than a simpler literal understanding can provide. Readers observe a devotional image and allow it to provoke a desired emotional response while recognizing its constraints. What might be seen as the surface-level “literal sense” of the image, alternately valued and devalued by Wycliffites and non-Wycliffites, exists alongside and as the scene unfolds is overtaken by its deeper exegetical sense.¹¹⁷

The not-just-a-hazelnut is a guide and a gateway, directing imagined readers away from a literal or imitative reading while ushering them into the vision sequence's fuzzy sense of corporeality. In this respect, the image might function as a control for potential misreadings—a spectre that haunts contemporary writers like Nicholas Love, but not Julian. Insecurity over mistaken imagined readings plays little to no explicit role in the visions, but pedagogical guidance such as in learning to read the hazelnut image need not always be fear or punishment-derived. Readers pass from conventional contemplation of images and saints to a reinterpretation of those familiarities to the hazelnut: an object not unique to religious devotion, an object whose literal sense the text meticulously problematizes. From here, the images become even more challenging.

¹¹⁷ Rita Copeland on the literal sense in the fourteenth century, which was “not only a hermeneutical tool, but was also an acutely determined political category of long historical lineage. . . . The central theme of the Lollard classroom was the notion that the literal sense as a pedagogical tool can be reclaimed as an instrument of hermeneutical control” (*Pedagogy, Intellectuals, and Dissent in the Later Middle Ages: Lollardy and Ideas of Learning* [New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001], 139-40).

The revelation of the internalized city is the devotional climax of the Short Text. The vision shows the same care in separating out ghostly and bodily sight as in the initial hazelnut vision, but the city itself is both—seen with ghostly vision, but located within the human heart.

Bot than lefte I stille wakande, and than oure lorde openede my gastelly eyen and shewed me my saule in middes of my herte. I sawe my saule swa large as it ware a kingdome, and by the conditions that I sawe therin, methought it was a wirshipfulle cite. In middes of this cite sites oure lorde Jhesu, verraye God and verrey man: a faire persone and of large stature, wyrshipfulle, heist lorde. And I sawe him cledde solemple in wyrshippes. He sites in the saule even right in pees and reste, and he rewles and yemes heven and erth and alle that is. The mangede with the godhead sittis in reste; and the godhead rewles and yemes withouten any instrumente or besines. And my saule is blisfullye occupied with the godhead: that is, sufferayn might, sufferayne wisdom, sufferayne goodnesse.

The place that Jhesu takes in oure saule he shalle never remove it withouten ende, for in us is his haymelieste hame and maste linking to him to dwelle in.
(22.1-12)

Julian's individual heart takes the place of the earlier hazelnut as the small stand-in for infinity, since from there Christ rules over "alle that is." The surreal bird's-eye view of one's own heart, an apparently medieval-looking walled city with a monarch at its center to rule both the material and immaterial world, differs from the images of Christ and Cecilia described when recounting her own religious education. Having demonstrated her credibility with conventional religious imagery, she pushes out to the fringes of that imagery for both herself and her imagined readers. In the heart-city, there is no separation between the inside world of Julian's physical and metaphysical body and the outside world of "heven and erth and alle that is." The city contains both.

The Short Text takes the city analogy more literally at first, assigning it generic characteristics of medieval cities. Even shrunk somewhat from city-size to home-size, the expanding and contracting heart defies stable representation. While the object in view shifts, so too does the view shift as Julian sees the city both from above and her soul from within. From

above, the view of a kingdom telescopes in first on a city and then on the figure of Christ seated at its center, but at the same time the view is of a heart and soul: an anatomy as well as landscape. The city walls are also the walls of the heart. As Heather Webb has shown in her analysis of medieval Italian literary and historical cases, the human heart in both sacred and secular discourses has unique signifying powers, particularly when dissected and found to contain holy material such as crosses. Saints' hearts in the literal, anatomical sense "bring the presence of the divine into the public space."¹¹⁸ In the Short Text, the pairing of heart and city is therefore a fitting one that can be read both literally (the organ contains a holy sign) and metaphorically (the heart contains the multitudes of a holy city). Readers navigate the near-simultaneity of both of these perspectives. The multiple views rely on a reader's sense of urban life and city planning: the presence and functions of walls, the geographic placement of power centers within the walled urban area, and the diverse uses of space between those centers and the periphery. Yet they also rely on readers' recognition of devotional signs. Here, too, the vision experiments with the contrast between more accessible imagery—the hazelnut, the badges Christ wears, the city, the "haymelieste hame"—and the matter it seeks to represent. The city of god calls up familiar images, making the scene legible in the terms of both urban and devotional life.

At the same time, that telescoping—between above and within, between metaphor and literal—prevents the image from settling into one dependable, fully knowable version. The text destabilizes those recognizable images with the city's and the heart's unsettling scale: the heart organ contains a city and a person who is most explicitly not small, taking the hagiographical trend of saints with crucifixes or other symbols within their hearts to a decidedly higher level. But it is still a human organ, finite in size and capacity. The mutable image of the heart city

¹¹⁸ Heather Webb, *The Medieval Heart*, 171.

suggests that with Christ at the center of institutional authority, if all is not contained within the heart then all can still be governed from it.

By appealing to senses of urban space, the text realizes the heart-city in familiar terms. Watson and Jenkins note that this was not unfamiliar as a literary device: both *Piers Plowman* and Margery Kempe make use of it, while other texts such as *Pearl* depict heaven as a city.¹¹⁹ It also resonates with the dynamics of urban space in the medieval period. Medieval Norwich itself was a walled city with a fortified castle elevated within those walls. As contemporary maps show, the castle is both elevated and guarded on the south side by a series of gates, ramparts, and a barbican. According to Brian Ayers, excavations have in turn shown that “the apparently anomalous location of the keep within the fortress can perhaps now be seen to be a result firstly of the earthwork history, an earlier mound beneath the keep being extended at the end of the 11th century, and secondly of a deliberate policy of providing a dramatic approach to the key building of the complex.”¹²⁰ This fortified space was surrounded by the Castle Fee or Liberty.

But the castle was not the only bastion of authority in medieval Norwich. Less centralized and unfortified but still well within city walls, Norwich Cathedral was surrounded by rings of delineated purpose: ecclesiastical, mixed, and lay, as well as public and private. Putting together existing archeological findings, Ayers concludes that “it is now possible to view the cathedral church and its environs as a sacred site but also as a location divided into spaces with varying degrees of public, private, and functional access.”¹²¹ At the heart of the city was the

¹¹⁹ Watson and Jenkins note that “the city in the soul resembles the New Jerusalem of Rev. 21:1-27, as represented in art and poems such as *Pearl* or *The Pricke*, where the vision of God ‘es mast joy’ of the city of heaven, a city so ‘large and wide’ it has space for all the saved, all of whom can nonetheless clearly see ‘the face of God allemighty’ (9207-31).

¹²⁰ Brian Ayers, “The Development of an Urban Landscape” in *Norwich: Medieval and Early Modern Art, Architecture, and Archaeology* ed. Alixe Bovey (Leeds: The British Archaeological Association and Maney Publishing, 2012): 10.

¹²¹ *Ibid* 11.

sprawling market bordered on the north by the Guildhall and on the south by the merchants' church St. Peter Mancroft, uphill from the warehouses lining the River Wensum. With the cathedral, civic governance, and the castle, medieval Norwich had three different (but not separate) centers of power. In Julian's vision, the city has one such center.

In his study of the Church's role in medieval Norwich's geography, David King follows Philippa Maddern to connect a late fourteenth-century church building and restoration spree to "the complex and well-developed system of oversight and control by which the city governed its citizens." In King's view, churches were particularly important outposts from which social norms and mores could be imposed and where "perhaps most importantly, the lessons of the consequences of non-compliance in terms of the torments of hell and purgatory would have been a powerful disincentive to those inclined to err and a positive encouragement to provide churches with items of material culture."¹²² With 58 parish churches within the city walls, there were more than enough outposts to go around.¹²³

In these terms of city planning, the heart-city's geography places Christ at its governing, spiritual, and defensive center. As a kind of precursor to the Long Text's lord and servant parable, the Short Text calls on readers' knowledge of real-world power structures—this time, however, it realizes those structures geographically. From above the city and deep within it, Christ's positioning "middles of this cite" models Julian's dual above-and-within perspectives. The castle, with its privileged vantage point, echoes the visionary's status while it also occupies the same place in the urban structure that Christ does in the vision's heart-city. The heart-city does not map directly onto the medieval urban landscape, but its efficacy as a pedagogical and

¹²² David King, "The Integration of the Church and City", *ibid* 263-4.

¹²³ For more on the parish churches of Norwich, see Sandy Heslop, "The Medieval Churches of Norwich," *The Medieval Churches of Norwich*. University of East Anglia, The Leverhulme Trust, and Norwich Research Park, 01 Oct. 2016.

affective device depends on those same urban associations and on readers' abilities to recognize them. That the heart-city metaphysically mirrors urban readers' surroundings allows once more for the concrete-made-abstract images in the visions, where the familiar is made both "hamely" and alien. The "hamely" here is repurposed in the same way sacred material is, making devotional signifiers out of both sacred and secular surroundings.

Sacred Image, Material World

While the visions explore the outer limits of images and image-use, they do not discard material realities. The fiend's arrival immediately following the worshipful city brings about a dramatic shift in the visions. The mind-expanding but benign earlier experiences are momentarily turned upside-down by the devil's almost tangible threat. Where those earlier visions experiment with the limits of images and with their wider, more abstract possibilities, the devil makes good on the increasing potential for those visions to go beyond two-dimensional visual encounters. Coming at the end of the Short Text, Julian's successful dismissing of the fiend is a kind of self-hagiography that establishes her as more than a visionary or mystic writer. This concluding moment of triumph and warning is realized in resolutely material terms, setting up a sort of mixed-life devil for a mixed-life body of readers. The startling immediacy of these passages is best rivalled by descriptions of Julian's progressing illness, but the difference here is that the devil is a vision rather than a condition of the visionary's corporeality. Where the worshipful city blends abstract and concrete for the urban-fluent reader, the devil takes the physical world into the metaphysical. Its appropriation of domestic and human properties warps them, making evil out of the recognizable and the recognizable into a new menace.

The fiend's presence in the sickroom becomes inescapable as it occupies nearly all of Julian's senses. As a visible, olfactory, and auditory presence it takes on an urgency and a multisensory corporeality

After this, the fende com againe with his heete and with his stinke, and made me fulle besye. The stinke was so vile and so painfulle, and the bodely heete also dredfulle and travailous. And also I harde a bodely jangelinge and a speche, as it hadde bene of two bodies, and bathe to my thinking jangled at anes, as if they halden a parliament with grete besines. And alle was softe muttering, and I understode nought what they saide. Botte alle this was to sire me to dispaire, as methought. (23.1-7)

Thomas Seiler has shown that devils in medieval drama were at times accompanied by smell as special effect to enhance the viewer's experience.¹²⁴ At any rate, one who lived in an urban environment in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, with its variety of daily and exceptional stinks, could be quite capable of imagining the very worst smells. C.M. Woolgar writes that sulphureous smells' association with Hell and the Devil was "ancient and widespread" in medieval England, citing numerous cases of that correspondence in religious and lay contexts. In the latter, "A bad smell, 'stinking', might be both a characteristic of those whose activities were nefarious or hypocritical and a term of abuse" while in the former those smells "marked out bad things or those destined for hell."¹²⁵

In the Short Text, stench is presented as perhaps the most disturbing part of the fiend's presence—it both precedes him and lingers after he has gone, and the immobilized Julian has little choice in the matter. The profound discomfort the fiend brings about is especially

¹²⁴ See Thomas Seiler, "Filth and Stench as Aspects of the Iconography of Hell" in *The Iconography of Hell* ed. Clifford Davidson and Thomas H. Seiler (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1992): 132-140. Seiler takes the odiferous devil convention from late antiquity through to the European Middle Ages. He cites Alan David Justice's "Trade Symbolism in the York Cycle" (*Theatre Journal* 31 [1979]: 47-58), which suggests that the Tanner's Guild's responsibility for The Fall of the Angels at both York and Chester is at least partially due to the profession's noxious fumes (137).

¹²⁵ C.M. Woolgar, *The Senses in Late Medieval England* (New Haven: Yale U.P., 2006): 123-4.

atmospheric, made all the more challenging because the heat and stench are unavoidable. The pervading stench is loaded down with cultural and religious significance. The devil's arrival and its signifiers of hell are a stark contrast to the worshipful city, with its ordered geography and altogether lack of smell. The Short Text may alternate between the world of the sickroom and the world of the vision, but the fiend can exist in both.

The jangling and “besines” the fiend brings into the sickroom turns it into a place of frenetic activity. The single devil seems to multiply, if not literally then figuratively, as the room suddenly becomes a parliament. This visual slipperiness (is it one fiend, a parliament of fiends, or a parliament of fiends in a single body?) bleeds into auditory slipperiness, heightening the scene's fear and discomfort. It is dissonant and multisensory, difficult to pin down and thus difficult to escape. Such discord is a trait common to medieval devils.¹²⁶ The fiend, though present only in Julian's visions and visible to no one else in the sickroom, is an external danger. Its noise, smell, and frenetic movement are formed out of the commotion of urban life at ground level where the worshipful city is seen from above and from within its most elevated edifice.

The devil's ability to straddle both the material and immaterial world sets it apart from previous visions. Though it is present in sight, smell, and sound, the besines the devil inspires “might nought be likned to na bodely besenes” (23.9-10). While the visionary experiences the devil physically, the text specifies that its danger is less bodily—in keeping with the same established system of priorities that places ghostly vision above bodily. It is curious then that Julian escapes this danger through focusing her bodily gaze on the material crucifix at her bedside:

¹²⁶ For instance, see Vincente Chacón Carmona's study of Spanish, French, and English religious drama, “Signing Shepherds, Discordant Devils: Music and Song in Medieval Pastoral Plays,” *Medieval English Theatre* 32 (2010): 62-80.

My bodelye eyen I sette on the same crosse that I hadde sene comfort in before that time, my tunge I occupied with speche of Cristes passion and rehersinge of the faith of haly kyrke, and my herte I festende on God with alle the triste and alle the might that was in me. And I thought to myself, menande: “Thowe hase nowe grete besines. Walde thowe nowe fra this time evermare be so besy to kepe the fro sinne, this ware a soferayne and a goode occupation.” (23.11-16)

In this way, Julian’s bodily vision can help overcome a ghostly threat. While the danger is both bodily and ghostly, so too is the solution. Julian sets her eyes upon the same crucifix that had initiated the visions and rehearses prayer aloud while directing her interior affect down well-worn devotional paths. She returns not to exegesis, text, or the other hallmarks of contemplative life in which she is already well-versed. Instead, she returns to the embodied religious practices outlined at the beginning of the Short Text.

By setting her eyes once more on the crucifix and reciting aloud while focusing on inward affect, she models a devotion that gathers up both bodily and ghostly into one practice. When Julian resolves to be “besy” in order to dismiss the fiend, she is proposing an alternative besines to the fiend’s jangling—one that relies equally on bodily and ghostly religious observance. Not only is Julian demonstrating this devotional, image-using kinship with readers and evencristene, as she does when first presenting her visionary persona: she is proposing it as a solution to the incorporeal threats the fiend represents. The material and immaterial devotional practices are not at odds, but work complementary to one another in religious life. In other words, what the tools and practices that enable Julian to dismiss the fiend are the tools and practices the text’s imagined readers might already employ.

Julian’s encounters with the devil are preserved in the decades-later Long Text, where they are expanded into bookends for the revelation of the worshipful city. Here too the fiend comes last, the sixteenth revelation a “conclusion and confirmation to all the fifteen” (66.2). If

the *Revelation* is generally seen to be a less autobiographical account of the visions, the fiend's entry is still notably focused around Julian's sickbed and her experiences. Where in the Short Text the fiend's presence is primarily olfactory and auditory, the Long Text cultivates a visual appearance to go alongside the constant stink and jangling. Indeed, his first appearance in the sickroom is related in a newly physical, visual sense while the Short Text's sounds and smells are moved to his second entry:

Ande in my slepe, at the beginning, methought the fende set him in my throte,
putting forth a visage fulle nere my face like a Yonge man, and it was longe and
wonder leen. I saw never none such. The coloure was red, like the tilestone whan
it is new brent, with blacke spottes therein like freknes, fouler than the tilestone.
His here was rede as rust, not scored afore, with side lockes hanging on the
thonwonges. He grinned upon me with a shrewde loke; shewde me whit teth and
so mekille, methought it the more ugly. Body ne hands had ne none shaply, but
with his pawes he helde me in the throte, and would have strangled m, but he
might not. (67.1-8)

The devil's human face is realized not in ecclesiastical terms, but in domestic ones: he is a young man made distinct by his hair and his burned-hearthstone complexion and animal paws.¹²⁷ His newly-embodied menace is both banal and bizarre. Watson and Jenkins note that "the physicality of the demonic assault in this passage is in accord with late medieval understandings of the devil's power to afflict the body through disease and illusion. According to *The Chastising*, holy men since antiquity have been 'chastised sodeynlie with bodily infirmittees, and sumtime grievously travelid with illusions of wikked spirites.'"¹²⁸ In her in-depth study of the devil in the medieval period, Joan Young Gregg shows that "the devil was frequently depicted as a creature dissolving the boundaries of natural species, a monster, humanoid in appearance but grotesquely

¹²⁷ According to the OED, usage of the word "paws" in this period applies only to animals (not as in present day when the word can describe human hands, usually in a derogatory manner)—cite definition

¹²⁸ See Watson and Jenkins's note on *A Revelation* 67.1 (332).

deviating from the shape of man.”¹²⁹ The paws are as much a part of the devil as its human face, his interspecies appearance a part of long-established visual norms. Where the Short Text grapples with his hallucinatory physical presence—one devil or two, or many—the Long Text focuses it into a single, recognizable but strange body of many voices.

What stands out in this description as unusual among contemporary depictions of devils is the color of his face as “red, like the tilestone when it is new brent.” By the fifteenth century in England devils were portrayed in racialized terms.¹³⁰ As both Woolgar and (in much greater length) Gregg show, this was evidently not a recent cultural development that an anchorite might have missed in enclosure. “By the end of the sixth century, black skin was an indication of evil...The black man or ‘Ethiopian’ had become synonymous with the Devil and was to remain so throughout the Middle Ages, although sometimes any dark colour, however improbable to a modern mind, sufficed to delineate evil.”¹³¹ Julian’s depiction of the devil as red with black freckles does not play quite so neatly into these visual tropes, although the devil’s red skin and possibly its hairstyle overlap with anti-Semitic portrayals of Jews in manuscript illumination. The devil’s description plays especially into extant animal, olfactory, and auditory tropes. The text’s focus here is on the devil’s pervasiveness even and especially in the materials of home.

The collections at the Norwich Castle Museum show that reds or burnt oranges were not uncommon glazes for contemporary ceramic tiles. As with the hazelnut and particularly Cecilia, the text takes an image and twists it in a different direction. Realizing the devil in quotidian terms makes the threat omnipresent, setting readers up to see the fiend in daily life. The fiend’s

¹²⁹ Joan Young Gregg, *Devils, Women, and Jews: Reflections of the Other in Medieval Sermon Stories* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997): 34.

¹³⁰ Woolgar cites *Jacob’s Well* as a fifteenth-century example of this trend. For more information on racialized depictions of devils, see D.H. Verkerk, “Black servant, black demon: color ideology in the Asburnham Pentateuch,” *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 31 (2001): 55-77 as well as Joan Young Gregg, cited above.

¹³¹ *The Senses in Late Medieval England* 162.

sickroom presence seems as inevitable as Christ's, and the training offered by this encounter prepares readers for that perceived eventuality, using common domestic imagery to concretize an abstract diabolical threat. The adaptation process applies to the fiend as much as it applies to Julian's less alarming passages. The fiend is no virgin martyr, but with both figures the text models reinterpreting conventional imagery to suit a broad late medieval readership.

The devil is therefore even more of a local presence than the worshipful city, constructed as it is of household material in a way reminiscent of earlier descriptions of blood running down Christ's face "like to the droppes of water that falle of the evesing of an house after a grete shower of raine, that falle so thicke that no man may number them with no bodely wit. And for the roundhede, they were like to the scale of hering, in the spreding of the forhede" (7.17-20). Like Christ's form or a hazelnut into "alle there is," blood is transmogrified into one kind of matter and then another as the literal image twists into a more abstract one. Where the devil's face is the color of tile, the blood on Christ's face washes down as water does over the eaves of a house after a heavy rain. The unceasing movement of water is also the unceasing flow of blood, a cozy (or damp) domestic image standing in for a more violent one. Frederick Bauerschmidt finds that excessive bleeding salvific, an image the text explores in this vision and in later ones as Christ's body tortuously begins to dry out.¹³² In this scene, the water drops are too many to be counted; text uses them to meditate on the Passion, standing in for excessive blood. The moving drops and the scene's kinesthesia cannot be contained in a stationary iconography, the image in constant motion in a way the technologies behind painting or sculpture cannot fully capture. This more quotidian metaphor serves the dual purpose of conveying that salvific blood while evoking

¹³² Frederick Bauerschmidt, *Julian of Norwich and the Mystical Body Politic of Christ* (University of Notre Dame Press: Notre Dame, 1999), 87.

devotional experience from everyday material. The everyday image is both metaphorically complex and no longer two-dimensional.

