

LEWD IMAGININGS:  
PEDAGOGY, PIETY, AND PERFORMANCE  
IN LATE MEDIEVAL EAST ANGLIA

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John Thomas Sebastian  
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John Thomas Sebastian, Ph.D.

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This dissertation explores clerical and lay desires for spiritual teaching and learning at the end of the Middle Ages in England, desires that, while ostensibly contemplative, carried crucial ecclesiological, political, and literary implications. Where these desires met stood the image of the unlearned lay person. This image has a history of its own; tracing it reveals many of the discourses and identities structuring late medieval society. The iconic lay person was a creature of imagination, feeling, and desire, not desire for theological proposition and dispute, but for a palpable relationship to God. Addressing that desire led in late medieval England to an astonishing increase in clerical awareness of the laity's spiritual needs and clerical activism in addressing those.

Learned writers invented a discourse of "lewdness" (after the technical term for the unlettered medieval laity) according to which the pious laity were supposed to learn by reading images as the learned did by reading books. Derived from an early pope's rebuke of an iconoclastic bishop, this assumption maintained its authority throughout the Middle Ages, regularly resurfacing in a variety of contexts, although not always in immediately recognizable forms. The pervasive authority of this dictum led late medieval theologians to expound a system of participatory meditation on events from the life of Christ as particularly suitable for the laity on account of its imaginative methods. These trappings of "lewdness" obscured, however, the much broader clerical origins of such mystical practice, from monastic and other learned

traditions, that paradoxically were adapted to how the “lewd” laity were instructed to pursue their own uniquely intimate kind of contemplation.

This discourse of “lewdness” assumed peculiar force within the region of East Anglia (the counties of Norfolk and Suffolk along with parts of Cambridgeshire and Kent), as evidenced by its refraction in the spiritual biography of a remarkable lay woman from Bishops Lynn, Margery Kempe, and its manifestation as the common dramaturgical foundation for a collection of plays otherwise notable for their formal and generic differences. Ultimately it coalesced, ironically, with the goals of later Reformers.

## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

John T. Sebastian grew up in Nutley, New Jersey, where he attended Nutley High School and was the valedictorian of his graduating class. John received his A.B. *magna cum laude* in 1998 from Georgetown University having completed a double major in Interdisciplinary Studies, with a concentration in Medieval Studies, and in English. He also earned a master's degree from Georgetown's Department of English in medieval and Renaissance literature in 1999, after which he began further graduate work in the Medieval Studies Program at Cornell University. He received his second M.A. in 2002 and was awarded the Stephen and Margery Russell Award for Distinguished Teaching in 2003 by the College of Arts and Sciences. During the 2003-2004 academic year, he was an inaugural Mellon Graduate Fellow at Cornell's Society for the Humanities. John completed his Ph.D. in the summer of 2004, and has been appointed assistant professor of medieval literature in the Department of English at Loyola University, New Orleans.

*To my leue dere moder  
for þe grete godenesse þat I haue recyued þorow þe  
of oure Lord Ihesus Crist*

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was something one could actually do for a living. Of the many superb teachers who generously gave of themselves during my time in DC, two deserve special mention. Jo Ann Moran Cruz has helped me ground my forays into imaginative literature in an appreciation and respect for history, most recently through her trenchant response to material from the first three chapters of this dissertation presented at the 79<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting of the Medieval Academy of America in Seattle. Penn Szittyá has been so many things to me at some many times and in so many places, that I can only hope to be half the teacher and friend to my students that he as been to me during the last decade.

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## INTRODUCTION

This dissertation explores clerical and lay desires as these intersected within peculiar forms of teaching and learning that emerged at the end of the Middle Ages, desires ostensibly spiritual but which nevertheless had implications ecclesiological, political, literary, and dramatic. At the point where these desires meet stands the image of the unlearned English lay person. This image, and the desires it speaks to, has a history of its own, and tracing that history reveals an unfolding of the discourses and identities that structured late-medieval society and its most basic foundations. The lay person of late-medieval England was a creature of imagination, feeling, and desire, not desire for theological proposition and dispute, but for a palpable relationship to his or her God. Addressing that desire led in the Late Middle Ages in England to an astonishing increase in clerical awareness of the spiritual needs of the laity and activism on the part of priests in addressing these perceived needs.