Watson, Jenkins, and many others have long read Norwich and Norfolk into both Long and Short Texts, and here the herring (if not the rain) is particularly East Anglian.¹³³ Elizabeth Rutledge describes herring as “the major trade” of thirteenth- and fourteenth-century East Anglia, with Great Yarmouth supplying Norwich and the midlands with mass numbers of the fish.¹³⁴ Although the industry declined over the course of the fourteenth century and especially after the Black Death, fish including herring remained a significant natural and economic resource for the region.¹³⁵ The devotional practices that go into reading images of the crucifixion in church or studying the lives of saints are here brought to bear on elements of daily life, Norwich-specific or not. The vision’s meditation on the Passion and Christ’s blood is realized through household and local material, a depiction that eases some of the anxieties wrought over the similarly domestic devil. If one awaits the unsuspecting reader at home, so too does the other. The visions show Julian and the evencristene she summons both Christ and the devil within the scope of daily life, amplifying both her more hopeful conception of oneing with Christ and the fiend’s threat. These images, ordinary and recognizable to the all-encompassing evencristene, lead to the same--or perhaps even more vivid--religious experiences as more typically devotional materials and practices. This pattern of adaptation demonstrates for imagined readers what past-

¹³³ See Watson and Jenkins’s note on ST 10.19, that the “blawinge of wind” over the crucified body is reminiscent of “a cold east wind from the North Sea.” See also Cate Gunn’s essay connecting images in local churches to the visions, “‘A reculuse atte Norwyche’: Images of Medieval Norwich and Julian’s Revelations” in *A Companion to Julian of Norwich* edited by Liz Herbert McAvoy (Cambridge: DS Brewer, 2008), 32-41.

¹³⁴ Elizabeth Rutledge, “Norwich before the Black Death” in *Medieval Norwich* ed. Carole Rawcliffe and Richard Wilson (Hambleton and London: New York, 2004), 174-5.

¹³⁵ See Penelope Dunn’s essay, “Trade,” in the same volume: “In the early part of our period [mid-1300s] Yarmouth merchants dominated the fish trade: only five Norwich citizens, William Gerard, John Palmer, John Pope, William Stalon and Reginald de Norwich, apparently challenged this monopoly. By the end of the fifteenth century, however, their astute successors had moved into the herring industry, presumably capitalising on the long-term decline of the port and collapse of its mercantile community by the 1470s” (220-221).

Julian herself practiced as she shifted from Cecilia's wounds to her own: devotional objects or experiences are not limited to those explicitly classified as sacred. Rather, the text models a piety for its readers in which new spiritual content can be found in the world.

Reading Images Inside and Outside of the Text

The Long Text does not excise the worshipful city, but it expounds on worldly power structures there most especially in the addition of the lord and servant parable. In this vision, political, domestic, and religious meaning twine together in the text's visualization of the relationship between god and human devotee. The lord and servant are at first generic figures, as "I sawe two persons in bodely liknesse, that is to sey, a lorde and a servant, and therwith God gave me gostly understanding. The lorde sitteth solempnely in rest and in pees. The servant stondest before his lorde reverently, redy to do his wille" (51.6-10). The Short Text's description of Christ in the worshipful city ("cledde solemplye in wyrshippes. He sites in the saule even right in pees and reste...") returns in these opening lines to describe a lord ruling over a servant. As the text goes on to reveal, the lord and servant here are not generic figures but are God and Adam (standing in for all men) and then God and Christ (51.192-2010). With each reiteration, the vision takes on a new shape. At the same time, however, the real world power structures illustrate the text's imagining of heavenly power structures in a familiar and graspable way: as Christ rules the worshipful city from within its centers of governance, so too does the lord rule the servant.

Like the hazelnut, the decipherable lord-servant image is, over the course of its different permutations, increasingly made to signify something much greater and more abstract than itself. The length of this passage, as well as the sheer number of permutations, make the parable

especially unstable. The servant's clothing in particular is described, re-described, revealed, and changed completely as the story is told and retold through several cycles of exegesis. First, "it seemed by his outward clothing as he had been a continual laborer and an hard traveler of long time" (153-4). But while the servant's clothes mark him as "a laborer...with alle the mischefe and febilnesse that foloweth," he shares his position with Christ—who, as the text reveals, is as much the servant as Adam (193-4). In this new context, the kirtel is also Christ's flesh, "the singlehede is that ther was right not between the godhede and the manhede. The straighthede is poverté. The elde is of Adams wering. The defauting is the swete of Adams traveyle. The shorthede sheweth the servant laborar" (207-210). The kirtel (which is also now skin) is shaped with new significance as the Christ-servant interpretation is added to the vision, every piece of its making laden with meaning from each of the parable's readings: servant, Adam, Christ. In each of those readings, however, it is marked by physical work and hardship. The servant's position before the lord is defined by that labor, and his willingness to uphold his part in the lord-servant hierarchy is his most valued quality.

The kirtel's final appearance sees it made new again after it is marked by the violence of the Passion. There are hardly enough superlatives to describe the transformed clothing-skin:

Oure foule dedely flesh, that Goddes son toke upon him—which was Adams olde kirtel, straite, bare, and shorte—then by oure savioure was made fair, new, whit, and bright, and of endlesse clenness, wide and side, fair and richar than was the clothing which I saw on the fader. For that clothing was blew, and Cristes clothing is now of fair, semely medolour which is so mervelous that I can it not describe, for it is all of very wurshippe. (259-64)

Now the metaphor and the language used to describe it are insufficient for conveying the reality of the new kirtel. Having cycled through lord and servant, God and Adam, and God and Christ, the image's limit is evidently the resurrected body. The vision sequence as a whole has laid out

an illustration of the evencristene's relation to centers of ecclesiastical governance first in terms of civic or domestic politics, but has moved from that original configuration into a multilayered religious exegesis. Like the city and the hazelnut before it, the lord and servant make concrete the abstract theology and dreamlike vision-world—but to a point. In the end, each of these devices is found lacking, its literal sense unable to fully convey.

In the speculative revisions between Short and Long Texts, those earlier-drafted images and key scenes are drawn out and unfolded with measured exegesis, divided and separated out into all their moving parts. From first demonstrating usership of devotional images to employing them in recounting visionary experience, the Short Text aims for readers who are equally accustomed to accessing religious emotion and education through visual reading and metaphor. But the images' at-times obfuscating qualities demand more than the simple reliance church authorities and dissenters feared, and this imprecision is amplified in the Long Text by its cyclical reiteration and exegesis. Devices such as the hazelnut might be pedagogical crutches, just imprecise enough to avoid becoming icons. But the image and its nonliteral qualities also speak to the readerly and devotional skill level of the readers imagined in the Short Text: aided by image but capable of grasping the abstract all the same.

The most well-known of images in Julian's theology exhibits markedly less instability. Jesus as mother is introduced in the fifty-eighth chapter, immediately following the parable, which from then through the rest of the fourteenth revelation elucidates all the ways in which that motherhood holds sway over the lives of evencristene. God as father, mother, and lord does not change shape and meaning in the same way the parable is made to do, and instead becomes a refrain, a steady fact within the text's theology to which it can return again and again. It retroactively offers an additional framing for the lord and servant parable, one in which a parent

allows a child to learn by making and recovering from mistakes. Rather than revising the parable, the mother-child frame offers a new relational depth. It also preemptively justifies Julian's testing encounter with the fiend: in a text that proposes universal salvation, the fiend's presence could seem an incongruous one.¹³⁶ But in light of both the parable and Christ as mother, the trial by fiend becomes a necessary step in Julian's spiritual development where she is both Adam and child of mother Christ. The child and the parable's servant show that such development is gained through trial and experience, and the Julian presented by the text now reinforces this proposition by successfully, if arduously, resisting the sickroom fiend.

The Christ imagery mediates the challenging kirtel, narrows the text's interpretive possibilities in advance of the final devil episode and the vision's end. As free as readers have been to see many meanings coexisting in one image, here Christ is mother is mother is mother. For a text that, compared to some of its contemporaries, betrays precious little anxiety over the possibility that it might be misread, this narrowing signifies a point of emphasis rather than a point of contention. The text calls on the long-lived monastic and mystical tradition of Christ as mother in a new context, one that has throughout its length fostered readers' capabilities to envision the sacred in any sphere of life.¹³⁷ In this new model of devotion, reading, and seeing, the sacred is both immanent and transcendent, everywhere and on no human plain.

The localized immediacy of these unconventionally devotional images works with a wide swath of imagined readers, using commonalities rather than divisions to appeal to readers on a scale compatible with the vastness of the term *evencristene*. These household images, smells, and

¹³⁶ See Jay Ruud, "Julian of Norwich and Piers Plowman: The Allegory of the Incarnation and Universal Salvation," *Studies in Medieval and Renaissance Teaching* 13.1 (2006): 63-84 and Jeanette S. Zissell, "Universal Salvation in the Earthly City: De Civitate Dei and the Significance of the Hazelnut in Julian of Norwich's Showings" in *Urban Space in the Middle Ages and the Early Modern Age* ed. Classen, Albrecht (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2009): 331-351.

¹³⁷ For much more on this tradition, see Caroline Walker Bynum's *Jesus As Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982).

sounds are on equal footing with the more formalized religious edification outlined at the beginning of the Short Text; using the color of the devil's face or the abstracted hazelnut to access that religious edification is, in these texts, just as valid as doing the same through the exemplum of St. Cecilia or visual depictions of the crucifixion. And at the root of the text, Julian herself is both visionary progenitor and avatar, an image to be read and a model to be followed: a stable narrative source and a vanishing one, ceding ground as mystic narrator to the evencristene who read and experience affectively through a body of words.

CHAPTER III

Readers' Diverse and Devout Ymaginacions

An anchorite, even one in England's second-largest city and with a substantial regional following, might not reasonably anticipate that her text would be copied and recopied into a wide historical readership. The evencristene exist independently of the prospect of actual circulation. But other projects could imagine wide readership and expect, to the extent possible before print technology in Europe, a wide realized readership. Nicholas Love's *Mirror of the Life of Jesus Christ*, an entry into one of the most popular genres of the day, written by a distinguished clergyman, endorsed eventually by Archbishop Arundel, is one such project. The *Mirror* consistently acknowledges and makes space for alternative modes of reading and alternative versions of the life of Christ, structuring in an essential interpretive range that recognizes readers' immersion in a sea of extant lives of Christ. How does imagined reading, and readerly autonomy with it, change when a text's imagined readership is accompanied by the prospect of real, widespread circulation and readership?

As his *Mirror of the Life of Jesus Christ* comes to an end, Nicholas Love offers some parting instructions that open up reading rather than bring it to a close: "...it semeth to me beste that euery deuout creature that loueth to rede or here this boke.' take the partes therof as it semeth most comfortable & stiryng to his deuocion, syntyne, one & sumtyme an other, & specialy in the tymes of the yere & the festes ordeynet in holy chirche, as the matires bene

pertheynt to hem” (222.37-44). Having toured key moments in Christ’s life and absorbed Love’s other directives on how to process the text, readers and listeners are deferred to here and throughout to customize their own experience of the *Mirror*. The speaker imagines readers encountering the text in different materialities and mentalities, incorporating it in different ways into their individual devotional practices. The *Mirror* reminds readers that it is one life of Christ among many, self-conscious of its place within a genre that traverses media, language, and form, and self-conscious, too, of how like it produces its own readings. It is keenly aware that where multiple readings exist, so too do erroneous or hazardous “misreadings” that make it vulnerable to allegations of impropriety. Even so, the text repeatedly acknowledges not just perceived misreadings but a multitude of alternatives formed by a subjective readership already enmeshed in lives of Christ. A text known for exerting control over its readers is thus also a text that allows multiple readings.

This chapter foregrounds the *Mirror* as a text written perhaps up to a decade before that approbation, participating in the popular genre of meditations on the life of Christ. Multiple versions of Christ’s life in multiple languages circulated across England and Europe up to the Reformation and identifying with Christ or his companions particularly at the scene of his death became a cornerstone of religious practice. The genre crosses media and literary forms, with episodes from Christ’s life everywhere from church décor to lyrics and pageant plays to mystic visions in addition to the literary narratives of Christ’s life represented in this chapter. Using two such narratives, this chapter explores how tropes of the reader or readership balance lay demands for spiritual autonomy with the demands of a religious establishment needing to retain its own authority. As the primary focus, the *Mirror* blends affective modes with scholastic exegesis, explicitly and implicitly imagining a body of readers whose range of abilities, prior knowledge,

and educational background is wider and more advanced than critics have previously established. Set against the c. 1400 *Meditations on the Life and Passion of Jesus Christ*, extant in one manuscript, the *Mirror* offers its imagined readers an interpretive autonomy that shows it to be a text particularly interested in empowering them. Where the *Meditations* foreclose interpretive possibility through a paradoxically authority-making univocal persona, the *Mirror* explicitly and implicitly engages with and does not overrule the depth of experience and perspective inherent to a wide imagined readership. Both versions of the life of Christ navigate the demands and hazards of a hungry-to-read laity to alternately give and take away interpretive—and religious—autonomy. Ultimately, they show that lay autonomy in reading-based religious edification can and does fall within the borders of orthodoxy.

Both texts balance between scripting the desired affective response of their imagined readers and leaving it unscripted and unregulated. While the *Mirror*'s aims for controlling potentially unruly readers have long been a defining part of its reputation among modern scholars, putting the text into conversation with the *Meditations* shows that prescribing readings and responses in this genre is hardly unique to Love's translation. In both the *Mirror* and the *Meditations*, control is executed by explicitly outlining, modeling, scripting, or prescribing an affective response (before, after, or during the meditation itself). As Shannon Gayk writes of the *Mirror*'s regulatory imagery, "images and imaginative texts provide sufficient basic instruction and allow a degree of imaginative freedom but do not lead a layperson to the sort of abstract speculation that could prompt theological questions."¹³⁸ However, to characterize the *Mirror*'s and the *Meditations*' relation to their imagined readers solely in terms of suppression and regulation misses the gaps in that affective prescriptivism—moments when a meditation is

¹³⁸ Introduction to *Image, Text, and Religious Reform in Fifteenth-Century England* (New York: Cambridge UP, 2010): 13.

related without specific instructions or with instructions that acknowledge more than one interpretation. Through such gaps, these two lives of Christ open up and close down interpretive possibilities for the readers they imagine. Studying these possibilities is a matter of form—as the *Mirror* blends exegesis and affect, as the *Meditations* dig deeply into affect, and as the former employs a collective speaking voice while the latter collapses multiple voices into a single one.

This chapter first looks to the *Mirror*'s explicit construction of readers, reevaluating its opening self-description in terms of its imagined and real circulation. It then goes on to examine the ways “drawynge oute” the meditations with exegesis and corrective instruction both does and does not exert control over individual readings before focusing on the passion sequence's integrated use of affect and scholasticism. The chapter closes by transporting these findings to the c. 1400 lyric *Meditations on the Life and Passion of Jesus Christ*, finding there a life of Christ whose interpretive certainty stands out as a contrast to the *Mirror*'s. Even there, however, narrative control lends readers authority in strange and intriguing ways. Both texts reveal a medium-crossing literary narrative invested in the experiences of its imagined readers and interested in how those experiences differ from reader to reader. They show that the practice of characterizing orthodoxy as a single, unified reading of scripture in the face of subversive alternative readings is insufficient. The *Meditations* and the *Mirror* show that lay readers could themselves be figures of authority independent of conventional church and literary hierarchies.

The popularity of lives of Christ narratives is contextualized in this chapter by growing lay demand for a measure of spiritual autonomy and by lay readers' ability to navigate at-times complex theological principles. In his history of passion narratives, Thomas Bestul describes the fifteenth century as “in many respects the great age of Western European devotional writing, and

the Passion of Christ was at the center of it.”¹³⁹ The “immense popularity and influence in the later middle ages” of the Latin *Meditationes* also convey the brisk seller’s market for religious literature.¹⁴⁰ “Literally hundreds of manuscripts survive of the original Latin text and the various vernacular translations...Fisher described 113 surviving manuscripts of the Latin *Meditationes*, including forty-four (the largest single national group) in English libraries.”¹⁴¹ This level of circulation implies a popularity that crossed clerical-lay boundaries, and it is in this environment that Love makes his own English translation. With a historically proven audience for lives of Christ—and especially for Pseudo-Bonaventure’s—a real-world audience could be envisioned even before the *Mirror* began the process of being copied and circulated, so long as nothing interfered with it undergoing that process. Love’s imagined audience, summoned rhetorically throughout the meditations, reflects that anticipated reception. At the same time, the *Meditations* attests to the fact that a life of Christ did not unlock wide readership by default, and this version likely never aspired to do so. The *Meditations* is a product of a patron-centered model of literary production, where the *Mirror* is not. The circumstances surrounding each text’s production factor into how they envision their readers.

The *Mirror* and the *Meditations* were entering into a manuscript culture that was actively producing texts for lay as well as clerical consumption. It might be a mistake to characterize the line between the two markets, never as well-defined as the boundary between Latin literacy and vernacular, as much of a line at all. After all, the *Mirror*’s many authorial margin notations are in Latin, suggesting that Love did not see a Latinate audience as at odds

¹³⁹ Thomas Bestul, *Texts of the Passion: Latin Devotional Literature and Medieval Society* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996), 60.

¹⁴⁰ Sargent, introduction to *The Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ: A Reading Text* (Exeter, Devon: University of Exeter Press, 2004), xix.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*

with (or as separate from) a Bernardian image-dependent one. The challenge here, then, is how to work with readers of potentially quite different backgrounds. Both texts manage this in part through the rhetorical figure of a reader or readers, summoned alternately for instruction or to produce a specific emotional response—for example, to feel compassion for Mary while she searches for her young son and eventually finds him in the temple. This rhetorical figure is as active when it is explicitly called upon to model learning and affect as it is when occupying areas where the text is silent on those matters, representing instead the open possibilities of reader-based interpretation. For both lives of Christ, the imagined reader gets the last word.

The Prescriptive *Mirror* and its Gaps

In his prohemium to Pseudo-Bonaventure's introduction, Nicholas Love spends a great deal of time describing his motivations for producing a translation and the needs of audience he imagines consuming it. Love cites Gregory and Bernard as justifications for the *Mirror*'s existence as a source for those who need to encounter scripture and feelings of religious devotion through image more than text (with image apparently interpreted in a literary sense).¹⁴² The *Mirror* is for those who do not or cannot read religious texts in Latin, the "simple soule", for "symple creatures", and for "lewde men & women & hem that bene of simple vndirstondyng" (10.28, 14, 6). Although contemporary definitions of a "simple" person can signify ignorance or lack of education, in devotional texts especially the word is also applied to "an innocent or a guileless person; a righteous person; -- also coll.; (b) a humble or modest person; (c) a person of low

¹⁴² Bernard: "contemplacion of the monhede of cryste is more liking more spedefull & more sykere than is hyge contemplacion of the godhead ande therefore to hem is principally to be sette in mynde the ymage of crystes Incarnacion passion & Resurreccion." And Gregory: "therfore is the kyngdome of heuene likenet to erthly thinges.' that by thot hinges that bene visible & that man kindly knoweth" (10. 23-28, 10.37-39).

degree; a poor person.”¹⁴³ The *Mirror* may well be aimed at the less educated, as its citation of Bernard suggests, but it is also—and probably to a greater degree—aimed at simple readers in the other senses of the word.¹⁴⁴ In addition, it seems to conjure its readers less by their gender than is often assumed in affective writings.¹⁴⁵ Rather, the *Mirror* imagines that wider simple audience, describing itself as “devoute ymaginacions & likenessis styryng simple soules to the loue of god & desire of heuenly thinges” (10.35-7). As Love makes clear with this pronouncement and by leaning on the well-established statements of theological authorities, the *Mirror* is to be tableaux of meditational images in text form into which men and women can imagine themselves and can then be educated in some of the tenets of their religion.

Analyses of the *Mirror* have sometimes focused on the text’s attempts to exert control over potential misreadings, which in turn characterize the *Mirror*’s work as providing meditative or affective religiosity rather than theological education for its readers. Love was to produce a theological work that was suitable for a wide range of inquiring minds without prompting those minds to seek spiritual edification too much outside of formal institutional structures, and inherent in this depiction of the text’s creation is the assumption that theological education would be more difficult to control than affective piety.¹⁴⁶ In this sense, the text gives and takes away;

¹⁴³ “Simple.” *Middle English Dictionary* (MED). Ann Arbor: University of Michigan. quod.lib.umich.edu/m/med/
<http://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/m/mec/med-idx?type=byte&byte=180779469&egdisplay=compact&egs=180783802&egs=180839165>

¹⁴⁴ The *Mirror* is “moste spedefull & edifying to hem that bene [of] simple undirstondyng to the which simple soules as seynt Bernerde seye contemplacion of the monhede of cryste is more liking more spedefull & more sykere than is hyge contemplacion of the godhed...” (10.22-26).

¹⁴⁵ Caroline Walker Bynum sets out “certain devotional emphases...to Christ’s suffering humanity” as a hallmark of affective piety in particular as it was practiced by women, but the genre in which the *Mirror* participates is not quite so gender-specific in its origins or direction (*Holy Feast and Holy Fast* [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987], 26).

¹⁴⁶ The narrative of the text’s tight interpretive control works in the tradition of Nicholas Watson’s foundational 1995 article “Censorship and Cultural Change.” In 1999, Steven Justice argues, “The *Mirror* shows what Arundel imagined as the proper use of the Bible among the laity: its brief translations of biblical Latin are swamped by detailed verisimilar narrative that in effect interprets the translations into a purely meditative, rather than theological, significance. Arundel, in other words, wanted less to outlaw biblical translation than to regulate its use, and suppress the parallel culture of theological discussion.” Ralph Hanna characterizes the *Mirror* as “a highly appropriate,

readers are supplied with just enough information and autonomy to feel empowered and for their discontent to be assuaged.¹⁴⁷ This textual-religious regulation carries over into the text's construction of readership. Love's interjections taking Lollardy to task and addressing hallmarks of that movement's theology, together with his keen awareness of the multitude of readers and readings the *Mirror* would produce, show anxiety over potential audience reactions and a desire to limit undesirable interpretations. The text's affective meditations, therefore, exist to control readers in ways this vein of scholarship judges exposure to more theologically advanced texts cannot.

Kantik Ghosh writes of Love's "extraordinary degree of self-consciousness about his undertaking," an undertaking that by the early fifteenth century was inherently a politicized one.¹⁴⁸ I am distancing the *Mirror* from the Memorandum in part because of its dating and circulation and in part because, as Mary Raschko writes, "while helpful for understanding the sharp contention that could arise over biblical translation, this dichotomy [the *Mirror* as controlling and the Wycliffite Bible as open] obscures our understanding of the texts positioned at these poles and of the scriptural texts that fall somewhere in between."¹⁴⁹ Indeed, lives of Christ in general and Love's *Mirror* specifically were drawn into the late medieval English Lollardy controversy and used by people on all sides of the issues at stake there. As Mishtooni

politically sanctioned book" ("The Difficulty of Ricardian Prose Translation: The Case of the Lollards" in *Modern Language Quarterly* [51.3: 1990], 330). Citing Nicholas Watson, Nicole Rice sees a "new conservatism in some of the first devotional works to take advantage of Arundel's official *imprimatur*," including the *Mirror* (*Lay Piety and Religious Discipline in Middle English Literature* [New York: Cambridge, 2008], 133-4). For recent work on the *Mirror* that views it through the lens of Lollardy (and less through Arundel himself), see Karnes ("Nicholas Love and Medieval Meditations on Christ" *Speculum* [82.2: 2007], 380-408 and Gayk (*Image, Text, and Religious Reform in Fifteenth-Century England* [New York: Cambridge UP, 2010]).

¹⁴⁷ Steven Justice, "Lollardy," *The Cambridge History of Medieval English Literature*, ed. David Wallace (New York: Cambridge UP, 1999), 678.

¹⁴⁸ "Nicholas Love," *A Companion to Middle English Prose*, ed. A.S.G. Edwards (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2004): 54.

¹⁴⁹ Mary Raschko, "Oon of Fouere: Harmonizing Wycliffite and Pseudo-Bonaventurean Approaches to the Life of Christ," *The Pseudo-Bonaventurean Lives of Christ*, 341.

Bose argues of Wycliffite sermons on the life of Christ, the life's "authority also legitimized diverse forms of exegetical creativity that make the Wycliffite sermons not only a complex and distinctive intellectual world in themselves but also a late-flourishing, but clearly recognizable offshoot, of the intellectual creativity that had long been fostered in the medieval schools."¹⁵⁰ The ensuing "challenge of developing hermeneutic principles that allowed for adjudication between the variety of interpretations to which scriptural texts could give rise" exposes that natural variety as inherent in orthodox theology.¹⁵¹ In this context, the *Mirror* explicitly welcomes alternative interpretations of Christ's life within the bounds of orthodoxy, and it implicitly understands those interpretations to be grounded in lay readings of scripture and non-scriptural representations of the Passion.

In this vein, lives of Christ "invite readers and listeners...to imagine themselves as present within the Gospel narrative, which is the focus of emotional and moral reflection and teaching. How to live, what to believe, how to feel, and how to be saved: this eloquent tradition is a gauge of lived religious sensibility without equal in the English later Middle Ages."¹⁵² David Falls examines the *Mirror* within its monastic contexts to find that "Love's impulse to translate and quite pointedly adapt the *Meditationes* could be explained in terms of his pastoral role as Prior of the Mount Grace Charterhouse."¹⁵³ In 2014, Katie Ann-Marie Bugyis argues that "it does not rest as easily within the categories of 'conservative', 'institutionalizing', or 'hierarchizing' theology

¹⁵⁰ Mishtooni Bose, "Reversing the Life of Christ: Dissent, Orthodoxy, and Affectivity in Late Medieval England," *The Pseudo-Bonaventurean Lives of Christ*, 61-2.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 62.

¹⁵² Ian Johnson and Allan F. Westphall, introduction to *The Pseudo-Bonaventurean Lives of Christ: Exploring the Middle English Tradition* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2013), 2.

¹⁵³ David Falls, "The Carthusian Milieu of Nicholas Love's *Mirror*," *The Pseudo-Bonaventurean Lives of Christ*, 315. "It seems clear that one of Love's principal audiences would have included the enclosed religious of his own order. In fact, a number of the additions and modifications Love makes to his Latin source focus on specifically Carthusian practices....suggesting the residents of his own house and members of his own order were very much at the forefront of his mind as he transformed the *Meditationes* into the *Mirror*" (David Falls, "'þou þat art solitarye': The *Mirror* and the charterhouse," *Nicholas Love's Mirror and Late Medieval Devotio-Literary Culture: Theological Politics and Devotional Practice in Fifteenth-Century England* [New York: Routledge, 2016]: 33).

as some scholars have argued,” and that the *Mirror* is more concerned with pastoral care than such narratives permit us to realize.¹⁵⁴ The *Mirror*’s relation to the institutional church exists alongside its pastoral relation to the perceived needs of its imagined readers.

Other recent work affirms the *Mirror*’s affectivity less through suspicious reading and more through the matter of Love’s place relative to affectivity and femininity, in the footsteps of Caroline Walker Bynum. Sarah McNamer reads the *Mirror* as a text seeking to “initiate the reader into feminine identity through inviting identification with Mary” and “the fiction of femininity.”¹⁵⁵ The *Mirror*’s model of piety is one that “depends not only on the reader’s identification with the Virgin and other female figures in the text but also more specifically on learning to see, or more pointedly to behold, like a woman.”¹⁵⁶ The *Mirror*’s modes of devotion, used by McNamer to reframe the history of affective piety and recover the roles women played in it, together with its widespread reception, offer wide windows into fifteenth-century religious culture and subcultures. The affectivity of the text is due less to its effort to placate or control readers and more to this devotional mode’s recovered origins. This move to recategorize the *Mirror* and its modes is especially productive, as it moves away from the older convention that sees the text and its contexts as products of several decades of push-and-pull between orthodox and heterodox parties. In other words, we are beginning to understand the *Mirror* as a text that is not only defined by its context within official orthodox responses to Lollardy.

Ryan Perry, writing in a collection of essays coming out of the Geographies of Orthodoxy project, directs the *Mirror* away from affectivity in a move that reclassifies the text

¹⁵⁴ Katie Ann-Marie Bugyis, “Through the Looking Glass: Reflections of Christ’s ‘Trewe Louers’ in Nicholas Love’s *Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ*,” *Devotional Culture in Late Medieval England and Europe: Diverse Imaginations of Christ’s Life* ed. by Stephen Kelly and Ryan Perry, MCS 31 (Turnhout: Brepols 2014), 463.

¹⁵⁵ Sarah McNamer, *Affective Meditation and the Invention of Medieval Compassion* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), 132, 133.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 134.

altogether. For Perry, the *Mirror* is designed to evoke emotional responses from readers and this is borne out by manuscript evidence possibly showing that the “ideal reader” for whom this might have been the case was more than ready to read affectively as an act of devotion. But Perry also proposes a critical shift in the way we see the *Mirror*, where “Love’s book is so much more than a mere Passion text or only an exercise in affective piety. Meditation is not only put in the service of inspiring transformative emotive response but is deployed as part of multifarious strategies for the edification of the author’s imagined audience.” The *Mirror* is thus less a book of meditations to be envisioned and vicariously experienced and more “a didactic handbook structuring devotional and meditative practice” in the vein of what Nicole Rice terms “lay spiritual rules” or “religious handbooks.”¹⁵⁷ Here classified as a handbook, Love’s project becomes even more regulatory of its readers. What is most interesting, however, is Perry’s move away from classifying the *Mirror* as a work of affectivity and more of edification. The *Mirror* sees itself as both providing meditative material and, more significantly, instruction—instruction that at times expects a certain amount of theological sophistication or aptitude from its lay and clerical readers.

I deliberately distance the *Mirror*, written ca. 1400, from the official approval it received a decade later. I contextualize it instead within the large, popular, multilingual and multimedia tradition of meditations on the life and Passion of Christ. A.I. Doyle has established from extant manuscripts that the *Mirror* was circulating before Arundel’s *Memorandum* and the Geographies of Orthodoxy project has further supported this pre-*Memorandum* dating.¹⁵⁸ “Neither of the two

¹⁵⁷ Ryan Perry, “‘Some sprytuall matter of gostly edyfycacion’: Readers and Readings of Nicholas Love’s *Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ*” in *The Pseudo-Bonaventuran Lives of Christ*, ed. Ian R. Johnson and Allan F. Westphall (Turnhout: Brepols, 2013), 79-84.

¹⁵⁸ “Although Arundel’s approbation c. 1410 was sought before the book was *freely* communicated, a restricted communication to devout souls such as those for whom it was written is not thereby excluded and may indeed be implied. Copies which seem never to have contained the *Memorandum* may be or descend from such a previous issue and may correspond to the state of the unrevised form in Add. 6578 or even an earlier version” (A.I. Doyle,

manuscripts dated (on paleographic and art-historical grounds) to the beginning of the fifteenth century have the ‘Memorandum’; of those produced later in the first quarter of the century, MS Mu [Bodleian Library MS e Museo 35], which probably belonged to Margaret Neville, the wife of Thomas Beaufort, lacked the ‘Memorandum’ as, originally, did MS A1 [Cambridge University Library MS Additional 6578], into which it has been added by another hand.”¹⁵⁹ In other words, two copies are likely to predate the *Memorandum*, and other copies of less certain or of later dating also do not contain it—including MS A1, which provides the base for Michael Sargent’s definitive edition.¹⁶⁰ Arguing that the *Mirror* was “aimed...at an initial audience of Carthusian novices and lay-brothers, the text is repurposed by Love at a later stage, as a rebuttal of the Wycliffite heresy,” David Falls uses the case of the *Meditationes* in Ripon Cathedral Library, MS xvii B. 29 to support a pre-*Constitutions* dating. The manuscript belonged to Mount Grace in 1400, “during the period in which Love was making his translation.”¹⁶¹ It seems possible enough to consider that readers encountered the *Mirror* before the *Memorandum*, and certainly afterward they continued to encounter it without the *Memorandum* in a number of copies. Apart from Arundel’s approbation, the *Mirror* is unusual in its regularity across manuscript copies,

“Reflections on Some Manuscripts of Nicholas Love’s *Myrroure of the Blessed Lyf of Jesu Christ*” in *Studies in English* [14: 1983], 86).

¹⁵⁹ Sargent, “Patterns of Textual Affiliation in the Manuscripts of Nicholas Love’s *Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ*” in *Geographies of Orthodoxy* <http://www.qub.ac.uk/geographies-of-orthodoxy/resources/affiliations.php>

¹⁶⁰ “All later manuscripts, as well as the incunabula, which also belong to the **α1** affiliational group, have it. No **α2** manuscript of whatever date has the ‘Memorandum’; all complete **α3** manuscripts do. In the **α** textual tradition, the ‘Memorandum’ invariably follows the ‘Attende’ note, after the Table of Contents, at the head of the text. Two-thirds of the **β** manuscripts lack the ‘Memorandum’: it occurs in only one **β1** copy of the first quarter of the fifteenth century, MS Ry2, and four other, later manuscripts; it is not found in the **β2** affiliational group. In **β**, the ‘Memorandum’ occurs following the ‘Treatise on the Sacrament’, at the end of the text. The ‘Memorandum’ also occurs at the end of the text in one-third of the **γ** manuscripts: the mid- to late-fifteenth century **γ1** MSS Tr1 and Ha, and the three mid-century London **γ2** MSS Wa, Pm2 and Sc. All of these manuscripts show evidence elsewhere of contamination with the **β** tradition; other **γ** manuscripts lack the ‘Memorandum’.” Ibid.

¹⁶¹ Falls, “Carthusian Milieu,” 336, 313-14.

“presumably...because it was intended as an orthodox answer to Lollard agitation for the translation of scriptures.”¹⁶²

If the inclusion or exclusion of the approbation from one manuscript to another alters our understanding of how historical readers could read the *Mirror*, so too do other material factors. Several *Mirror* manuscripts are illustrated, including Pierpont Morgan Library MS 648 (c. 1440) and to a much lesser extent Pierpont Morgan Library MS 226 (c. 1450). The illumination on fol 2v of MS 648 envisions the text’s composition: Pseudo-Bonaventure is seated at a desk, wearing clerical robes and alone in a windowed room. The writer exists in solitude, excised from the monastery or the scriptorium, a figure that might also be read as Love himself. The scene’s privacy resonates with trends in private reading, the book written and relayed directly from Bonaventure’s room to the manuscript’s owner. MS 648’s fourteen subsequent miniatures all portray biblical scenes, focusing primarily on Christ’s life. The volume’s final illumination (fol 131r) returns readers to the world outside the narrative, depicting a liturgical procession. If the images are meditational aids, helping the reader imagine themselves within the action, the first image places them at the moment of the text’s conception and the last places them back within their own religious ceremonial practices. This final image permits readers to attend the procession through meditation rather than physical presence, the manuscript providing a full-service religious experience encompassing contemplation and ritual practice within textual devotion.

MS 226, a near contemporary in the same group, augments the text with illustration in very different ways. The four marginal ink illustrations--perhaps more accurately called doodles--are animals or animal-human hybrids: one hybrid man, a dragon, and two birds. None has a

¹⁶² Sargent, *Mirror*, cvi.

direct bearing on the text it borders. Where MS 648 contains Arundel's Memorandum at the end, MS 226 does not include it at all. MS 226 contains other abbreviations: it is "acephalous (begins at 10.36 likenessis styryng) [and] atelous (ends in ch. 52, with the reading: joy, that we may alle see him with such joy in spirit. AMEN)."¹⁶³ The Memorandum is one factor in a very mutable system of text, paratext, and neighboring texts, none of which is completely identical from one codex to another.

With or without the *Memorandum*, affectivity and theology are not mutually exclusive. In the case of Love's *Mirror* they work in complementary ways not just to tamp down on potentially heretical readings but to offer imagined lay readers a fuller devotional and theological education. The model of religious devotion the text provides—complete with meditations on the Passion, exegesis of scripture, references to outside theological works, and descriptions of the contemplative life—opens up an individual-focused religiosity that relies less on clerical intermediaries than it does on the practitioner's access to a text. Crucial to this model of religious practice is independent interpretation. Although this is seemingly at odds with Love's agenda for control, the success of the *Mirror*'s program of lay devotion lies in the interpretive leeway it gives readers at key moments as much as it tightens that leeway at others.

Extant manuscripts show the push-and-pull of official and unofficial readings and practices. Its success in serving this need is seen, in part, through its circulation: it is extant in 56 manuscripts, is excerpted in more, and was printed regularly from 1484 on by Caxton and others.¹⁶⁴ In comparison, 82 manuscripts of *The Canterbury Tales* are extant, in addition to its 1478 first printing.¹⁶⁵ Even so, extant manuscripts, complete or otherwise, are only a partial

¹⁶³ Sargent, introduction, lxxxi.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, lxiii.

¹⁶⁵ Derek Pearsall, *The Canterbury Tales* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 8. According to Sargent, the number of surviving copies (not specified as complete or incomplete) is "comparable to those of Hilton's *Scale of Perfection*"

indicator of reception. The *Mirror*'s assiduous inclusion not just of imagined text readers but of imagined listeners reminds us that there was more than one way in which contemporary readers could be expected to encounter a text.¹⁶⁶ Indeed, reading and hearing were both gateways to the primary work of visualizing and meditating on the scenes presented in the text. Both were available to lay readers of varying backgrounds, and the *Mirror*'s attentiveness to both implies that the theological complexity of the images and their exegesis are similarly available to those readers.

Evidently, its imagined as well as its real readers were not precisely who Gregory had in mind when writing of images as texts for the illiterate. The *Mirror*'s tableaux may well supply the structural framework of the text, but the project as a whole sells itself short in its opening description of those images' significance. Love goes on to explain that the text is not quite solely a set of meditational images:

Wherefore at the instance & the prayer of some deuoute soules to edification of suche men or women is this drawynge oute of the foreside boke of cristes lyfe wryten in englysche with more putte to in certeyn partes & withdrawing of diuerse auctoritis [and] maters as it semeth to the wryter hereof moste spedefull & edifying to hem that bene [of] simple vndirstondyng... (10.17-23)

That is, in addition to its translation of scripture and Pseudo-Bonaventure the *Mirror* also translates and incorporates the works of established theological auctors—Bernard in particular, but also Paul, Jerome, and Augustine. It ticks the boxes not just of spiritual handbook and

(lxiii), although the manner of the *Mirror*'s transmission differs from the *Scale*, as it remains less changed from copy to copy as a result of what seems to have been a more “centralized” transmission process. Sargent and the Geographies of Orthodoxy project identify three major groups that apply to most extant copies: α (authorial revision), β (Love's original version) and γ (scribal revision) in “Patterns of Textual Affiliation in the Manuscripts of Nicholas Love's *Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ*” in *Geographies of Orthodoxy*.

<http://www.qub.ac.uk/geographies-of-orthodoxy/resources/affiliations.php> HYPERLINK

"http://www.qub.ac.uk/geographies-of-orthodoxy/resources/affiliations.php"

For example, at the end of the meditations: “Wherefore it semeth to me beste that euery deuout creature that loueth to rede or here this boke.’ take the partes therof as it semeth moste comfortable & stiryng to his deuocion...” (222.37-40).

affective meditation, but also of exegesis as it relates a narrative and interprets it literally, allegorically, or morally. This is a generically varied text not just because it is a translation but because it plays with multiple genres conventionally targeted toward multiple reading demographics. Its investment in and strategies for producing affect and edification, therefore, must constantly adapt.

Love's "drawynge oute" of the life and passion of Christ with the additions of other scholars as well as his own analysis sets up a format that similarly draws out a scripted emotional response. The Incarnation is prefaced by a series of imperatives that first provide a segue into the scene for readers ("Go to oure dere doghter Marie...Now take hede, & ymagine of gostly thinge as it were bodily, & thenk in thi herte as thou were present...") and then instruct them on some of the finer theological points of "seeing" scripture (21.23-32):

Bot now beware here that thou erre not in imaginacion of god & of the holi
Trinite, supposing that these thre persones the fadere the son & the holi gost bene
as thre erthly men, that thou seest with thi bodily eye...Nay it is not so in this
gostly substance of the holi trinyte, for tho thre persones ben on substance & on
god, & yit is there none of thees persones other. (22.6-14)

This emphatic distinction between ghostly and bodily sight is echoed by both of Julian's texts, one written before and one after the *Mirror*. It is also echoed in Margery Kempe's autobiography. The ghostly/bodily distinction mattered to a wide swath of devotional readers that included lay individuals as well as the highly educated and professionally religious—all under the umbrella of the "simple".¹⁶⁷ In outlining the correct categorization of this kind of "sight", Love or Love's "pastoral persona" engages in some of the prescriptive or instructional

¹⁶⁷ For example, see Vincent Gillespie and Maggie Ross, "The Apophatic Image: The Poetics of Effacement in Julian of Norwich." *Medieval Mystical Tradition in England: Exeter Symposium, V. Papers Read at the Devon Center, Dartington Hall*, ed. Marion Glasscoe (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1992) 53-77. See also Kathleen Kamberick, *Popular Piety and Art in the Late Middle Ages: Image Worship and Idolatry in England 1350-1500* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002).

writing he is perhaps best known for. But in delaying the meditation in favor of pre-emptive corrections and commentary, he also incorporates affective contemplation into a scholastic structure of text and gloss.¹⁶⁸ Only after recognizing the technical differences between bodily and ghostly seeing can readers proceed to the images themselves.

With the series of initial imperatives to “go”, “take hede”, “ymagine”, and “think” leading first to similarly imperative cautions on religious sight and then, at last, to the Annunciation itself, the meditation is heavily foregrounded by the speaking persona’s presence: the source of those imperatives. Readers here are sharply led to envision a scene just so and to conceive of their envisioning in a similarly precise way—with both of these corrections held closely in mind as they process the ensuing scene related from the Bible. Elsewhere, the length of meditative scenes pales beside their exegesis, as when Love recounts the flight into Egypt in 24 lines and unpacks the lessons of that episode over the course of the next 164 (51.24-55.19). Even without the marginal notations marking out “prima racio”, “2^a racio”, and instructing readers to “nota vicium Curiositatis”, the subdivision of these lessons first into four and then into an additional seven parts (each separated out by pilcrows in Sargent’s edition) incorporate significant elements of scholastic textual apparatuses developed by medieval compilers and rubricators to facilitate textual navigation (54.19, 15, 27-8).¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁸ From Bugyis, who seeks to recover that persona through study of two women-owned manuscripts and the *Mirror*’s interaction with women readers and scriptural figures (465).

¹⁶⁹ MB Parkes writes, “the late medieval book differs more from its early medieval predecessors than it does from the printed books of our own day. The scholarly apparatus which we take for granted—analytical table of contents, text disposed into books, chapters, and paragraphs, accompanied by footnotes and index—originated in the applications of the notions of *ordinatio* and *compilatio* by writers, scribes, and rubricators of the thirteenth, fourteenth, and fifteenth centuries. By the fourteenth century the reader had come to expect some of these features, and if they had not been supplied by scribe or rubricator the reader himself supplied the ones he wanted on the pages of his working copy” (“The Influence of the Concepts of *Ordinatio* and *Compilatio* on the Development of the Book” in *Medieval Learning and Literature: Essays Presented to Richard William Hunt*, edited by Alexander, J J G, Gibson, M T, Southern, R W [Oxford: Clarendon, 1976], 135).

This passage enjoins readers once more in a collective “we” to “deuoutly ymagine & think” of Joseph and Mary’s life as foreigners in Egypt, and in particular of their poverty. This entreaty differs from the directions to look, take heed, or see which originate with the speaker and apply to the imagined reader, instead overlooking those category divisions to present the communal first person plural. The narrator’s persona combines with the imagined readers’ into an experience of imagining and thinking that both parties share. By alternating between imperatives that draw a stark line between persona and reader and a combined “we”, the *Mirror* enforces theological propriety from above at the same time as it experiences the meditations alongside the readers the narrator imagines.

In this meditation on the flight to Egypt experiences of poverty and exile accumulate as Love lists them, writing that here “we” may imagine time passing for the family in “that vncouh londe” where both parents work to support themselves among strangers, away from the communities they knew (43.36). The pangs of social isolation here need little translation, but the *Mirror*’s guidance follows this with the scene’s exegesis on curiosity.¹⁷⁰ “Trowe we that oure lady in hire sowing or other manere wirchyng made curyouse werkes as mich folke dothe? Nay god forbade,” Love asks and answers, asserting that she made no frivolous things in her sewing work and that readers’ curiosity into the particulars of her work serves no good purpose (54.7-9). Love cultivates a picture of Christ’s early poverty over the course of the *Mirror*, but here turns that image into an admonishment that has less efficacy than the text’s consistent meditations on poverty. Perhaps not unreasonably, it assumes that readers have their own interests in frivolous materiality as “mich folke” did within the narrative, but it is hard to believe that the irritated

¹⁷⁰ taken here to mean “1 (a) Skill, ingenuity, cleverness; (b) skilled or clever workmanship, elegance (of workmanship), beauty (of a work of art) in addition to the sense that carries over into its modern meaning, 2. (a) Inquisitiveness, curiosity, interest; (b) idle or vain interest, esp. in worldly affairs” (MED).
<http://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/m/mec/med-idx?type=id&id=MED9170>

questioning of this passage produces an emotional response to the same degree as its earlier meditation. The scholastic hermeneutics of the passage strain under the weight of the text's moralizing duties, drawing attention to the insufficiencies of that method rather than selling the ill-fitting moral of the story.

This type of fostered dependence on the *Mirror* as a handbook or manual is a strategy that uses the text itself in lieu of a priest or other local cleric. The demonstrative firmness behind the text's forceful "we" and its myriad corrective statements forecloses some opportunities for counter-reading, but notably does not turn readers in the direction of their local ecclesiastical institutions. Instead, they are at liberty to continue reading, and to rely on the text for guidance even while Love is abundantly clear that that guidance may not be sufficient in the face of more aggressive curiosity. Heeded or unheeded, that interrupting guidance implies that keeping in mind these theological distinctions while putting oneself in the room with Mary and Gabriel at the Annunciation might intervene with the potential pathos of the scene, a regulatory step in keeping with the dominant veins of scholarship on the *Mirror*. However, it also suggests that Love is assuming his readers are capable of both upholding the bodily/ghostly distinction and of going on to meditate freely on those events. Some readers will be spiritually edified by Love's cautions, some will recognize his glossing practices, and potentially some would both be edified by and recognize the scholarly apparatus surrounding the meditative tableaux. Rather than present a simple binary of controlled and uncontrolled reading, the *Mirror* gives readers the authority, within bounds of official positions on the matter, to make interpretive decisions independently—possibly even when those decisions deviate from the readings presented in the *Mirror*.

At the same time, the *Mirror* is more than a series of affective moments interrupted by highly structured unpacking that allows readers the unfettered (or less fettered) access to the scripture and theological resources they aspire to find in their religious reading programs. As much as the text contains regulated or modeled emotive responses, it also develops affective themes over time, unbroken by interjection from a scholarly narrative voice. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the Passion sequence and other longer stretches of narrative stand out for this reason—scenes that focus on narrative and affective response more than the process of “drawynge oute”. While the more exegetically inclined passages enact a potential for edifying instruction and engagement with church auctors, the affect-centered mediations capitalize on the similarly well-established tradition of emotional identification in lives of Christ.

Longer narrative passages often circle around family ties, particularly the relationship between mother and son. When Mary and Joseph lose their young son through the now-classic misunderstanding of each thinking that their child was with other, her anguish erupts with a striking degree of self-blame:

“And therwith she brast on wepyng, & with gret sorrow seid, Alas where is me dere childe? For now I se that I hawue not wele kept him. And anone she began to go aboute in the euentyde as she mygt honestly fro house to house asking, Sey ye ouht of my sone? Sey ye ouht of my sone?...Gode fadere taketh hede & beholdeth the sorrow of my herte.’ & not my gret negligence, for I knowlech wele that I haue offendet in this case. Neuerles for it is falle me by ignorance.’ Ye for your gret gudenes yeve him me ayen, for I may not lyue without him. And thou my swete sone Jesu where art thou now or how is it with the? (58.14-8, 58.43-59.5)

Her prayer puts that sense of guilt alongside confusion that her son might have left her for heaven, or that some ill has befallen him that he was unable to escape as he had Herod—a combination of possibilities that are not especially imitable in the fifteenth century, or outside of that one family. But Mary’s outburst is a significant departure from earlier meditations depicting

her preternatural calm and wisdom from a young age as they show her on the verge—in her mind—of losing her child. In this meditation, her repeated questions and expressions of guilt (warranted or not) show deep distress not through a minute recounting of the scene’s details but by narrating Mary’s voice.

The anxious parents find their son three days later at the temple in Jerusalem, “sittyng among the doctors of lawe heryng hem entently, & asking hem questions wisyly” (59.27-9). Losing one’s child, finding one’s child and the tense searching in between those moments are experienced here through the parents’, and primarily Mary’s, point of view. The episode stresses these parental ties in anticipation of their final separation and makes apparent the difficulties of parenting in this situation, where Christ is both their son and something larger and less knowable, and “it behoueth [him] to be occupied in tho thenges that longen to the wirschipe of my fadere” sometimes at the expense of Mary and Joseph (59.39-41.). Meanwhile, the parents “these words thei vndirstode not in that tyme” and instead feel the anguish other parents might at the disappearance of their child (59.41-2).

The exegetical takeaway from this scene exists in two parts, focusing on interpretation rather than the words of church auctors. The first is interjected into the midst of Mary’s distress, directing the collective “we” to have compassion for her (“She was neuer in so gret [anguish] fro the tyme that she was born”) and then directing that “we” to learn “what tyme tribulacion & anguish fallen to us.’ not to be to heuy or miche disturblet therby, sithen god sparede not his owne modere as in this party” (58.28-9). Such suffering as Mary’s is therefore a “token of his loue,” a theme cultivated throughout Christ’s early years as the family encounters poverty and danger (58.30-4). For the imagined reader, the emphasis on suffering at the center of these

instructions offers a guided exegesis that focuses on Mary's search rather than Christ in the temple and aims toward a lay or mixed life application.

The second analysis of this scene comes at its end, after the family has been reunited and all return home. Where the first asks readers to consider Mary's pain, the second asks them (using the collective "we" once more) to consider more from Christ's perspective that such separation is necessary for "he that wole perfytely serue god" (60.14). Depriving oneself of family ties and following "not to miche his owne witte or his owne wille" is not necessarily at odds with that earlier analysis, but it skews more contemplative than active; however, it does so without drawing a line between the two modes of living, or even mentioning them specifically (6.29-30).

Christ's desert wanderings illustrate the *Mirror's* ambivalent stance on separating active and contemplative living. The chapter's opening narration does not address the episode's asceticism to one or the other, instead falling back on a collective and undefined "we":

For here he techeth vs & giveth vs ensauple of many gret vertues. As in that that he here is solitarie, & fasteth & preyeth, & waketh, & lyth & slepeth vp on the erthe, & mekely is conuersant with beestes. In the whiche processe bene touched foure thinges, that longen specialy to gostly exercise & vertuese lyuyng, & wonderfully folpyng eche othere to gedere, that is to sey, Solitary being, Fastyng, Prayere, & Penance of the boody, by the which we mowe come best to that noble virtue that is clenness of herte...(71.11-19)

The *Mirror* presents Christ's period of contemplation as an edifying lesson for "us", a group that includes both senses of the word "simple". Neither contemplatives nor laypeople are being singled out for this message, which stands out relative to meditation's later shift to address "specialy thou that art solitarie" (76.9-10). This note explicitly adds contemplatives or the professionally religious to the *Mirror's* imagined readership, where they have been implicitly present for much longer. Nothing prevents or otherwise discourages non-solitaries from reading

the rest of the chapter, and the earlier setup of the meditation as an “ensample of many gret vertues” prepares that general audience to take from the scene what they can. The text as a whole has little use for differentiating heavily between conventional categories of active and contemplative, deferring instead to the readers it constructs. Rather than place themselves somewhere along that spectrum, readers may choose from each.

Mary’s lengthy speeches at Christ’s childhood disappearance foreshadow his death, giving her space to voice grief, loss, and guilt that the passion scenes do not. The *Mirror*’s lengthy Passion is an extended meditation that recounts the events of the Crucifixion in striking and substantive detail but with little speech. Unlike previous sections, the Passion refers little to outside auctors and focuses almost exclusively on relating scripture. It is introduced at some length at the beginning of the *Mirror*’s Friday meditation, but Saturday and Sunday (the aftermath of Christ’s death and his resurrection, respectively) are without introduction. Absent from the Friday introduction is the admonishing voice of previous interjections, although it continues to explicitly model reader response and flag important points for readers to follow as they proceed through the vision. Citing Bonaventure, Love writes that having Christ’s pain in mind is “first to the stiryng of the more compassion,” and “bisy meditacion” is the key to full entry into the scene (162.8-9, 12). On this occasion, however, Love offers nothing in the way of caution. With the distinction between bodily and ghostly already made at the outset of the *Mirror*, here at the meditations’ culmination there is evidently no need for a reminder.

Love sets that agenda for the meditation and goes on to acknowledge both the different modes through which readers come into contact with the text and their prior experiences encountering the events of the Passion. The directions given here are only a part of the array of Passion-related experiences the *Mirror* envisions its readers bringing to this particular version:

Wherefore if thou that redist or herest this boke, haste herebefore bisily taken hede to thoo thinges that hauen be written & spoken of the blessed life of oure lorde jesu criste in to this tyme.’ mich more now thou shalt gedire alle thi mynde & alle the strength of thi soule to thoo thinges that folowen of his blessed passion. For here specially is shewede his hye charite, the which reasonably shold alle holely enflaume & brenne oure hertes in his loue. (162.33-40)

In acknowledging both aural and textual circulation of the text, Love gets at one of the more difficult parts of writing an orthodox vernacular religious text within a wider world of both orthodox and heterodox views: while individual readings might be guided by the narrative voice, the text’s circulation is less regulated. Moreover, the popularity of the Passion means that other versions circulate in different media, and that readers will bring their experience with those versions to bear on the *Mirror*’s. Readers called up in this passage are imagined to be capable of discerning between multiple sources and adopting the elements of each (here, Christ’s “hye charite”) to adopt into their individual religious practices. The *Mirror* is one part of a complex context, and although it has the power to shape readers’ views it must do so alongside alternate ideas and versions.

With the instructions to “take hede of his most perfite obedience” added to the focus on Christ’s charite above, the *Mirror* shifts into a sustained meditation, moving from the crucifixion to the resurrection with occasional brief interjection but without longer exegetical breaks (163.28). In these scenes, the emotional arcs begun in earlier episodes of Christ’s life reach their climax. With minimal interference from the narrative voice, the exchanges between Mary and Christ—a relationship begun in earlier, similarly uninterfered with passages—stand out for their affective potential. This moment, recounted in lyric, prose, longform verse, and in visual representations, is one of those moments that “hauen be written & spoken of the blessed life of

oure lorde jesu criste in to this tyme” and it is at once intensely private—she “turned neuer hir eyene fro him”—and unavoidably public:

And all these reproues, blasphemies & despites ben done, seyng & heryng his most sorrowful modere, whose compassion & sorowe made him hir sone to haue the more bitter peyne.

And on that othere halfe she hange in soule with hir sone on the crosse & desirede inwardly rather to haue diede that tyme with him.’ Than to haue lyuede lengire. (178.21-2, 13-19)

As with the family’s time in Egypt, Love sets the relationship between mother and son against a wider backdrop of community suspicion, shame, and hostility. The fraught ties between an individual and his or her larger community, together with the imminent prospect of losing one’s adult child, have an affective proximity to readers both because of readers’ established familiarity with these events and because these factors are not particularly limited to Mary and Christ.¹⁷¹

Mary’s wish to trade places with her son recalls her decades-earlier panic when she could not find him in Jerusalem. Mary and Christ’s conversation here, where they speak to one another through prayers directed to God, echoes Mary’s earlier distress and prayer to find her young son.¹⁷² Their exchange here trades on the affective strength of that mother-son relationship, and it realizes the Passion less through bodily torture than through the rending of family bonds. The Passion meditation directs readers not to the instruments of torture or execution, but to the less exceptional pain felt by both Christ and Mary at the cross. When the scene widens its lens, it also incorporates the nuclear group of followers—John, Mary Magdalene, and “othere of his frendes”—who share in that sorrow, offering alternative models of the same sorrow and weeping

¹⁷¹ As one barometer of the affective efficacy of this motif, Margery Kempe makes the tension between her devotion and her community a centerpiece of her self-martyrology. From *The Book of Margery Kempe* (ed. Lynn Staley [Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1996]): “Sche had so many enmys and so mech slawndyr that hem semyd sche myte not beryn it wythowtun gret grace and a mygty feyth” (992-3).

¹⁷² “Gode fadere taketh hede & beholdeth the sorow of my herte.’ & not my gret negligence, for I knowlech wele that I haue offendet in this case... Ye for your gret gudenes geve him me egeyn, for I may not lyue without him” (58.43-59.3).

(178.38). The scene amplifies compassion and emotional pain in place of the physical, a move that might make affective identification somewhat more accessible for readers who are not literally being crucified.

Christ's death happens relatively quickly in the *Mirror* and without the grisly details of other textual or visual versions.¹⁷³ The text devotes the Passion to this scene and to relating Christ's final words in a format that blends narrative storytelling with scholastic subdivision of those statements into seven parts. The chapter's unpacking of those words puts an exegetical interlude directly into the action, cataloguing and analyzing the speech as it happens within the timeline of the Passion sequence. As if those numbered sets and occasional exegesis are a countdown clock, Christ's death is announced after the seventh and final set of words—the death only a piece of the scene of departing spectators and the small group of followers who set to work burying the body. Love folds this numerical structure into the narration of the scene, separating out the death into stages of rhetoric rather than physical deterioration, marking out the points for readers to note without the force of earlier, more prescriptive correctives. In a scene as practiced and common as the Passion, reading counter to the text's modeled affect may well be more difficult than at other times; even so, this short and crucial scene offers no overarching, uniform reading—that work is left to the readers, who, as Love knows, transfer their own contexts to these chapters.

The meditations' closing lines illustrate the *Mirror*'s understanding of that work. To Love's narrator-persona, alternative versions of the narrative are inevitable, as the *Mirror* itself is an alternative of its Pseudo-Bonaventurean original: "Thus endeth the contemplacion of the blessed life of oure lorde Jesu the which processe for als mich as it is here thus written in English

¹⁷³ See Mitchell B. Merback, *The Thief, the Cross, and the Wheel: Pain and the Spectacle of Punishment in Medieval and Renaissance Europe* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).

tonge lengir in many parties & in othere manere than is the latyne of Bonaaventure” (222.28-31). This note extends the Passion sequence’s earlier acknowledgement of readers’ familiarity with other versions to the writer, who has added to Pseudo-Bonaventure using his own judgment. The *Mirror* is therefore a product not just of the Latin *Meditationes* but of a larger body of texts. This wider context poses a series of interpretive decisions to Love’s persona, who must choose between existing versions of Christ’s life and who has modeled for readers one possible course of interpretation.

In the same passage, Love’s persona acknowledges that “...it semeth to me beste that euery deuout creature that loueth to rede or here this boke.’ take the partes therof as it semeth most comfortable & stiryng to his deuocion, symtyme, one & sumtyme an othere, & specialy in the tymes of the yere & the festes ordeynet in holy chirche, as the matires bene perteynent to hem” (222.37-44). This is both an understanding of contemporary reading practices, where a book might be read out of order, as well as an understanding of variables a text cannot control for: Love imagines readers choosing selections based on the calendar but also on their personal preferences, with individual interpretation of the “partes therof” varying by day, mood, or necessity. The *Mirror* has provided some strictures for inevitable autonomous reading: the distinction between bodily and ghostly seeing, a repeated defense of religious imagery with authoritative sources, narrative and moral focal points within each meditation. These regulatory steps are steps aimed at preparing readers to use that autonomy fruitfully. The *Mirror* draws attention to choice: it presents itself here as a product of authorial choice and leaves room for readers to make their own.

By condemning unneeded curiosity or embellishment and (later in the text) Lollards while acknowledging the inevitability of diverse readings, the *Mirror* makes a distinction

between natural, variable reading and heresy. This is the kind of variation inherent in the text's sense of "we", a word that puts speaker and reader on the same footing and acknowledges the capability of each to make interpretive decisions. In backing away from total authorial control, Love's narrator-persona also delegates some of this control to a reading public he imagines capable of reading and being edified independent of institutional structures. In the *Mirror*, orthodoxy is not a rigid, universal reading but a polyphonous one.

An Affective "I"

Whether the disconnect between regulated affect and unregulated affect is by design or an unintended side-effect of the *Mirror*'s affective prescriptivism, Love's imperatives do suggest an expectation that the response they model will in turn be modeled—in some degree— by the reader. Less clear is the efficacy of this model, which relies on readers feelingly encountering and being instructed in events of Christ's life through the medium of the *Mirror* and prior knowledge. Other versions of the life and passion of Christ model responses to different effects. The decidedly non-Pseudo-Bonaventurean *Meditations on the Life and Passion of Christ* in British Museum Addit. MS. 11307 is an assemblage of original and extant lyrics joined together into a single verse life of Christ. Like the *Mirror*, it too directs the affective experiences of the readers it imagines through a series of imperatives. The effects of those imperatives, however, are quite different from Love's series of cautions. Rather, in the *Meditations* this tool presents a universal reading rather than a reading that explicitly tamps down on some alternatives rather than others. The totality of the "I" encompasses writer, narrative voice, reader, and speaker and allows less room for alternative readings than the *Mirror* while at the same time incorporating these multiple roles into a single authoritative voice. The single voice circumvents alternative

readings and levels out the conventional hierarchy of writer/scribe/reader at the same time.

Through this combined persona, the life of Christ shown in the *Meditations* constructs a diffused model of authority that supports a different kind of lay involvement—in literary production more than in autonomous religious edification.

The *Meditations* is collocated with *The Charter of Christ* and *The Dialogue between the Virgin and St. Bernard* and the manuscript itself is dated to the second half of the fourteenth century.¹⁷⁴ The *Meditations* featured here have less in common, in terms of form, with Nicholas Love than they do with devotional lyric; as Charlotte d’Evelyn writes, it “might be described briefly as a compendium of the lyric themes of Middle English poetry.”¹⁷⁵ It contains excerpts from scripture, Richard Rolle, and Hugo St. Victor, along almost the entirety of the *Orison of the Passion*, extant in eight other manuscripts. While this version of the *Meditations* has not survived in any other copies, it belongs to a network of texts making use of this existing material—and in particular to a network of texts engaging directly with the *Orison*.

The lyric *Meditations* takes the *Orison*’s refrain “Writ, loue, in myn herte” and expands it into a series of imperatives where the speaker/reader begs first to be subject to some of the tortures of the Passion and then to have those events inscribed into his or her own heart (1604). Apart from the *Meditations*’ 1922 EETS volume by Charlotte d’Evelyn and its 1987 reprint, the only work on this text that I have found that goes beyond a passing mention is here, when Eric Jager builds the motif into his 2000 study of the motif and its long history in *The Book of the*

¹⁷⁴ For more on dating, see Charlotte d’Evelyn, introduction to *Meditations on the Life and Passion of Christ* (London: EETS, 1987). More recently, Denis Renevey in the *Cambridge Companion to Medieval English Mysticism* dates it to the second half of the fourteenth century (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2011), 105.

¹⁷⁵ “One may find within it passages representing the hymn of praise in honour of the Virgin (vv. 79 f.), and the prayer asking for her intercession (vv. 2162 f.); or, again, meditations on the incidents of the Passion expressed in simple, devout language (vv. 489 f. and 1527 f.), or elaborated into series of rhetorical conceits (vv. 1829 f.). There are passages typical of the lyric of love-longing...and even the moral ballade is represented” (d’Evelyn, introduction, vii).

Heart. The heart-writing imperatives appear in the Passion sequences, rather than throughout, and center on physically experiencing those moments:

Verrayliche whan I the se
Gon harde bounden for loue of me,
Euere I weile that ilke stounde
That I ne were smyte with dethes wonde
Thou that berest up-on thyn hond
ffor my sunne that bitter bone,
With thyne bondes bynd me so
That I wepe thorw thought of thi wo. (425-32)

And later,

Whi ne wilt thou, thorn, myn herte perce,
The peyne of Crist whan I reherce?
More skyle it were to do me wo
Than hym that no thing hath mysdo. (579-83)

The demands to be bound up or pierced with a thorn go unmet, remaining hypothetical, imaginary, and affective. This moment of emotional insertion into the Passion and of demanding physical pain is where the “I” comes to the forefront, while it is little used outside of these imperatives. In the *Mirror*, the persona’s interventions are centered on instruction in how a collective “we” should properly view such a meditation. In the *Meditations*, there is only the singular “I”. The difference is between a fully participant persona and a learning-to-participate one still in need of direction. Paradoxically, the difference between the one feeling or experiencing “I” and the collective, instructive “we” is also the difference between a single, total reading and the possibility of viable alternatives.

The “I” of this refrain demands to experience something more than is strictly possible to experience and it does so in a particularly all-encompassing narrative voice. On the one hand, “I” is the reader/speaker.¹⁷⁶ On the other, it is a narrative voice belonging to a rhetorical speaker kept

¹⁷⁶ “Reader/speaker” out of deference to the possibility (or likelihood) that the *Meditations* were read both silently and aloud. “The most obvious clue to the *Orison*’s practicaly use is a rubric that accompanies it in two manuscripts:

just out of sight by the narrative itself. Whether or not that voice refers to the speaking persona of an author, as it does in the *Mirror*, is unclear. It is thus a multiple “I”—at once more blurred and more precise than Love’s “we”. Eric Jager notes that some copies of the *Orison* come with instructions that “In the saying of this orison, pause at every sign of the cross and think about what you have said. For I have never found a more devout prayer of the Passion, whosoever should say it devoutly.”¹⁷⁷ These do not accompany the *Orison* here, as it is dispersed throughout the body of the *Meditations* and is more heavily located toward the end of the poem, but they suggest this blurring of roles—both the note-writer and the present *Orison*-reader saying the words aloud and enacting the narrative voice—is another form of affective piety. This time, the affective meditations of the reader are focused on identifying with the process of religious literary production in addition to identifying with Mary’s sorrow or Christ’s pain.

The imperative refrain culminates in the *Orison*, where it becomes an oft-repeated directive initially for Love (Christ, in other versions) to write these events in the speaker’s heart.¹⁷⁸ The singular voice—already a combination of roles involved in literary production—becomes or aspires to become another thing altogether: the text itself. The heart-text is both literal and figurative. Clare of Montefalco’s heart (d. 1308) was found to have contained a crucifix, as her fellow nuns and the author of her *vita* attested. The crucifix is both real and metaphorical to her followers, and “a 1333 fresco in the Church of Saint Clare in Montefalco shows a mournful Jesus thrusting the cross into Clare’s breast as he looks into her eyes.” Heather Webb argues that this is not an *imitatio Christi*, but that “the visual exchange constitutes a kind

‘In the saying of this orison, pause at every sign of the cross and think about what you have said. For I have never found a more devout prayer of the Passion, whosoever should say it devoutly’” (Jager, *The Book of the Heart*, 111).

¹⁷⁷ Jager, *The Book of the Heart* (Chicago: U Chicago Press, 2000), 111.

¹⁷⁸ D’Evelyn, introduction, xxiii-xxv.

of intercourse during which an actual object takes its place within her heart.”¹⁷⁹ In the *Meditations*, the speaker’s heart inscribed with scripture occupies the same space as earlier requests for physical torment; the desired action is both literal and metaphorical. With this text written in his or her heart, a person—lay or religious—could enter into the ranks of saints whose hearts were found to contain, postmortem, signs of their devotion. As Eric Jager writes of the *Meditations*’ heart-writing, “by implication, anyone might aspire to having a heart inscribed with Christ’s name.”¹⁸⁰

The speaker does not desire a cross or crucifix, but rather in the request to “Write also, loue, the rode-tre/ That wrogt was in dyspyt to be” desires the words that are the signifiers of those signifiers (1811-12). With the exception of the early requests for thorns or bonds described above, they revolve around the act of writing and of being written upon: “Write, loue, a swete word also/ That Jhesu seyde in al his wo”, “Write his loue that was so strong,” “Writ his deth so ful of mygt,” as well as “Writ upon myn herte-bok” (1803-4, 1497, 1507, 1415). The meditation’s focus on the pain of the passion is, with these requests, mediated by writing more than feeling those torments. The actual process of parchment-making was not without its pains, as tormented skin became writing surface; the experience is as metaphorical as feeling the torments of the passion, but the experience of being written upon becomes the frame through which the experience of the passion is made affectively tangible. The speaker witnesses the passion and becomes a record of it at the same time.

Keeping books in or reading one’s heart has deep roots in Judeo-Christian writings in particular, and in late medieval writings inscribing a heart with scripture is not altogether unlike an *imitatio Christi*. Christ’s breast is a shield “of double colour/ Whit and red as rose-flour;/ This

¹⁷⁹ Heather Webb, *The Medieval Heart* (New Haven: Yale UP, 2010), 172.

¹⁸⁰ Jager, *The Book of the Heart*, 109.

sheld is born in torneement,” and is a text in its own right (659-61). As his wounds grow more more legible, more symbolic, his body becomes less a human body and more a signifying body. As Jager shows, the *Meditations* extend the writing motif even more explicitly to Christ (“He wrot his body with harde nailes/ To writon us in bok that neuere failes”), setting both Christ and the reader into an *imitatio* of a text (883-4).¹⁸¹ As Christ’s body was rendered legible, so too does the devout speaker desire their body to be marked and read. The *Meditations* imagine a reader capable of being immersed in the passion sequence, striving for a deep identification with Christ’s body. But by filtering this identification first through writing and by connecting to the crucified body’s legibility, the poem goes in a different direction from meditations such as the *Mirror*’s, which center on the narrative sequence of events and the people present (Christ included). The poem has already blended reader and speaker into a univocal persona and now it adds two more roles to that combination: one, where that voice is words and the material they are written upon—making the persona itself a text; and two, where Christ’s body is not just implicitly a text through its symbolic wounds but is also literally a text, a body written upon. This final point of combination, between persona-text and Christ-text, sees the persona’s culminating identification with Christ—not just emotionally, as elsewhere in the life of Christ genre, but materially and corporeally. The text imagines its readers, itself, its speaker, even its contributors or writers, radically combined into one Christ-like body—but a body of text.

If the writing is in the speaker’s heart, however, who reads it? Perhaps inner holiness can be read outside of the body—as it seems to have been for Clare of Montefalco and as meditations on Christ’s external wounds suggest. But if the kind of heart-writing imagined by the *Meditations* takes place less metaphorically within the heart of the imagined reader, then like St.

¹⁸¹ See also, as Jager directs, 1061-2, 1415, 2243 in the *Meditatios*.

Clare's cross it can only be extracted after his or her death. In that case, it is legible to higher powers only. But its legibility seems to be a secondary or tertiary concern to this heart-writing refrain, relative to the act of being written upon and the ability to embody that writing.

The *Meditations* skips the *Mirror*'s careful emphasis on ghostly and bodily vision and goes straight for a combination of body, vision, and text. It assumes a readership that is not in need of a primer on ghostly seeing, or else it is less concerned with expounding on protocol and lessons than the *Mirror* is. The result is that these moments of affective identification with the events unfolding in the poem are not broken up by corrective guiding. The uninterrupted meditation simultaneously places the reader in a position of greater authority as he or she becomes a speaker and offers one centralized affective response that crowds out the presence of alternatives—alternatives of which Love is all too aware in the *Mirror*. Even as the *Meditations* allow, in their lyric form, an emotive meditation on the Passion to be uninterrupted by exegesis or sense of spiritual propriety, the “I” they present is uniform and complete: the speaker's experience is any and every reader's, independent of a reader's capacity for interpreting the meditation or experiencing it differently. When the series of imperatives shifts from its opening iterations on feeling the pain and tools of the Passion to having those events inscribed within or on the reader's heart, one definitive version of the Passion is being written there.

In terms of scale, putting the *Mirror* alongside the lyric *Meditations* is complicated. Although the *Mirror* was written up to a decade before it was sent to Arundel for approval, Love's attention to a diverse readership shows he was writing with a larger audience in mind—and that the *Mirror* was circulating amongst that audience before 1410. Meanwhile, although it is located within a network of texts using the *Orison*, the single extant copy of the *Meditations* suggests that if it circulated in other copies, it did not circulate in enough copies for more than

one to survive use and the passage of time. It is almost certainly a bespoke manuscript, made at the commission of an individual or group—not necessarily a circumstance that completely prevents wider readership, but one that makes it at least very unlikely.

As a bespoke copy, 11307 is made up of texts (the short *Charter of Christ*, a dialogue between Bernard and the Virgin, and the *Meditations*) that share strong interest in affective piety and in meditating on specific scenes. If the *Mirror* straddles, sometimes awkwardly, scholastic and affective modes of piety and reading, 11307's investment is considerably less divided. The model of devotion constructed by the manuscript's version of the life of Christ grounds it in both affectivity and fourteenth-century lyric convention, where "in order that the reader of the poems may feel these emotions personally and keenly, he is persuaded by the lyric to imagine himself in a scene which will invoke them, and which is described often in minute visual detail."¹⁸² The two other texts in the manuscript are also committed to imagining that scene, its pains, and its emotions in detail. For all we do not know about 11307's provenance, we know that it is a compilation invested specifically in affective piety—rather than, for example, exegesis—and is also well-connected to already extant texts of that nature.

The *Meditations*' singular copy means that its "I" could encompass many readers, as it encompasses multiple roles in literary production. But it is also possible that the historical, real readership on the receiving end of the text's singular narrative "I" really did belong to a singular reader, and it may also be that this patron-producer relationship means that the imagined reader is also, and only, that historical reader. But the Orison itself, which includes in its other versions many of these heart-writing refrains, opens up a range of possibilities independent of 11307's conjectured history. In any case, the *Meditations* (including its version of the Orison) bypasses

¹⁸² Rosemary Woolf, *The English Religious Lyric in the Middle Ages* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968), 19.

interpretive empowering for a more production-oriented empowering, emphasizing the reader less as a reader and more as at the crux of the complex system through which texts are produced. The reader's ability to navigate, judge, and sort through the information in the text is secondary to the reader's ability to become that text in an act of devotion. Not only has the reader of 11307 commissioned this text into being, but the reader of the manuscript has moved beyond that hierarchical system of production altogether as all that system's roles are subsumed into that one speaking, demanding, and experiencing voice.

Two lives of Christ, regulating and unregulating their readers as they deem fit: while it may be that the *Mirror*'s large imagined readership factors into its scripting of those readers' experiences of the text in a conventional narrative of control and suppression, it cannot now be the only factor—as the *Meditations* show, scripting affect and piety more generally is not necessarily a hallmark of a text expecting to be popular, orthodox, or official. The *Mirror* empowers readers to develop unique readings of the life of Christ within certain strictures that subordinate them to the narrative voice, its scholarship, and its directives for proper reading practice. Conversely, the *Meditations* imagines a reader fully enmeshed and even indistinguishable from other, higher-ranking roles in literary production while also confining him or her to the single version of events presented in the poem.

The “simple souls” Love envisions are a complex body of interested readers brought together under that idealized “simple.” As a demographic term for the text's imagined readers it conveys more than enough: lay and religious readers of various backgrounds can be assimilated under the word. One reader neither text addresses, however, is a member of the institutional church. Love himself was enmeshed in this structure, but neither he nor the author of the

Meditations (or the author of the *Orison*) look directly to officialdom or its representatives as they work out their models of lay piety. As an official intermediary, the text suffices.

CHAPTER IV

Learning to Read in *The Book of Margery Kempe*

In the previous chapters, we have seen how readerly autonomy is a built-in, essential part of the texts at hand. Imagined readers conduct their reading in a variety of modes, in multimedia terms as well as in differing degrees of quality. Readers are imagined to be hearing, visualizing, processing letters on a page; they are imagined to be reading obediently, thoroughly, completely, partially, confrontationally, ignorantly, and sometimes hardly at all. The latter end of this spectrum seems not to trouble the *Revelations of Divine Love* or the *Parson's Tale*, which unlike other texts in their genres do little to regulate their imagined readers' reading experiences. Even Nicholas Love's *Mirror*, oft-quoted for its insecurities and concerns about unruly unorthodox readings, displays a keen and multi-faceted awareness of its place within a larger canon of multimedia work on the life of Christ. In the *Mirror*, demonstrably different versions of that life float in the same sea, the integrity of one neither overruling nor threatening the integrity of any other.

We encounter a different imagined reading in the case of Margery Kempe's *Book*. Here, Kempe's autohagiography operates on two levels: first, by offering up the life of Margery Kempe of Bishop's Lynn, holy woman and contemporary saint; and second, it authorizes Kempe's holy life by translating it— and her— into a Christ-like body of text. As an avid consumer of texts without the ability read in a text-dependent mode, Kempe is in a unique

position to observe the authorizing power of making a devout life into text. Her struggles with social scorn and its very real dangers to her life and freedom, so central to her *imitatio* of saintly martyrs, forcefully acquaint her with the consequences of hostile or incorrect reading. The *Book* is both her entry into devout canon and her final, enduring opportunity to set the record straight. Her life of diminishment and marginalization at the hands of misreaders, her status as a bourgeois laywoman and wife, make her credibility more vulnerable and her voice more easily misinterpreted than the other sources we have thus far explored. Her relationship to imagined readers, and to inevitable hostile readings, is therefore different and results in a more definitive distinction between “good” and “bad” readers. To read Margery Kempe well is to believe in her work and her Word.

Margery Kempe’s difficulties with misreading begin early. Her confessor’s misreading of her sickbed confession provides the catalyst for her turn toward Brigittine lay mysticism and a decades-long personal relationship with Christ: at the moment “whan sche cam to the poynt for to seyn that thing which sche had so long conseyled, hir confessowr was a lytyl to hastye and gan scharply to undyrnemyn hir er than sche had fully seyde hir entent” (144-7).¹⁸³ The priest insists Margery has finished her confession when she is only just then reaching its culmination. Having not listened through to the end of her confession, the priest cannot fully understand her, and the incompleteness of her sickbed confession plunges her into months of illness during which “develys opyn her mowthys al inflaumyd wyth brennyng lowys of fyr as thei schuld a swalwyd hyr in” and she slanders herself, her husband, and her community.

¹⁸³ Margery Kempe and Lynn Staley, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, Kalamazoo, Mich: Published for TEAMS (the Consortium for the Teaching of the Middle Ages) in association with the Univ. of Rochester by Medieval Institute Publications, Western Michigan Univ, 2004.

From this confession onward, Margery becomes a hermeneutic problem to her peers and those who seek to interpret her as either heretic or holy woman. Like the other works explored in this dissertation, the *Book* develops its own way instructions for orthodox religious living. This living revolves around aural, textual, visual, and behavioral consumption and assumption of religious texts, with Margery as both a model of this reading practice and a text to be read. Within the narrative, Margery's great oeuvre is to correct those misreadings, to prove she has cultivated a valid and followable spiritual life, and to disseminate that way of life by teaching her followers to recognize holiness when it is before them. The *Book* carries on that work.

I characterize the priest's misengagement with his parishioner's confession as a misreading in light of both present-day scholarship on medieval aural literacies and medieval senses of what constituted accurate or inaccurate reading. We have seen in earlier chapters how a text's or a writer's fear of imagined misreading has been expressed, and how texts set about instructing imagined readers on appropriate reading strategies across modes and material. In the first chapter, the Parson's more anthologized, non-narrative model contrasts with the *Cloud*-author's prioritization of linear, beginning-to-end reading; for Kempe, her confession belongs to the latter model, and the priest's willful mishearing in refusing to listen to her record to its end changes the course of her life.¹⁸⁴ Imagined readers of the textual *Book* are accompanied by the readers who encounter Margery within her narrative. Where Kempe displays a holy literacy that ends with her own elevation into text form, the priest's misreading is the first in a long and unremitting series of misreadings. As John Arnold writes, "what got Kempe into trouble was hermeneutics: the problems that people had, in the context of religious fears, of deciding how to

¹⁸⁴ Janette Dillon has written on the role of the confessor in the female mystic's life; see especially her discussion of the dynamics of a confessor refusing to hear the female mystic's confession. "Holy Women and their Confessors or Confessors and their Holy Women? Margery Kempe and Continental Tradition," *Prophets Abroad: The Reception of Continental Holy Women in Late-Medieval England*, Ed. Rosalynn Voaden (Cambridge: DS Brewer, 1996), 123.

‘read’ the interior person from the exterior shell” (90).¹⁸⁵ While Kempe becomes legible to those around her, weeping in white clothing, sometimes impoverished, sometimes a pilgrim, sometimes a preacher, she becomes more susceptible to misinterpretation— with potentially dangerous consequences.

I am arguing that Margery’s struggles against slander and misreading do more than build a case for canonization. The *Book* is a densely intertextual piece of writing, connected to a wide network of religious texts through her voracious aural reading, and it shows Margery not just reading those texts but enacting them. She is edified not simply by her absorption of the texts’ information, but her embodiment of them-- and finally, in the form of the *Book*, her own becoming text,

wherin thei may have gret solas and comfort to hem and understondyn the hy and unspcabyl mercy of ower sovereyn Savyowr Cryst Jhesu, whos name be worschepd and magnyfyed wythowten ende, that now in ower days to us unworthy deyneth to exercysen hys noveley and hys goodnesse. Alle the werkys of ower Saviowr ben for ower exampyl and instruccyon, and what grace that he werkyth in any creatur is ower profyth yf lak of charyté be not ower hynderawnce. (1-7)

The sinful wretches, like Margery the “synful caytyf,” exist in a time of “ower days” when Christ is present in narrative rather than in body (10). His life has been translated into a series of works for further study and for use as an example-focused instructional program. Margery discovers this kind of reading and exemplarity through her own encounters with texts and textual-hagiographic culture, and the *Book* is an autohagiographic entry into that milieu. In the shared “ower days” of the *Book*’s narrative present, Christ’s life now exists as an example, subdivided into smaller episodes and examples, so too does Margery’s— and so too does the *Book*. The “yf”

¹⁸⁵ John Arnold, “Margery’s Trials: Heresy, Lollardy, and Dissent,” *A Companion to the Book of Margery Kempe* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2004), 90.

in this statement is a significant one: any creature can profit from religious instruction, if only they read charitably.

Beyond the story of a regional holy woman, what Margery and her followers offer imagined readers is a way of reading. It is not quite a surface or shallow reading, because Margery must go to great lengths to prove she is more than the bourgeois lay woman she appears to be. In the context of fifteenth century conflict over the practice and meaning of orthodoxy, “ower hynderawnce” is both inclination toward social ostracism and heretical accusation, and that lack of charity is the primary deterrent from good reading and instruction (7). In the context of the varied suspicions Margery herself faces and the varied faulty readings they engender, a charitable reading means a complete and trusting, if not shallow one; readers must trust Margery’s words, even if her appearance and behaviors inspire skepticism. She and her followers increase in spiritual power as they read and live their readings because they trust in what those authorities are showing them. Her followers are marked as good and devout people because they correctly read Margery in her white and tears— and because, most of all, they listen completely to her when she tells them who and what she is.

Her detractors, who read her hastily or poorly or not at all, project heresy onto her where she is in fact reifying an orthodox way of reading and living. Kempe does not doubt her orthodoxy, and her spirituality is regularly validated by the Church as well as her conversations with Christ and Mary. Kempe’s concern is not being read as a heretic. Rather, it is being read as she was in her sickbed: incompletely, and without the gravity to which her spiritual work has entitled her. The *Book* models a variety of modes of reading, most of them proved faulty by their inability to correctly interpret Kempe. But Kempe provides the antidote in text form as much as in her traveling body. The *Book* develops a strategy of edification through multimodal reading

that values reading through listening and values Kempe's authority as a spiritual guide equally with her esteemed sources. A dangerous reading to Kempe, whose final act as a devotional reader is to write her way into the orthodox canon, is not a heretical one but an erroneous or malevolent one—one in which her work, text, and body are misinterpreted, scorned, marginalized. In Gail McMurray Gibson's words, "if martyrdom by sword was not available to qualify her for sainthood, martyrdom by slander was, and Margery's *Book* seems quite conscious of the validating implications of such suffering."¹⁸⁶ In the *Book*'s reckoning, the ability to read well is tied neither to formal education nor to clerical status; rather, to read properly is to read Margery completely and trustingly. Recognizing Margery's holiness is a sign of the reader's spiritual worth and potential.

Margery's intertextual *imitatio* is a reflection of her reading practices. Barbara Newman writes of Margery's "pure imitation" of the religiosity she encounters at least partially in text format, as "she seems self-consciously to have experimented with every spiritual practice she encountered in every book she could persuade her clerical friends to read to her."¹⁸⁷ As Catherine Sanok writes, "Margery insists on the reproducibility of ancient feminine sanctity and faces considerable resistance from civic and ecclesiastical authorities as a result. Refusing to acknowledge her *imitatio* of virgin martyrs and other holy women of the early Church as such, these officials inadvertently demonstrate the similarities between the pagan persecution of female saints and the hostile reception of a woman's public spiritual vocation in late medieval England."¹⁸⁸ Margery's *imitatio* starts with the consumption of hagiography—sometimes, as she

¹⁸⁶ Gail McMurray Gibson, *The Theater of Devotion: East Anglian Drama and Society in the Late Middle Ages* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989): 47.

¹⁸⁷ Barbara Newman, "What Did It Mean to Say 'I Saw'? The Clash Between Theory and Practice in Medieval Visionary Culture," *Speculum*, 80 (2005), 32.

¹⁸⁸ Catherine Sanok, *Her Life Historical*, 116.

attests, through hearing the vita read aloud, and perhaps through other modes of engagement, from feast days to statues in the church to street theater. She then positions herself within that textual and extratextual network of saints and holy women, embodying the dual role of reader and “St. Margery.”¹⁸⁹

Jennifer Bryan and David Lavinsky argue separately that Margery’s consumption and enactment of religious texts and vitae is not limited to the women scholars commonly cite, her “spiritual precursors.”¹⁹⁰ As Bryan writes, Kempe’s reading “points to the ways in which even those women without solid literacy might become part of the ‘textual communities’ of vernacular devotion.” Bryan charts a “movement of devotional discourse from religious women to the laity, often with special interest and promotion of laywomen”-- a movement into which Margery inserts herself not as laywoman but, because of her reading, as religious.¹⁹¹ Margery’s and her priest’s ongoing negotiation with Rolle’s works is more complex than imitation, and Lavinsky points to key points at which “the *Book* adopts a surprisingly resistant attitude toward Rolle’s paradigm of inspired physical and emotional intimacy with God, elevating Margery’s visionary experience over the model for spiritual discernment provided by *Incendium Amoris*.”¹⁹² Margery’s treatment of Rolle here shows a critical engagement with her reading material, one that borrows from and alters rather than mimics popular modes of piety. It is a style of reading that recalls the one Nicholas Love proffers in the *Mirror*: one where readers simultaneously embrace the text’s surface meaning and alter it in accordance with their own devotional practices.

¹⁸⁹ “St. Margery” as McMurray Gibson calls her, where “Margery Kempe’s *Book* is also a calculated hagiographical text, a kind of autobiographical saint’s life” (47).

¹⁹⁰ “Affectivity, *Incendium Amoris* and the *Book of Margery Kempe*,” *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* (July 2003), 340.

¹⁹¹ See Jennifer Bryan, *Looking Inward: Devotional Reading and the Private Self in Late Medieval England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), 19-20.

¹⁹² *Ibid*, 341.

In Lynn Staley's words, the *Book* is a "sacred biography;" for Carolyn Dinshaw, it is "a spiritual autobiography."¹⁹³ Sanok, Sarah Salih, and Timea Szell, and others explore the *Book* as hagiography.¹⁹⁴ As a hagiography or autohagiography, it "presents a holy woman as an example to its readers. Margery displays the workings of God...The example of Margery's life draws many people to God."¹⁹⁵ Under these circumstances, as Sarah Salih writes, the "theatre for her martyrdom" is slander.¹⁹⁶ In this vein, scholars see the *Book* as at least "aware of the possibility of canonisation."¹⁹⁷ The *Book* therefore is both a record of reading (Margery consumes religious texts on her way to sainthood) and the kind of religious text it recounts reading (it constructs the legend of Saint Margery for others to read). For my purposes, though, the canonization question is of secondary importance to the questions of what the *Book*'s hagiography offers in way of devotional pedagogy to its imagined readers and how it goes about developing that pedagogy. If Margery "is obsessed above all with the impression she makes on others," I suggest that her concern is rooted not just in enduring the martyrdom of ostracism but in understanding the impression she makes on others, shaping it, and teaching her imagined readers to form an accurate reading of her as a reputable holy woman.¹⁹⁸ With the reading skills she supplies, the *Book* imagines its readers will be able to increase in spiritual power as Margery and her followers do within the text.

¹⁹³ Lynn Staley, *Margery Kempe's Dissenting Fictions* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994), especially 39-82. Dinshaw, "Margery Kempe" in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Women's Writing*, edited by Carolyn Dinshaw and David Wallace (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 224.

¹⁹⁴ Timea Szell, "From Woe to Weal and Weal to Woe: Notes on the Structure of the *Book of Margery Kempe*," *Margery Kempe: A Book of Essays* ed. Sandra J. McEntire (New York: Garland, 1992): 73-91.

¹⁹⁵ Salih, *Versions of Virginity in Late Medieval England* (Cambridge: DS Brewer, 2001), 175.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid*, 212.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid*, 174.

¹⁹⁸ A.C. Spearing, *Medieval Autographies: The "I" of the Text* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2012): 36.

Reading Texts, Enacting Texts

The *Book*'s account of Margery's program of study is both a record of reading practices and a model for imagined readers' use. Persuaded by her weeping, a local priest

red to hir many a good boke of hy contemplacyon and other bokys, as the Bybyl wyth doctowrys therupon, Seynt Brydys boke, Hyltons boke, Boneventur, Stimulus Amoris, Incendium Amoris, and swech other. And then wist sche that it was a spirit sent of God whch seyde to hir, as is wretyn a lityl befor, whan sche compleynyde for defawte of redyng, thes wordys, "Ther schal come on fro fer that schal fulfillyn thi desyr." And thus sche knewe be experiens that it was a ryth trewe spiryte. The forseyd preste red hir bokys the most part of seven yer er eight yer to gret ences of hys cunnyng and of hys meryte, and he suffryde many an evyl worde for hyr lofe inasmeche as he red hir so many bokys and supportyd hir in hir wepyng and hir crying. Aftywardys he wex benefysyd and had gret cur of sowle, and than lykyd hym ful wel that he had redde so meche befor. (3389-3400)

Her reading list here includes mystical works written in Latin and in English, a Bible with glossing, and others. Some of these cross genres; Rolle may not have written *Incendium Amoris* as a deliberate entry into his pre-sainthood portfolio, but there were regional attempts to have him canonized in the years after his death in the mid-fourteenth century.¹⁹⁹ Kempe's beloved "Seynt Bryd", Saint Bridget, offers Kempe a history and text with more literal points of similarity. The priest reads Bridget's writings to Kempe, and Kempe absorbs elements of Bridget's dialogues with Christ and elements of her saint-cult into her own mystical, auto-

¹⁹⁹ See David Lavinsky, "'Speke to me be thowt': Affectivity, *Incendium Amoris*, and the *Book of Margery Kempe*," for more on the *Book*'s ties to Rolle. "Like the anonymous Cathusian who later added 'R. hampall' in red ink where the manuscript mentions *Incendium Amoris*, Margery's amanuensis— if not Margery herself— was obviously familiar with Rolle's text. References to 'þe fuer of lofe' that 'qwenchith alle synnes' strongly suggest that she or her scribe had encountered English versions of *Incendium Amoris*, which had become available through the inclusion of Rolle's Latin writings in vernacular devotion compilations in the period. Another source may have been a translation made by the Carmelite Richard Misyn in 1435, one year before Margery's second scribe began recording her account in its current form. And although Margery's actual familiarity with *Incendium Amoris* is a matter of some speculation, the text was frequently excerpted, becoming available to those who may otherwise have had little direct exposure to Rolle's Latin writings" (*Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 112.3 [July 2013]: 345).

hagiographical text. In this text-based society, the works Kempe lists represent only the written portion of texts with which she came into contact.

In her essay “Reading and *The Book of Margery Kempe*,” Jacqueline Jenkins situates the mode of Kempe’s reading within the scope of practical late medieval literacy, where “‘being read to’ by a spiritual adviser does not necessarily mean ‘being led by’, an important distinction often lost in the modern prejudicial association of full literacy with intelligence.”²⁰⁰ As Jenkins writes, the more official Latinate sense of literacy excluded “all but men in the highest classes, and the religious of both sexes (though even, religious women in general seem to have had considerably less access to formal Latin education than their male counterparts).”²⁰¹ Julian of Norwich’s disavowal of literacy at the start of the Long Text is a demonstration of modesty, a self-abasing that makes her less exceptional while it removes latinity as a prerequisite for encountering her text, shaping the visionary speaker as “a simple creature unletterde” (2.1). Kempe makes no such gesture.²⁰² Where Julian ties together “simple” and “unlettered,” the primary challenge Kempe’s literacy status poses is not her apparent inability to read a text but her inability to write her own.²⁰³ The text does not entertain the possibility that her mode of study

²⁰⁰ Jacqueline Jenkins, “Reading and *The Book of Margery Kempe*” in *A Companion to The Book of Margery Kempe*, ed. John Arnold and Katherine J. Lewis, 117.

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 115.

²⁰² According to Mary Carruthers, claiming illiteracy goes beyond latinity: “the term *illiteratus* involves yet one more, related, assumption, basic to the medieval epistemology of signs. It is a common medieval humility trope that we are all, in varying stages, *illiteratus* in respect to the perfect knowing of God” (*The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture* [New York: Cambridge U.P., 2008] 308).

²⁰³ As Dinshaw observes, “producing the *Book* was thus a long and arduous process, political as well as spiritual. Margery seems not merely dependent upon but really at the mercy of others— particularly men— to authorize her and produce her book. Margery’s controversial status exacerbated the difficulties. But her need for a scribe, and her aural contact with texts, were not unusual” (“Margery Kempe,” 228).

is categorically different from any other.²⁰⁴ As Dinshaw writes, “learning is not just the property of Margery’s literate scribes, and the very concepts of literacy and text need to be extended.”²⁰⁵

Indeed, Kempe associates encountering books and sermons with increasing spiritual life and power— for herself as well as for the priest who reads to her. For Bryan, Kempe’s devotional reading is a part of her ministering, and those who participate are enriched by it. The priest’s authority, increasing through his proximity to Kempe and through his acts of reading, further marks Kempe out as a source from which devotional discourse flows.²⁰⁶

Thus, thorw heryng of holy bokys and thorw heryng of holy sermownys, sche evyr encresyd in contemplacyon and holy meditacyon. It wer in maner unpossibyl to writyn al the holy thowtys, holy spechys, and the hy revelacyons wech owr Lord schewyd to hir, bothyn of hirselfe and of other men and women, also of many sowlys, sum for to ben savyd and sum for to ben dampnyd, and was to hir a gret ponyschyng and a scharp chastisyng. (3401-6)

If her relationship with Christ may or may not be reproducible amongst an imagined readership, her bibliography is. The priest, who has read her and ruminated over her, increases in spiritual power and in Church office because of their symbiotic relationship. Not only has the act of reading texts benefitted him, but so too has the act of reading Margery herself. He has correctly perceived Margery’s holiness, an ability— alongside the reading he undertakes with her— that leads him into positions of authority. Correctly reading Margery’s signs is in itself a sign of spiritual authority.

²⁰⁴ Dinshaw: “But her need for a scribe, and her aural contact with texts, were not unusual; the particular skill of writing down letters and words was more separate form the concept of authorship in Margery’s day than in our own. So to say that Margery could neither read nor write does not indicate that she had no access to textual culture. And as Boffey points out, no one seemed to expect that Margery herself would learn to read or write, though these were the obvious solutions to her problems of ‘defawte of redyng’ (p. 143) and lack of a willing and able scribe to record her experiences for posterity” (“Margery Kempe”, 228).

²⁰⁵ Ibid., 230. For a longer view of multimodal literacies, see also Mary Carruthers, *The Book of Memory*, 307-9. Carruthers’s study of Hugh de Fouillois finds that he “restates the old idea that picturing and writing are the same thing intellectually but in different media. To this, he adds the observation, also very traditional, that the memory...more readily retains something seen [as an image] than something heard” (308).

²⁰⁶ Bryan, *Looking Inward*, 20.

Margery's reading gives her a mystical authority as well as an academic one. Like Julian in the anchorhold, Margery becomes a source of answers for the people she meets; but her readings manifest in every part of her life. Catherine Sanok notes Margery's "literal reading of the Magdalene legend," a reading that "offers precedent for Margery's sexual temptations, her dramatic conversion and personal relation to Christ, her weeping and itinerant preaching. More broadly, it provides a rare model for the kind of story that the *Book* announces itself to be: a story of conversion."²⁰⁷ Margery's pilgrimage to Jerusalem strikes her with the weeping of Mary Magdalene, bringing Margery's self-fashioning after Mary into sharp focus: a boundary-crossing female mystic who overcomes social ostracizing and has a privileged relationship with Christ. During a conversation with Christ in which he gives her "a flawme of fyer...the hete of the Holy Gost," evocative of Rolle's *Incendium Amoris*, Margery and Mary are connected once more (2060, 2066):

Thy sowle is mor sekyr of the lofe of God than of thin owyn body, for thi sowle schal partyn fro thy body but God schal nevyr partyn fro thi sowle, for thei ben onyd togedyr wythowtyn ende. Therfor, dowtyr, thy hast as gret cawse to be mery as any lady in this werld, and, yyf thy knew, dowtyr, how meche tu plesyst me whan tu suffryst me wilfully to spekyn in the, thy schuldist nevyr do otherwise, for this is an holy lyfe and the tyme is ryth wel spent. For, dowtyr, this lyfe plesyth me mor than weryng of the haburjon or of the hayr or fastyng of bred and watyr, for, yyf tu seydest every day a thowsand Pater Noster, tu schuldist not plesyn me so wel as thy dost whan tu art in silens and syfferyst me to speke in thy sowle. (2073-2083)

Margery in silence, listening to Christ speak within her soul, is a striking and not quite concretizable image. Margery's soul is more closely tied to Christ than it is to her own earthly body, and her soul most decidedly outranks the married woman's body over which she cannot always exercise full control. Where for Julian Christ's interior presence is realized by the magisterial heart-city, Margery envisions it in more intimate and less material terms: no city in

²⁰⁷ Sanok, *Her Life Historical*, 128, 127.

which other people might crowd Christ or Margery, nothing but her soul and his speech, her corporeal reality fading into the background. On the one hand, this conversation with Christ reaffirms the same inner visionary speech Julian develops in the Short and Long Text, differentiated from bodily speech. On the other, it exists within a specific register of reading hagiographically.

Christ's words here echo his words to Mary and Martha in their home, taken here from Bokenham. Mary "was so desyrous/Hys wurdys to here, þat for deuocyoune/Euene at hys feet she hure set doun" (5545-7). Christ responds to Martha's complaint at Mary's inaction by elevating Mary's contemplation:

'Martha, Martha,' quod he, 'þou art besy,
And a-boute many þingys troubyld ful sore;
But oon þing sykyr, Marthe, is necessary,
Wych Mary hath chosyn: to lestyn my lore,
Wych neuere shal fayle; were weel þerefoor
That þe bettyr part sothly chosyn hath sche,
Wych takyn from hyr shal neuere be.' (5563-69)

Writing in particular of Margery's weeping, Sanok sets Margery's *imitatio* as an *imitatio Magdaleneae*—one that goes misread by her scribe and by others she encounters, who cannot bridge the gap in historical distance or between Latin and vernacular textual cultures.²⁰⁸ Locating Margery's *imitatio* in scripture over medieval holy women as Sanok does here makes Margery even more of a hermeneutic problem as Margery defies skeptical readers' attempts to categorize and interpret.

²⁰⁸ See Sanok, 128-9. On Margery's peers' inability to interpret her Magdalene-like weeping: "Her tears are read variously as evidence of possession, illness, intoxication, insanity, or— conversely— holiness. The community's inability to agree on a reading of Margery's behavior points to the absence of a consensus on whether it should be read through the categories offered by moral, medical, social, or spiritual discourses and to the considerable differences between these discourses in the representation of normative or acceptable feminine behavior. With the exception of a few 'ghostly men' who recognize the legitimacy of her devotion, however, most privilege contemporary discourses in which Margery's public vocation violates expectations about laywomen's religious practice" (129).

Christ's words to Margery confirm the validity of her spiritual life and overturn the doubt she encounters in her travels and at home. Within the additional frame of Margery's aural literacy, Christ's highlighting of Margery's listening is a further endorsement of her method of study. Like Mary, however, Margery goes beyond listening and undertakes a demanding series of pilgrimages, experiments with poverty, and sometimes-controversial public speaking engagements. The *imitatio* is a reading in action, the application of Margery's interpretation of the Magdalene legend.²⁰⁹ Listening, as the priests who consult her to their satisfaction find out, appears to allow a kind of additional access to knowledge. Margery's expertise is unique and endowed with its own authority: "Than sche, goynge agen to Yorke, was receyved of mech pepul and ful worthy clerkys, which enjoyed in owr Lord that had govyn hir not lettryd witte and wisdom to answeryn so many lernyd men wythowtyn velani or blame, thankyng be to God" (3028-32). With a literacy firmly coded as lay, female, and non-elite, Kempe attains a kind of earthly endorsement (in addition to Christ's) from the Latinate clergy Jenkins has outlined. In this setting, Kempe is clear that she has something to offer those of very different educational backgrounds; she is as valued amongst the clergy as she is amongst the citizens of York, in spite or perhaps because of her unlettered status.

Margery's readings are in large part endorsed by the *Book*, but not uniformly. Margery, too, reads imperfectly, and must be corrected when she attempts to put a flawed reading into practice. In a demonstration of her devotion, she begins to seek out bodily pain and wear a hairshirt. In a subsequent conversation, Christ offers both a correction and an addition to that practice:

²⁰⁹ For more on Margery's more literal *imitatio christi*, see McMurray Gibson: Margery's devotional practices "are all manifestations of her determined attempts to live out a series of homely and affective meditations which were originally addressed to a Poor Clare in Italy more than a century before her birth...It is often when Margery Kempe sounds most like her inimitable self that she is, in fact, most the Pseudo-Bonaventure" (*Theater of Devotion*, 49).

And, dowtyr, thy hast an hayr upon thi bakke. I wyl thu do it away, and I schal give the an hayr in thin hert that schal lyke me mych bettyr than lle the hayres in the world. Also, my derworthy dowtyr, thy must forsake that thow lovyst best in this world, and that is etyng of flesch. And instede of that flesch thow schalt etyn my flesch and my blod, that is the very body of Crist in the sacrament of the awter. Thys is my wyl, dowtyr, that thow receyve my body every Sondag, and I schal flowe so mych grace in the that alle the world schal merveylyn therof. Thow schalt ben etyn and knawyn of the pepul of the world as any raton knawyth the stokfysch. (376-84)

Margery is not the only late medieval mystic to be rerouted from experiencing physical pain. As Karma Lochrie writes, “Julian of Norwich expressly says that her desire for bodily remembrance is aimed at knowledge of Christ and his pain...the tokens of suffering in the body commemorate what the memory, imagination, and flesh know.”²¹⁰ The popularity of Pseudo-Bonaventura’s *Meditationes* and Love’s English translation show a widespread interest in reading, thinking about, and experiencing Christ’s bodily suffering.

The Orison we encountered in Chapter 3’s exploration of meditations on the life of Christ provides a framework for understanding that desire to experience Christ’s pain as inscription. The speaker’s refrain to have the pains of the crucifixion written upon their “herte-bok” imagines becoming a legible record of the crucifixion (1415). The speaker goes so far as to wish to be pierced by the thorn instead of Christ, but like Julian and Margery they must observe a less physical meditation (“Whi ne wilt thou, thorn, myn herte perce,/The peyne of Crist whan I reherce?/More skyle it were to do me wo/Than hym that no thing hath mysdo” [579-83]). Karma Lochrie identifies the legibility of *imitatio christi* as “a semiotics of suffering, a complex system of signposts and tokens that do not always observe the boundaries of the physical, imaginary, and symbolic...A system of images and signs induce this suffering, while the suffering itself produces its own *insignia* in the body, thereby perpetuating a semiotic system of remembrance.

²¹⁰ Lochrie, *Translations of the Flesh*, 36.

The mystic's body itself is translated into *imago*, into sign of Christ's suffering and God's intentions."²¹¹ Margery has encountered this system of semiotics, read it, and aspires to enact it. The hairshirt is an early step in that process.

But Margery's hairshirt is not legible enough if only she can read it. Christ redirects her reading and enactment of ascetic devotional practices from private legibility (the hairshirt, worn beneath her clothing) to public (abstaining from all meat, except the Communion wafer), introducing the largest and most lamented source of Margery's suffering: social ostracism. The hairshirt is one reminder of Christ's pain, but forgoing meat to focus on the Eucharist is another; where Margery has worn the hairshirt privately, this new devotional practice is not so concealable.²¹² From Rolle's texts, interactions with area anchorites, and her *imitatio* of Mary Magdalene's legend, Margery has developed one reading and enactment of ascetic life. Christ introduces a second reading, one that forces Margery to engage with her community rather than to withdraw from worldly life. As Margery consumes the Eucharist and devotional texts, so too will she be consumed.

Reading and Misreading Margery Kempe

The people who populate the *Book*, from a range of stations and cultures, are also readers— and relentlessly, their chosen subject is Margery herself. Christ sets their misreadings

²¹¹ Ibid, 36-7.

²¹² From Staley, "Margery's unwillingness to share the eating practices of her fellows has a significance that goes well beyond her wish to abstain from certain foods; by her abstinence, she marks her distance from communal values. However, in what is ostensibly an account of Margery's eating habits, Kempe, in fact, describes a community that seems to fear what is not immediately capable of assimilation" (51).

of her body, her intentions, and her training as Margery's most painful holy undertaking; her suffering in the face of exclusion and doubt. Those who recognize Margery's holiness are held up as wise and important allies, but those who misread her behavior, teaching, and appearance are sources of great distress. Their failure to read her correctly, or their failure to correct their faulty readings, is proof of their spiritual inadequacy.

Margery's journey to and from Jerusalem puts her at the mercy of others' readings. Her fellow English pilgrims misread her consistently:

And sone aftyr thorw mevyng of summe of her cumpany hyr confessor was dysplesyd for sche ete no flesch, and so mech of alle the cumpany. And thei wer most dysplesyd for sche wepyd so mech and spak alwey of the lofe and goodnes of our Lord as wel at the tabyl as in other place. And therfor schamfully thei reprevyd hir and also chedyn hir and seyden thei wold not suffren hir as hir husbond dede whan sche was in Inglond. (1405-12)

Though Margery's vegetarianism has been ordained by Christ and is a not-unheard-of religious practice for medieval female almost-saints, the pilgrims fail to see it as a spiritual sign.²¹³ Their reading of their fellow pilgrim exists solely in a secular, social register: here is a woman whose singular self-fashioning might expose the whole group to scorn. It evidently does not occur to them to read her in the semiotic system of an *imitatio christi*. The English pilgrims go so far as to materially inflict their faulty reading on Margery's body, altering her appearance in accordance with their interpretation of her behaviors:

They cuttyd hir gown so schort that it come but lytil benethyn hir kne and dedyn hir don on a whyte canwas in maner of a sekkyn gelle, for sche schuld ben holdyn for a fool and the pepyl schuld not makyn of hir ne han hir in reputacyon. (1430-32)

²¹³ Caroline Walker Bynum writes, "Food-related behavior was central to women socially and religiously not only because food was a resource women controlled but also because by means of food women controlled themselves and their world. Bodily functions, sensations, fertility, and sexuality; husbands, mothers, fathers, and children; religious superiors and confessors; God in his majesty and the boundaries of one's own 'self' -- all could be manipulated by abstaining from and bestowing food" (*Holy Feast and Holy Fast* 193-4).

In white canvas that comes to just below the knee, Margery is meant to be legible as a fool accompanying the English group. This is both an act of exclusion from the group and a preemptive exclusion from other pilgrims they encounter, a license to dismiss her. Like the priest at her sickbed years before, the pilgrims come to a premature and incomplete reading of Margery, refusing to hear her speech or interpret her presence accurately and hastening to their own conclusions. Their cruel misreadings invite other cruel misreadings, until to read Margery well is to forge ahead with a counter-reading.

But Margery's fellow pilgrims are not wholly successful in their attempts to overwrite her body. Those who are able to read beyond her altered surface are elevated by their interpretive skill: the "good man of the hows" who treats Margery kindly over her companions' objections, the legate who joins her in abstaining from meat, William Weaver of Devonshire, and Richard of Ireland, are sharp contrasts to her detractors. Undeterred by the short white canvas, they perceive more of Margery than her traveling group does. Like Margery herself, they also exhibit skilled listening. Indeed, Margery seems to inspire listening even in more challenging circumstances, as she and the Italian priest to whom she confesses are able to understand one another despite neither speaking the other's language. With this translation miracle, "sche confessyd to this preste of alle hir synnes as ner as hir mende wold servyn hir for hir childhode unto that owre and receyved hir penawns ful joyfully. And sithyn sche schewyd hym the secret thyngys of revelacyons and of hey contemplacyons, and how sche had swech mend in hys Passyon and so gret compassyon whan God wolde geve it that sche fel down therwyth and myth not beryn it" (1925-9). Margery is able to make the complete confession she was once denied.

Having listened fully to her confession, the priest's lingering doubts are assuaged when "owyr Lord sent hym swech tonkenys be the forseyd creatur of his owyn mys governawns and his

levyng” (1934-6). Reading these tokens as genuine and true, the priest joins Margery’s growing flock of supporters and strenuously undertakes her defense. Margery repeatedly offers full confessions to her followers, providing her an opportunity to rewrite again and again that incomplete confession— and providing her followers with repeated opportunities to “read” her charitably, respecting her life’s narrative. Her travels form a network of charitable supporters, people who listen and are converted by her speech and actions; though Margery’s peripateticism means an inevitable separation, in every city she leaves behind devoted followers to perpetuate her spiritual legacy.

What this spiritual legacy entails after Margery’s departure is another matter: to what are these followers being converted? When it considers those followers, the *Book* is most interested in the moment of their conversion; their correct readings of Margery prove their holiness. Beset by “wepyng, sobbyng, and crying” in Jerusalem, Margery poses a hermeneutic test to everyone she encounters (1726). While her ostensibly devout traveling companions “wolde not knowyn hir,” a many others read Margery as she wishes to be read (1724):

And the Freyrys of the Tempyl mad hir gret cher and govyn hir many gret relykys, desiryng that sche schult a dwellyd stille amongs hem, yyf sche had wold, for the feyth thei had in hir. Also the Sarazines mad mych of hir and conveyd hir and leddyn hir abowtyn in the cuntré wher sche wold gon. And sche fond alle pepyl good onto hir and gentyl saf only hir owyn cuntremen. (1739-43)

The friars discern the spiritual authority of Margery’s weeping, entrusting her with other signs of holiness. Faced with the option of staying with them, however, Margery chooses to continue circulating amongst new audiences both friendly and hostile. The Saracens’ welcome further opens up Margery’s readership, limiting charitable reading not by nationality, race, or religion; the sole determinant for holiness here, it seems, is reading Margery herself. In Margery’s vita, supporters are characterized by their immediate relation to Margery: their usefulness in

defending her, their understanding of her mode of living, their suffering alongside her. Central to all of this is their ability to first read Margery charitably. Converted as readers, their devotion is marked by belief in her.

Abroad, Margery faces cruelty and rejection alongside rarer but dramatic embracing. In England, misreadings of Margery unfold within the context of late medieval heterodoxy and heresy. Though anxieties over heterodoxy are not at all limited to England, the *Book* does not put Margery into contact with them during her international travels; at home, however, her devotional project is frequently interpreted as a threat to orthodoxy. At home was another matter, as “Margery, though doctrinally orthodox, was associated with Lollardy because of her direct communication with the divine, her circumventing and correcting clerical authorities, her speaking in public...and her generally unofficial and disruptive devotional style.”²¹⁴ In other words, the signs of Margery’s holiness that in Jerusalem and in Rome result either in social scorn or in veneration here lead to either veneration or criminal allegations.

Margery’s difficulties with heresy certainly go beyond misreading. As many scholars have shown, contemporary tensions— punctuated by official condemnation of Wyclif, the introduction of the death penalty for heretics, heresy trials, and the Oldcastle rebellion, among other events— contribute to Margery’s particular divisiveness. “If we look more closely at the texture and technique of the episode, ultimately at its fiction” writes Lynn Staley of Margery’s experience in York, “we can begin to see it as raising (but not laying) some of the most important and more inflammatory issues of the day.”²¹⁵ In his essay on Margery’s trials, John Arnold weaves these into a net around her, but argues against taking the Lollardy charges too literally. Once stable signs were now in doubt: “One of the consequent effects of the growing

²¹⁴ Dinshaw, “Margery Kempe,” 228.

²¹⁵ Staley, *Margery Kempe’s Dissenting Fictions*, 7.

fear of heresy at the beginning of the fifteenth century was an increased concern about what constituted orthodox practice and belief, and to what extent such ‘normality’ had to be *demonstrated* rather than assumed.”²¹⁶ Margery, who proved her orthodoxy again and again in her trials, is caught up in a new world where old devotional practices can be interpreted with new suspicion.

One throughline of misinterpretation is begun by Margery’s decision to take up the clothing of married chastity while traveling with her husband to visit the bishop of Lincoln. Though the bishop approves of her decision, pausing first to ascertain Margery’s husband’s approval, her appearance in white clothing subjects her to ridicule and suspicion elsewhere. In Leicester, she is imprisoned for Lollardy and brought before both the city’s secular and ecclesiastical administrations. Taking her into custody, the mayor draws and then severs a connection between Margery and one of her virgin martyr influences: “‘A,’ seyde the meyr, ‘Seynt Kateryn telde what kynred sche cam of and yet ar ye not lyche, for thu art a fals strumpet, a fals loller, and a fals deceyver of the pepyl, and therfor I schal have the in preson’” (2625-7). To the mayor, Margery is false, false, and false; every part of her appearance and behavior is a deception. But in his disbelief, he gives Katherine and Margery a real commonality—imprisonment. Margery’s jail time (mitigated by the hospitable jailer and his wife) puts her alongside the virgin martyr in ways from which the rest of her life has disqualified her.

The steward takes up the mayor’s allegations of deception, telling Margery she “‘lyest falsly in pleyn Englysch’” (2651). To the steward, Margery’s speech is a misuse of the plain speaking in devotional contexts advocated by Mirk and Chaucer’s Parson. The steward finds Margery’s combination of chaste dress and married status contradictory and incompatible. Her

²¹⁶ John Arnold, “Margery’s Trials,” 93.

persistent occupation of the boundary between married and chaste opens her up to misreadings like the Steward's, as her novelty poses a hermeneutic challenge to would-be readers. In the church at Leicester before her arrest, she is struck once more by "the fyer of lofe kyndelyd so yern in hir hert that sche myth not keypyn it prevy, for, whedyr sche wolde er not, it cawsyd hir to brekyn owte wyth a lowde voys and cryen merveylowlslyche and webyn and sobbyn ful desorslyche that many a man and woman wondryd on hir therfor" (2610-3). At her arrest she attests to her readiness to be imprisoned and requests that she not be held with men. Margery answers the steward's questioning so "redily and resonabely that he cowde getyn no cawse ageyn hir," suggesting her skill with and proper deployment of with the very kind of English plain speaking the steward accuses her of abusing. Margery's appearance may be difficult to read, but she speaks only the plain truth. The steward's willful misreading is an antagonism Margery has by now faced many times, and his attempted rape links his misreading to larger moral failings. Alleging falsity in Margery, the steward himself is proved false.

If Margery's white clothing and married status contribute implicitly to the steward's "strumpet" claim, they contribute explicitly to the allegations she faces before the clergy and assembled laypeople of Leicester. She swears to the articles of the faith to the satisfaction of the clergy, but the mayor continues to doubt her. His sticking point seems to be her white clothing, which he interprets in a comically paranoid misreading: "I wil wetyn why thow gost in white clothys, for I trowe thow art comyn hedyr to han away owr wyvys fro us and ledyn hem wyth the" (2727-8). In the mayor's reckoning, the sign of Margery's married chastity is rather a beacon to the married women of the town, legible only to those women and legible with the purpose of leading them all astray. His reading does not persuade the clergy present, who show their worthiness by dismissing him and not Margery. The mayor's objections isolate him from

the good sense of the rest of the assembly, bringing Margery into the fold even as he removes himself from it.

To the clergy, Margery furnishes a true reading of her dress. With the mayor temporarily excused from the proceedings, Margery supplies the clergy with the explanation that “my gostly faderys” has instructed her to wear white and cautions them that he will know if anything false is said about her not for their own benefit (they do not object to the clothing) but for the mayor’s (2738-40). She is no longer in immediate danger of a heresy conviction and has brought the city’s clergy over to her side, but with the mayor’s continued resistance the victory is not quite complete. Margery on her own cannot persuade the mayor, but she gambles that he might be more receptive to the collective authority of the local Church. That the mayor relents after hearing from the clergy is both a testament to how difficult reading Margery is to her peers and how, even by that low bar, the mayor shows himself to be a wilfully ignorant reader.

He accepts the clergy’s words conditionally, his final decision resting on his receipt of the bishop’s letter. The letter suffices for the mayor, evidence of his misreading and a credible endorsement of Margery at the same time. It also marks Margery’s first translation into text.

Margery is now both woman and record:

Than sche gat hir a lettyr of the abbot to my Lord of Lyncolne into record what conversacyon sche had ben the tyme that sche was in Leicetyr. And the Deen of Leicetyr was redy to recordyn and witnessyn wyth hir also, for he had gret confidens that owre Lord lovyd hir, and therfor he cheryd hir ful hily in hys owyn place. (2762-66)

Her conversation with the bishop has been made text—made into something more authorized or indisputable than her physical and vocal presence. Margery has met and converted numerous people to believe in her holiness by this point in the *Book*, but here she gains a material sign of

her holiness, something that interprets her for others so they do not have to interpret her themselves. The text's authority speaks for her when her own voice cannot persuade.

And so sche gat hir a lettyr of the bischop to the meyr of Leycetyr, monyschyng hym that he schulde not vexyn hir ne lettyn hir to gon and comyn whan sche wolde. Than ther fellyn gret thunders and levenys and many reynes that the pepil demyd it was for venjawns of the sayd creatur, gretly desyryng that she had ben owt of that cuntré. And sche wolde in no wise gon thens tyl that sche had hir scryppe ageyn. Whan the seyde meyr receyved the forseyd lettyr, he sent hir hir skryppe and leet her gon in in safté wher sche wolde. (2797-2803)

In addition to containing a record of her voice and the bishop's in conversation, the letter speaks for the bishop's separate wish that the mayor cease his efforts against Margery. Margery's testimony—her adherence to the articles of faith, her responses to questioning, and her discussions with high-ranking Church officials—is not adequate evidence of her innocence for the mayor. The mayor must acquiesce to the bishop's request, but not before committing the final injustice of withholding her pilgrim's scrip. Some detractors may never be fully persuaded, but in this case Margery's possession of a written testament saves her from a great deal of difficulty.

Being conveyed into text is a meaningful event in Margery's vita, one that emboldens her to prolong her conflict with the mayor to retrieve her property. She is temporarily advantaged with a textual, material clearance to proceed, and her religious work is put into text for others to witness outside of her bodily presence. Indeed, where that presence is insufficient proof of her holiness, the letter is meant to confirm her status. Margery is no longer only a reader of texts or a legible human body; with the bishop's letter, she begins to assume a body of text. As others have argued, the written *Book* is a crucial part of Kempe's autohagiography. Her battles with misreading and slander, the primary instruments of her suffering and torture, mean the *Book* is also a crucial part of Margery's defense—both during her life (with her dictation to the first

scribe) and after. Its existence recognizes, like Margery before the mayor of Lincoln, that while aural transmission is powerful, it is most powerful when accompanied by a written text.

On the one hand, written text in the *Book* occupies a special practical status: when Margery has a written record of herself, she can escape hazardous situations. When she does not, she is vulnerable to heresy charges. At York, Margery is once again without written proof of her holiness. As she delves more deeply into her practice of preaching from outside the pulpit, the authority of her spoken words in relation to written words becomes fraught. She is slandered in the speech of her enemies even as “in that tyme many good men and women preyd hir to mete and madyn hir ryth good cher and weryn ryth glad to heryn hyr dalyawns, havyn gret merveyle of hir speche for it was fruteful” (2826-8). Margery’s speech is of a different substance from her enemies, something fruitful and of good cheer. To York Minster’s assembled clerics and her lay detractors, however, speech is not enough. When they request a “lettyr of recorde,” she can only tell them ““myn husbond gaf me leve wyth hys owyn mowthe”” (2875-6). The validity of her husband’s permission does not allay the assembly’s doubts, as her dialogue with them thereafter shows.

In her speeches before the York clerics, she repeatedly provides evidence of her authority as a spiritual figure and devout layperson; their continued misreading of her appearance and her words cast some doubt on the efficacy— at least in elevated circles and among skeptics— of speech as a mode of spiritual communication and sign of spiritual authority.

Than the clerkys examynde hir in the Articles of the Feyth and in many other poyntys as hem likyde, to the whch sche answeyrd wel and trewly that thei myth have non occasyon in hir wordys for to disesyn hir, thankyd be God...Than the secular pepil answeyrd for hir and seyde sche schulde not comyn in preson, for thei woldyn hemsself undirtakyn for hir and gon to the Erchebisshop wyth hir. And so the clerkys seyde no mor to hir at that tyme, for thei resyn up and went wher thei wolde and letyn hir gon wher sche wolde, worschip to Jhesu. And sone aftyr ther cam a clerke unto hir, on of the same that had sotyn ageyn hir, and seyde,

“Damsel, I prey the be not displesyd wyth me, thow I sat wyth the docowr ageyns the; he cryed so upon me that I durst not otherwise don.” And sche seyde, “Ser, I am not displesyd wyth yow therfor.” Than seyde he, “I prey yow that preyth for me.” “Sir, sche seyde, “I wil alreedy.” (2882-2895)

Margery’s recitation of the Articles of the Faith fails to verify her orthodoxy— at least, for some of the clerks present. But the disbelieving clerks are the exception that highlights Margery’s authority; the laypeople speak out in her defense, having been converted not to Margery’s unique mode of living but rather to her mode of reading. Where in her travels Margery’s confession functions as the text her followers correctly read to accept her holiness, in England her speech is shaped by the political forces that situate her squarely in the push-and-pull between orthodoxy, heterodoxy, and heresy. Margery’s testimony and recitation of the Articles is sufficient proof for her defenders in York, where the timidly dissenting clerk undermines the assembled clergy’s seeming-unanimity. To the lone clerk, Margery’s prayers are entirely worth seeking. Within the larger scope of Lollard heresy, however, Margery’s illegibility is a lingering problem that separates charitable from suspicious reading and endangers the narrative’s heroine.

Margery is so inscrutable to York’s clergy that she enters into new layers of category crisis. Some of her interrogating is now familiar, including the major contention from her time in Leicester: ““Why gost thou in white? Art thou a mayden?”” (2923). Heresy is at the forefront of York’s consciousness in more ways than Margery’s dress, however, as “Sum of the pepil askyd whedyr sche wer a Cristen woman er a Jewe; sum seyde sche was a good woman, and sum seyde nay. Than the Erchebischoop toke hys see, and hys clerkys also, iche of hem in hys degré, meche pepil beyng present” (2933-35).

And than anon, aftyr the Erchebischoop put to hir the Articles of owr Feyth, to the whch God gaf hir grace to answeyn wel and trewly and redily wythowtyn any gret stody so that he myth not blamyn hir, than he seyde to the clerkys, “Sche knowith hir feyth wel anow. What schal I don wyth hir?” The clerkys seyden, “We knowyn wel that sche can the Articles of the Feith, but we wil not suffyr hir

to dwellyn among us, for the pepil hath gret feyth in hir dalyawnce, and peraventure sche myth pervertyn summe of hem.” (2943-49)

Margery’s orthodox knowledge— her facility with the Articles of the Faith— cuts both ways. On one side, it certifies her as not Lollard. On the other, it authorizes her too much as a lay mystic and undermines the institutional church. In the eyes of the clergy, Margery’s capacity to lead followers astray extends beyond wives to laypeople more generally.

Her explicit disavowal of preaching, which she follows by relating a religious parable, changes the assembly’s tone. Margery’s telling of the tale of priest and palmer with “but comownycacyon and good wordys” evidently impacts the Archbishop and clergy in ways her earlier demonstrations of knowledge have not (2976). Now they begin to see her as she wishes to be seen, to read Margery’s spoken text as she wishes it to be read. The parallel she draws between herself and one of her priest-mentors at Lynn skirts her preaching once more, and makes clear the consequences of failing her hermeneutic test: “‘yyf any man be evyl plesyd wyth my [the priest’s] prechyng, note hym wel, for he is gylty.’ ‘And ryth so, ser,’ seyde sche to the clerk, ‘far ye be me, God forgeve it yow.’” (3014-6). The instrument of Margery’s martyrdom— her susceptibility to misreading— is also the instrument that proves the spiritual worth of each person who engages with her.

As both a reading test and a pseudo-saint, Margery is ever-aware of her role as a heroine within her own narrative. If a written saint’s life is just one part of their hagiography, it is still an important part; Margery has learned all too well the extra authority accorded to written texts. Hurt by the slander she endures, she is comforted in a vision by Christ, who assures her that

‘Dowtyr, it is mor plesyng unto me that thu suffyr despitys and scornys, schamys and reprevys, wrongys and disesys than yif thin hed wer smet of thre tymes on the day every day in sevyn yer. And therfor, dowtyr, fere the nowt what any man can seyn unto the, but in myn goodnes and in thy sorwys that thu hast suffryd therin

hast thu gret cawse to joyn, for, what thu comyst to hevyn, than schal every sorwe turnyn the to joye.’ (3094-99)

Margery the protagonist and perhaps Kempe and her collaborators are already looking ahead to a time when she is not personally present to speak for herself. Her network of followers can only spread her word so far. If she wants her legend to continue to be transmitted, writing it is a natural choice.

The *Book* will be a longer-lived letter of record, and Margery pursues its composition with the same determination she has pursued the rest of her spiritual career. As she is repeatedly called up for questioning by her peers and by church authorities, so too does the paper-and-ink text require making and remaking. Margery is “warnyd in hyr spyrit for that sche schuld not wryte so sone,” and many years pass before that warning lifts (120-1). When it finally does, Margery has grown in spiritual power and assembled her own following; where a virgin martyr’s legend has a clear arc and ending, the warning not to write so soon enables the arc of Margery’s life to take its own unique shape. It ensures she does not commit the same mistake as the priest who cut off her sickbed confession, and that her legend can grow to its own natural fullness. Allowed to mature, the *Book* can ultimately offer a very different legend from the exempla Margery herself seeks to emulate.

The *Book*’s first readers, however, face a different kind of reading challenge. In the narrative of the *Book*’s coming into existence, the first draft is written in German “red letters” illegible to Margery’s English readers—her second and third scribes (86). The second scribe “wrot abowt a leef” before giving up. The third scribe, a priest, is daunted at first by the letters and his own eyesight, but Margery’s prayers and his own repeated attempts to read the writing result in a successful transliteration and the *Book*’s completion. The priest’s difficulty in reading the text does not induce him to abandon the project, but rather he returns again and again to it,

finding it easier to read as he does so. Just as Margery's white clothing requires multiple attempts at comprehension for the skeptical priests of Lincoln, so too does the legend in text form.

The fact that both Margery and the text are hard to read is not an immediate reflection of the reader's spiritual prowess. Challenge and failure is a necessary part of the project, as Margery herself discovers when turning to a hairshirt to manifest her devotion. Her own spiritual life is marked by highs and lows and turns "agen abak in tym of temptacyon," but not disqualification from her holy aspirations (13). The net sum of her life is holiness, for all its mistakes. Readers are similarly failure-prone but redeemable. The true outliers are those who, like the mayor of Lincoln, attempt to make Margery a fool but instead become one themselves. If a successful reading is a charitable one, the mayor's inability to read charitably does more than exclude him from the group accepting Margery's story: it marks him as spiritually flawed and uninterested in a remedy.

The fourth scribe casts some doubt on the priest's scribal skills, and this last scribe resolves that problem with much the same methodology. That priest has died, and "thow that he wrot not clerly ne opynly to owr maner of spekyng, he in hys maner of wrytyng and spellyng mad trewe sentens the wech, thorw the help of God and of hirselve that had al this tretys in felyng and werkyng, is trewly drawyn owt of the copy into this lityl boke" (5243-6). With God's help and Margery's, the final scribe is able to read accurately and to produce the *Book*. It is a feat of charitable reading and an enactment of the persistence Margery models in her pursuit of a religious life.

Reading Margery well, as the *Book* measures it, should be easier than it proves to be. Margery struggles with misreading because she exists in context where her face-value meaning

is unstable, and she might alternately be a holy woman or a heretic. To her accusers and slanderers, the latter was a more believable reading. To be read accurately, she is to be read from beginning to end and taken more or less at face value; she is what she says she is. Even when splitting legal hairs over teaching and preaching, she responds with restraint and accuracy. Margery assures the assembly at Lincoln, “I preche not, ser I come in no pupytt. I use but comownycacyon and good wordys, and that wil I do whil I leve.” (2975-7). Margery relates scripture, essentially preaching, but that action does not constitute the whole of her work. Rather, she cultivates a charitable way of reading those exempla, and ends by providing the Margery legend as a final entry into that corpus. For readers inside of the text and outside of it, Margery is an authority to be trusted, as she trusts the authorities she reads: “And for alle tho that feithyn and trustyn er schul feithyn and trustyn in my prayerys into the worldys ende, sweche grace as thei desiryng, gostly er bodily, to the profite of her sowlis, I pray the, Lord, grawnt hem for the multitude of thi mercy. Amen” (2.798-800). For Margery, narrating the *Book*’s closing lines, imagined readers and the characters who read her reap the same “profite” for reading her well.

Margery’s imagined readers and the *Book*’s imagined readers are the same, imagined in the same terms. They exist in the same long moment of reading, where the only point in their shared timeline is the “worldys ende.” Until that point, “feithyn and trustyn” make up one continuous unit of time. Margery and the *Book* are always being watched, read, and heard, and interpreting them is a lifelong act. If in her lifetime Margery presents two possible readings, one charitable/orthodox and the other disreputable/heterodox, the *Book* makes clear which mode of interpretation is accurate. Her followers within the *Book* and her imagined readers are not invited to partake of her same visionary experiences, affecting themselves within her visions. Instead, their devotion comes from their agreement with and support of Margery’s exceptionalism— like

the priest who reads to her in his room, her followers are increased by their belief in her, by their interpretation of Margery as a spiritual guide.

As reading Margery and reading the *Book* are envisioned as methodologically one project, Margery and the *Book* are conflated into one legible body. The *Book* realizes the demands of the *Orison*'s speaker to be made text. Where the *Orison* envisions heart-writing, the *Book* takes all of Margery's legible parts and inscribes them on skin. For the *Book*, the *Orison*'s heart-writing interiority is turned outward on the skin— a public devotion, like Margery's publicly-lived life. It poses “into worldys ende” the interpretive challenge Margery poses as its protagonist— not just autohagiographic proof of life but an enduring mode of reading.

CODA

Preservation and Trash: Imagined Readers and Unimaginable Readings

“...we really are unable to see what right any one has to find fault with a set of persons associating together for the sake of reprinting old books. If they choose to reprint ‘trash,’ let them do so,—it is their pleasure, and certainly no one else has any title to object. In the next place, the limitation of copies is objected to; but if the books are worthless, why should they be multiplied? The fact is, that the books are *not* worthless, and, with very few exceptions, may be useful to persons attached to the Ancient History and Literature of their country. The object of the Club, and of all Clubs of a similar description, is not for *publication*, but *preservation*, and the object is fully attained by an impression of forty or fifty copies...To multiply copies would serve no good end, for how few readers nowadays care one farthing about the works, however important, of the older authors!”

— James Maidment, [*Roxburghe Revels*](#), *And Other Relative Papers: Including Answers to the Attack On the Memory of the Late Joseph Haslewood, Esq., F. S. A., With Specimens of His Literary Reproductions* (Edinburgh, 1838), vii.

I have used imagined readers to move outside of the confined space opened up by manuscript and reception studies, but they have been roughly bound by how those texts understand their religious and cultural, if not technological, realities. Imagined readers permit texts to envision reaching as many or as few readers as they wish. At the same time, textually semiliterate or illiterate readers can be spoken to in the space the text creates. A readership can be imagined into being independent of the size of its historical counterpart. Imagined readers are not a fantasy of the text, grounded as they are in the texts’ understandings of contemporary modes of reading and modes of piety. The texts in these chapters are aware that imagined readers are free to read well or poorly, but what happens to imagined readers after their landscapes of reading and religious practices have been thoroughly, even unrecognizably, changed?

The texts I have explored in a late medieval context experienced and continue to experience these changes. The *Book of Margery Kempe* and the *Longleat Parson's Tale* were both sequestered in private libraries. The *Book* was read and annotated in the Mount Grace Charterhouse, then came through unknown circumstances to the Derbyshire library of the Butler-Bowdon family until Hope Emily Allen's famous discovery in 1934, and now resides in the British Library as MS Additional 61823. The *Longleat Parson's Tale* originated in London with the merchant Goldwell family and arrived at Longleat probably with the marriage of Elizabeth Goldwell's granddaughter, who married the Steward of Longleat in 1567. It has remained in that library since, first as an anonymous devotional text and much later as a *Canterbury Tale*. The *Book* has been printed and reprinted in myriad edited editions since its discovery, and the *Canterbury Tales'* print run in English is nearly as long as the history of print in England. But the *Parson's Tale* specific to the Longleat text has not been published and continues to be available only in manuscript form at Longleat House in the idyllic and remote Wiltshire village of Horningsham. The anonymous penitential manual and Kempe's autohagiography have disrupted and limited circulation histories until the twentieth century; if we plot what we can confirm of their circulation before, during, and after both the Reformation and the rise of print technologies in England, we generate a few points separated by centuries of blank space.

Though their provenances too include sizeable blank spaces in the medieval and early modern periods, MS 11307 and the texts of Julian of Norwich fared differently. The Short Text is extant in a single manuscript, the Carthusian compilation British Library Add. MS 37790, which was made in England and appears to have stayed there from its making. Excerpts of the Long Text are also extant in several English manuscripts. The only extant pre-Reformation Long

Text, Westminster Treasury MS 4, is partial.²¹⁷ Complete extant copies of the Long Text originate with English Benedictine nuns in post-Reformation exile in northern France, two sister communities at Cambrai and Paris. This, too, is where the first printed edition of the Long Text originates— with an affiliate of the community, Serenus Cressy. The manuscripts themselves are not just a record of the text, but of the nuns’ deep devotional relationship to it; they went through the labor of manually copying it out.

The results are three manuscripts in a variety of hands; margin annotations as one finds in medieval manuscripts and early modern books alike; and a preserved Middle English.²¹⁸ The nuns’ linguistic distance from Middle English tracks in some of the marginal notes in both Sloane 1 (Sloane MS 2499) and Sloane 2 (Sloane MS 3705), which comment on or translate archaic words. MS fonds Anglais 40 does not have the marginal dialogue that continues through both Stowe and Sloane, but where the others are written in contemporary hands Anglais 40 is more self-conscious in its manuscript stylings, its script in reminiscent of gothic textualis. It observes other formal conventions of manuscript and early print in its layout where Sloane 1 and Sloane 2 do not, including oversized decorated capitals at the start of each chapter, elaborate pilcrow demarcating paragraphs, and lead words. Though this is not notably or exclusively a medieval characteristic, each page is also heavily ruled (sometimes the lines of text runneth over). The result is a text written in a bold and affected gothic hand with clean margins.

²¹⁷ Alexandra Barratt attributes the Short Text’s survival to “the Carthusian monks, who also preserved the unique manuscript copy of *The Book of Margery Kempe*” (“How Many Children had Julian of Norwich? Editions, Translations and Versions of her Revelations,” in *Vox Mystica: Essays on Medieval Mysticism in Honour of Professor Valerie M. Lagorio*, ed. Anne Clark Bartlett [Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1995], 2). In Westminster Treasury MS 4, the Long Text excerpts appear with selections from Walter Hilton.

²¹⁸ Scholars have identified one of these hands: Sloane is “a much plainer manuscript perhaps written by Clementina Cary, founder of the English Benedictine convent in Paris” (Watson and Jenkins, 14). The other manuscripts are attributed to these communities with widespread scholarly confidence (Ibid 15-16).

The French recusant manuscripts are situated at the junction of formal, material, linguistic nostalgia, their recusant communities' contemporary spiritual needs, and perhaps investment in the long term survival of pre-Reformation English religious texts. Manuscript study offers insight into how these devout recusant communities imagined their work being read, and how they themselves interacted with the text as a affective focal point for their devotion. The manuscript and its recopying in exile are an act of preservation, materially, devotionally, and culturally preserving a past of which the nuns and the country they left have dramatically divergent readings. Manuscript remaking adds another layer of imagined readers to the text: the exiles' imagined readers alongside Julian's own. These imagined readers seem to be fellow recusants, incorporating manuscript study and production into their religious practices.

But the exiled Benedictine communities and their allies did not just remake the the Long Text for themselves. Over the course of the seventeenth century, the Long Text was not only copied by hand but in 1670 it was also printed by the communities preserving it.²¹⁹ Serenus Cressy “did what the nuns did not have the financial resources to do” in producing the print edition, which is “probably based on Paris.”²²⁰ For the first time, Julian's evenchristene might be realized more fully— a wide community of readers made possible through print technology. What readers does Cressy imagine for the print edition?

Like Julian, Cressy assumes a benign readership in search of writings to add to their devotional repertoire, and for whom reading is a devotional practice. In the edition's dedicatory letter to Lady Mary Blount, Cressy writes,

The Author of it, is a Person of your own Sex, who lived about Three Hundred years since, intended it for *You*, and for such Readers as your self, who will not be induced to the perusing of it by Curiosity, or a desire to learn strange things,

²¹⁹ For more on the nuns' literary work, see Heather Wolfe, *The Literary Career and Legacy of Elizabeth Cary, 1613-1680* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

²²⁰ Watson and Jenkins, 16.

which afterward they will at best vainly admire, or perhaps out of incredulity condemn. But your *Ladiship* Will, I assure my self, afford *Her* a place in your Closet, where at your Devout Retirements, you will enjoy her Saint-like Conversation, attending to her, whilst with Humility and Joy, She recounts to you the Wonders of our *Lords* Love to *Her*, and of his *Grace* in *Her*. And being thus employed, I make no doubt but you will be sensible to many Beams of her Lights, and much warmth of her Charity, by reflection darted into your own Soul. Now that such may be the effects of this Book, is the desire of

(Madam)
Your Ladyships most Humble,
and most Obliged Servant
in our Lord,
H. Cressy. (v-vi)

Cressy constructs a direct relationship between Lady Mary Blount and Julian of Norwich, two people connected through time via textual transmission. Blount is a model for other readers, too; Cressy specifies what they and Blount do and do not do as readers. With Blount standing in for an idealized imagined reader receptive to “the Saint-like” visionary’s message, Cressy envisions engaging with the book as one part of an active private devotional life— a personal “Closet” of edification. The private conversation between Blount and Julian resonates with practices reverencing saints even as it resonates with the Protestant belief in the primacy of the individual’s connection to the divine. It recalls, too, the closet of the anchorhold in the now-distant pre-Reformation medieval past.

Cressy’s prescription to Blount and the readers she stands for as proxy was wildly at odds with his edition’s public reception. The Long Text’s appearance in print brought it to new audiences across the Channel in England— including hostile ones. Edward Stillingfleet, the Bishop of Worcester, instigated a blistering and public attack against the edition, Cressy’s credibility, and Julian’s authority; the attack drew responses not only from Cressy himself but from his and the edition’s supporters. To Stillingfleet however, the *Revelations* are suspect on multiple counts: as “hysterical gossip” indicative of “the great number of female Revelations

approved in the *Roman* church” (this is evidently a negative characteristic), as nonsensical “fopperies,” and as part of a sinister scheme to inveigle Catholic doctrine into England:

“...one would wonder to what end such a Book were published among us, unless it were to convince us of this great truth, that we have not had so great *Fanaticks* and *Enthusiasts* among us, but they have had greater in the *Roman Church*. And by this means they may think to prevail upon the *Fanaticks* among us, by perswading them, that they have been strangely mistaken concerning the *Church of Rome* in these matters; that she is no such enemy to *Enthusiasms* and *Revelations* as some believe; but that in truth she hath not only alwayes had such , but given great *approbation* and *encouragement* to them. So that among all their visions they do but mix some that confirm their particular Doctrines. (260-61)

Stillingfleet dismisses the *Revelations* while entertaining the notion that they might be a strategy in a larger plot. Stillingfleet’s imagined readers of Cressy’s printed edition are vulnerable people who might be swayed to Catholicism through Julian’s visions. Julian’s evencristene and Cressy’s devout retirements exist alongside Cressy’s imagined readers, who fall as prey animals before the writings of nefarious forces from Rome.

Until Cressy’s print edition, Julian’s historical reception relied on the Long Text’s survival with a small group of English recusants across the Channel— not circumstances the text or its writer might have imagined. British Museum Add. MS 11307, the compilation containing the *Long Charter of Christ*, the lyric *Meditations*, and a dialogue between St. Bernard and Mary, appears to have stayed in England. It resurfaces in the care of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century London writer and antiquarian Joseph Haslewood (1769-1833), who— like the nuns with Julian— cultivated his own relationship to Middle English, manuscript culture, and an English religious past. Like the nuns, Haslewood undertook a project with MS 11307 that substantially remade it for contemporaneous imagined readers.

A year after his death, Joseph Haslewood’s library came up for auction in London. Among the many entries in the auction catalogue is “The Birth, Death, and Resurrection of our

Saviour ; written in the first person. A Dialogue between St. Bernard and the Virgin Mary, a MS. on vellum, with a transcript and glossarial index.” The asking price was four pounds, four shillings (78). In addition to its three medieval texts, this manuscript now contained a new glossarial index. It had also been transliterated in facing-page fashion, modern paper interleaved with medieval parchment. Four Middle English devotional lyrics were also amended to it in the transliterator’s hand.²²¹ The manuscript’s buyer was the British Museum and the manuscript was thereafter designated British Museum Add. MS 11307, which we have encountered elsewhere in this dissertation. The library’s other contents were scattered, and for forty pounds another buyer purchased Haslewood’s collection of notes on the proceedings of the Roxburghe Club, an organization of titled and untitled men who gathered to print limited editions of older texts in classical and vernacular languages including Middle English.

In the context of Haslewood’s and the Roxburghe Club’s other work, the manuscript becomes a thing of England’s past: exotic in its form, religion, and language, and possessed of the authority attributed to voices from the past surviving in a supposedly diminished present-day. As the title page declares in a mix of print and gothic-style lettering, this is a manuscript of “Ancient English Poetry.” Haslewood’s framing of it is devotional— reverence for the “ancient” and the object both, if not for a revival of medieval religious practices. The prefatory Memorandum underscores the manuscript’s provenance, setting it up as a legacy of a noble family “now considered extinct.” Where the manuscript’s late medieval readers were to encounter a religious edification, here the recompilation’s imagined readers encounter a kind of historical one. The plate that functions somewhat at random as frontispiece, a copy of an Italian piece by renowned manuscript illuminator Giorgio Giulio Clovio (1498-1578), is lent

²²¹ The transliterator is assumed to be Haslewood (see d’Evelyn, viii); I have found nothing as yet to suggest any other possibility.

significance by Clovio's being a contemporary of Raphael. Its authority as something suitably "ancient" is further bolstered by the plate's presence in a "Valuable Manuscript Missal" and the manuscript's presence at "the University Library, CAMBRIDGE". These criteria evidently make it suitable for Haslewood's volume, and they help set up a kind of devotional experience different from the one Cressy imagines in Lady Blount's closet. Imagined readers here pay homage to a literary heritage. At the same time, the manuscript— as for Cressy and the nuns— becomes a conduit between the individual and a vaunted past.

Haslewood's rebinding brought major changes to the medieval manuscript. The additions of a facing-page transliteration and the glossary, both done by hand, underscore the difference in language and script. With the scribe's hand thus translated and interpreted for nineteenth-century readers, the script becomes a part of the codex's objectification. Haslewood's own facility with Middle English texts makes it unlikely that these changes were purely for his own benefit, though perhaps they were for his own pleasure as a devoted hobbyist; regardless, they are made with an eye toward easing accessibility for nineteenth-century real or imagined readers less immersed in medieval literatures than Haslewood. Absent is a medieval sense of multimedia literacies, as MS 11307 is being remade in a text-dependent milieu. In Haslewood's remaking literacy is no longer a question of mode so much as it is a question of language and orthography, where unfamiliar language is made legible through transliteration and translation.

For Haslewood and the recompilation's imagined readers, an encounter with the manuscript facilitates a kind of devotional experience, but not the kind of devotional experience of a medieval reader. On the one hand, the manuscript remains a religious text, its status reinforced by Haslewood's addition of the four religious lyrics. On the other, the manuscript is now a point of contact for a something other than religious devotion. Rather, it is a focus for

nostalgic devotion not necessarily to Catholicism or medieval religious practices but to the sort of past that has only ever existed in nostalgic memory: for a time when life was somehow simpler and more noble than in the present day. Engaging with the manuscript continues to be—or to purports to be—an edifying experience for imagined readers, but Haslewood’s codicological alterations frame that edifying as meditation over history rather than spirituality.

Like Cressy’s, Haslewood’s imagined readers are benign, seeking edification through engagement with the past in the form of a manuscript. But also like Cressy, historical reception differed from the imagined ideal. As both the club’s supporters and detractors afterward remarked, perhaps Haslewood’s executors erred in letting Haslewood’s notes go to auction. Published in *Athenaeum* in January 1834, *The Roxburghe Revels* uses his notes to launch an almost comically devastating attack on every element of the Roxburghe Club’s, and Joseph Haslewood’s, existence.

“The old proverb asserts, that ‘dead men tell no tales,’ but, as we have already shown, Haslewood has been vastly more communicative since his decease, than he ever was before it; and if his surviving relations and friends had had any regard for his memory, they ought not only to have burned the MS. before us, but to have carefully erased from every book he possessed, every scrap like a note or remark. Greater nonsense could not have been written—more rubbish could hardly have been collected.” (38)

To sum, the article’s writer or writers take issue with the socially mixed nature of the club; Haslewood’s particular audacity for mixing with the club’s titled members on equal grounds; receipts for individual meals the club took together (several of these are reprinted in the article and subjected to merciless close reading); the club’s choice of venue for the meals; and the club’s preservation-oriented mission to print what they felt were underappreciated or endangered English texts in small runs. The case of the Roxburghe Revels is indeed rich. It recalls the

interpretive problem posed by Margery Kempe: when reading cannot be controlled, what is perfectly legible as devotion to one reader is perfectly legible as transgression by another.

The controversy that ensued orbits around reading, and it illuminates a rift in attitudes toward real and imagined readers particularly in relation to the dissemination of older or rare texts. Imagined readers are therefore fraught in new and different ways that question the value of preservation and reading in a reading culture more oriented around quantity, accessibility, and profit margins. The Roxburghe Club's circulation is, in its limited scope, medieval; meanwhile, in its text-dependency and prioritization of the material text, it is a product of print literacies. I do not wish to give the *Revels* more credit than it is due; it troubles a literary "oligarchy" while reifying nearly every other kind, and it maintains the worthlessness—"rubbish"—not just of the club's work but of the texts themselves. Its preoccupation with the club's mission is just one part of a multi-prong and often illogical plan of attack, as it argues for the democratization of preservation while simultaneously arguing against preservation's value and against the rights of non-elite readers to engage with and shape literary culture. But suspicion of a literary history in the hands of a self-selecting few is at the heart of the *Revels* and the subsequent responses published by members of the Roxburghe Club. The medieval-sized readership, imagined and real alike, is now a problem. What, ask the *Revels* and the club's defenders alike, is the purpose of preserving obscure texts for so small a readership?

For Haslewood and for the Roxburghers, engaging with a preserved text has an additional, wider consequence as each new reader participates in the salvation of a text perceived to be at risk of disappearing. But in the *Roxburghe Revels* controversy, the club must contend with the ways in which its mission is more complex than an enthusiast's benign hobby. Preservation and reading are, evidently to their surprise, political. The club's defenders cite

economic necessity for the small size of their printing projects and situate themselves within a wider community of private clubs using similar methods:

With the view of enabling such persons as were disposed to purchase the works originally issued by the Bannatyne Club, a certain number of copies were set aside, to be sold at very moderate prices. The importance of Spalding's Memoirs, and the Historie of King James the Sext, (a part of which was first published by Mr. Malcolm Laing) is pretty generally known to all students of Scottish History. These works were carefully edited, and, in every respect, well got up, but, nevertheless, the copies set apart for the public did not sell, and the result was the Bannatyne Club declined, in future, printing any works for sale. In like manner, the Maitland Club printed some extra copies of a valuable Topographical History, but could get no purchasers. Of course, the attempt was not repeated.

The reason for all this is obvious,— there is no taste for books of this description, and a large impression would therefore tend to benefit only the printer and the papermaker. To expect Booksellers to risk such publications, is out of the question, and unless adopted by Literary Clubs, it is extremely improbable that any valuable MS. would ever be printed. (viii)

The club's supporters argue that seeking a wider print release would shift the club into a for-profit model and subject it to the vicissitudes of the open market— a market that has, on similar occasions, proven its apathy. If the result of the club's choice to print for private consumption is an oligarchy, the reason for it is therefore in their view a lack of interest amongst the general public.

In short, the Roxburghe Club's model presents a return to the bespoke editions and circulation networks of a manuscript culture without the prior manuscript culture's other modes of transmission— oral, performative, visual. While the club is printing 50 or so copies of works from *Havelock the Dane* to *The Owl and the Nightingale* and the Chester Mystery Plays, Haslewood's work on 11307— making it legible to imagined nineteenth-century readers,

expanding it into a larger resource, wading through the Middle English with a glossary— takes the club’s scale and shrinks it to its smallest point.²²²

MS 11307’s 1834 sale to the British Museum ensured that readers would in fact engage with both the medieval texts and Haslewood’s interpreting. The ensuing theatrics between the Roxburghe Club and its detractors clarify the extent to which the club’s imagined readers and its historical readers could differ. Where Nicholas Love actively dialogues with multiple readings and openly acknowledges hostile perspectives, and where Margery Kempe casts herself as perpetually caught between benevolent and malevolent readers, the club has not imagined such a reception—perhaps taking for granted its very small reach, but a miscalculation nonetheless. As Cressy and later the Roxburghe Club find, printing a text is a choice to be interrogated—sometimes publicly.

But my focus is not on the extant texts and how they came to be extant. Instead, I want to think about this in terms of imagined and historical readers. I do not wish to revive the *Revels*’ charges of an oligarchy of letters in the study of old and rare books, but rather to advocate for the continued growth of a history of reading—in all the ways in which it was and is possible to read. In their editorial remakings of medieval manuscripts, Haslewood and Cressy imagine reaching readers, building a relationship with their imagined audience separate from historical realities. So too have the *Mirror*, the *Parson’s Tale*, the *Vision and Revelations*, and *The Book of Margery Kempe*. They have done so through the figure of imagined readers, and through those imagined readers’ varied literacies. These diverse readings and modes of reading have much to say both alongside and separate from historical reception. I hope I have shown texts imagining a breadth

²²² In fact, the Roxburghe Club continues today. For a full list of the club’s publications, see its website: <http://www.roxburgheclub.org.uk/clubBooks/> Copies are made for the club’s 40 members and a limited number are available for sale.

of readership: orthodox, heterodox, literate, illiterate, book-owning, auditing, seeing, careless, thorough, devout, casual, sinning. I want to approach medieval literary cultures with this breadth at the forefront, as it is for the texts we have explored.

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