The proximate historical causes of this heightened clerical-lay interaction were as political as they were theological, as social as they were ecclesiological, beginning at least as early as the thirteenth-century reform program initiated by the bishops assembled at the Fourth Lateran Council during the papacy of Innocent III. The constitutions promulgated during the final session of the Council in 1215 hint at Innocent's active, reformer's zeal, but also at the preexistence of pressures both internal and external that propelled that reform. These decrees commence with a restatement of the major tenets of the faith followed immediately by the anathematizing of the millennialist Joachim of Fiore and all heresies and all heretics in general, "whatever names they may go under."<sup>1</sup> If reform were to be undertaken, it

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<sup>1</sup> ". . . quibuscumque nominibus censeantur." Norman P. Tanner, S.J., ed. *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, vol. 1 (Washington: Georgetown University Press, 1990), p. 233. All translations of the constitutions are Tanner's.

was to be initiated at the institutional level, not on the ground by people like Peter Waldo, the Albigensians, and other heterodox reformers against whom Innocent regularly contended.<sup>1</sup>

The Fourth Lateran constitutions then turn to specific instructions for reform of the Church, many of which no doubt had serious implications, or at least the intention thereof, for the practice of Christianity at all levels of society throughout Western Europe. Thus, constitution fifty-one, “de poena contrabentium clandestina matrimonia,” forbids participation in illicit clandestine marriages by lay men and women seeking to be united outside the bounds of normal procedure, as well as by the clergy who performed the secretive rituals, and prescribed punishments for both groups. Other constitutions focus on reforming individual social estates, such as the fifteenth, “de arcenda ebrietate clericorum,” on the inadvisability of clerical drunkenness, or, of perhaps greater relevance to the present study, the sixteenth, “de indumentis clericorum,” which, in addition to prohibiting the clergy from dressing in a manner unbecoming their religious calling, states that priests “should not watch mimes, entertainers and actors.”<sup>2</sup> Perhaps the most influential and enduring declaration of the bishops, however, comes in the form of constitution twenty-one, the justly famous *Omnis utriusque sexus*, in which all Christian men and women are exhorted to confess at least annually to their own priests and to receive Holy Communion, usually at Easter. The extreme importance of regular participation in these sacraments in the eyes of the Church is established by this constitution’s insistence that “this salutary

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<sup>1</sup> Malcolm Lambert, *Medieval Heresy: Popular Movements from the Gregorian Reform to the Reformation*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2002), pp. 97-235.

<sup>2</sup> “. . . mimis, ioculatoribus et histrionibus non entendant . . .” Tanner, *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, p. 243.

decree be frequently published in churches, so that nobody may find the pretence of an excuse in the blindness of ignorance.”<sup>3</sup>

The reforms of Lateran IV were promoted on English soil in earnest by the Franciscan Archbishop of Canterbury John Pecham, who held the see from 1279 until his death in 1292. In 1281, Pecham convoked a council at Lambeth Palace, the result of which was the drawing up of a program for lay instruction in the fundamentals of Christian belief and clerical reform known as the *Ignorantia sacerdotum*. Pecham’s efforts resulted in a subsequent proliferation of texts in the vernacular aimed at ensuring an acceptable minimum of doctrinal literacy among both the clergy and their flocks, especially with regard to the administration of the sacraments by parish priests as outlined by *Omnis utriusque sexus*.<sup>4</sup> These newly composed vernacular compendia of Christian doctrine and their successors would eventually find another audience among the vernacular-reading laity.

Parallel to this aspiration toward reform at the institutional level of the Church in Europe generally and England specifically was an at least equally powerful desire for increased participation in the faith among the laity themselves. In speaking of this lay desire, I do not wish to imply the existence of “popular” religion in England fundamentally separable from the practices mandated by official Church teaching during the Middle Ages. Eamon Duffy, in his magisterial investigation into what he calls “traditional religion” on the eve of the Reformation, has convincingly

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<sup>3</sup> “Unde hoc salutare statutum frequenter in ecclesiis publicetur, ne quisquam ignorantiae caecitate velamen excusationis assumat.” Tanner, *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, p. 245.

<sup>4</sup> Decima L. Douie, *Archbishop Pecham* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952), pp. 133-37; W. A. Pantin, *The English Church in the Fourteenth Century* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1962), pp. 189-219. For the proliferation of vernacular texts, see Leonard E. Boyle, “The Fourth Lateran Council and Manuals of Popular Theology,” in *The Popular Literature of England*, ed. Thomas Heffernan, *Tennessee Studies in Literature* 28 (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1985), pp. 30-43, and Judith Shaw, “The Influence of Canonical and Episcopal Reform on Popular Books of Instruction,” pp. 44-60 in the same volume.

demonstrated that such a distinction is misplaced.<sup>5</sup> Instead, scholars have identified a certain consciousness among the laity of their role in their own salvation. Within East Anglia particularly, the residents of Norfolk, Suffolk, and the surrounding areas—members of the always rising middle class at the historical moment when trade-centered economy began to flourish alongside of traditional feudal modalities, prior to displacing these entirely—were numerate as well as literate in English but not in Latin. The scattered relics of their personal histories, in the form of wills and financial or material donations to parish churches, reveal that they were also increasingly daunted by the very real possibility that the profits they earned at the expense of their neighbors compromised their standing in the sight of God. Thus, Gail McMurray Gibson, in her ground-breaking book on lay piety and its influence on medieval theater, has noticed a common anxiety spanning many of the surviving wills of East Anglian testators:

[I]t must be admitted that there is evidence in East Anglian wills of men with anxious hearts, if not guilty consciences, about their worldly and prosperous lives. . . . Walter Daniel, a prosperous merchant and former mayor of Norwich, specified in his will that he wanted three annuals of masses celebrated for the souls of the faithful departed, but especially for the souls of carpenters and other tradesmen whom he had “knowingly or unknowingly cheated” in the course of his business. Another Norwich merchant making his final accounting likewise ordered in his will two annuals of masses to be said for those with whom he had traded to make up for any sins or faults against them.<sup>6</sup>

And the list of guilt-ridden testators goes on.

Turning to a different kind of evidence for the same phenomenon, Theresa Coletti has recently explored the ramifications of the social tensions described by Gibson for the Digby play of *Mary Magdalene*. Coletti remarks:

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<sup>5</sup> Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England, c. 1400-c. 1580* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992).

<sup>6</sup> Gail McMurray Gibson, *The Theater of Devotion: East Anglian Drama and Society in the Late Middle Ages* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1989), p. 27.

For these economically powerful social classes [the aristocrats, gentry, and bourgeois of late-medieval East Anglia], the play works to resolve contradictions between a spiritual theology whose highest value counseled renunciation of the world and a prosperous social and economic environment whose moral fissures are registered in anxieties about property, status consciousness, and promotion of charity.<sup>7</sup>

Coletti's choice of subject here, "the play," and the agency she assigns to it, namely its ability to "work" within the system of tensions engendered at the intersection of late-medieval East Anglian religious and secular mentalities, provocatively suggest that, more than just the manifestation of opposing material and spiritual forces, the drama itself performs an active role in identifying its audiences, a possibility I return to at the conclusion of this dissertation in my analysis of the discourses at work in the morality play *Wisdom*. Finally, scholars working on various aspects of lay literacy, and especially women's literacy, during the later Middle Ages have found abundant evidence for lay readers of devotional texts, especially in East Anglia. I turn to some of their findings below, but for now Felicity Riddy's trenchant observation about the state of affairs in late-medieval England superbly summarizes the situation. She writes: "The assiduous pastoral activity in the two centuries after the fourth Lateran council in 1215, which is often described as if it were entirely generated from the centre, could hardly have taken place if the laity had not been avid to learn."<sup>8</sup>

Finally, any consideration of fourteenth- and fifteenth-century English lay piety must account for the rise of Lollardy, England's native heresy. I give fuller attention to Lollardy in the first several chapters of this dissertation, particularly to the debates that raged over the role of imagery in late medieval Christian devotion and worship. For now, it is enough to note that the popularization of John Wyclif's ideas

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<sup>7</sup> Theresa Coletti, "*Paupertas est donum Dei*: Hagiography, Lay Religion, and the Economics of Salvation in the Digby *Mary Magdalene*," *Speculum* 76 (2001), pp. 340-41.

<sup>8</sup> Felicity Riddy, "'Women talking about the things of God': A Late Medieval Sub-culture," in *Women and Literature in Britain, 1150-1500*, Cambridge Studies in Medieval Literature 17, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., ed. Carol M. Meale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 107.



through their vernacularization made a heterodox theology born of the universities accessible to a much wider audience that was, in Riddy's phrase, "avid to learn." Lollards and orthodox writers thus found themselves competing for the attention of similar audiences of lay people.<sup>9</sup>

This dissertation offers a study of a particular and prevalent configuration of the complex cultural icon of the pious English lay person, identified as "lewd" during the later Middle Ages, as that icon was conceived by and within the learned, clerical imagination and rapidly assimilated by lay men and women in the articulation of their own identities. By writing texts for a nascent audience of readers of the vernacular, learned authors were able to construct the identity of the laity discursively by means of the modes of address they routinely employed in calling these readers into existence. This production of identity within the clerical imaginary and its subsequent reproduction within the lay imaginary represents, furthermore, only one point of intersection between the medieval imagination and social identity politics in a kind of cultural *mise en abyme*: according to dominant medieval theories, the clergy envisioned so-called *lewyd peple* specifically as those dependent on affective imagery, rather than books and human intellect, as a vehicle for approaching the divine. Thus, this study does not attempt to identify the original audiences for vernacular theological, literary, or dramatic writing in the flesh-and-blood, named and nameable citizens of Bishops Lynn or Bury St. Edmunds or Thetford, people who wrote wills or paid for local parish church improvements or physically attended dramatic performances; rather, it seeks the boundaries that circumscribed lay identity as this was *imagined* by learned and clerical theologians, homilists, and playwrights. By

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<sup>9</sup> Recently, this point has been too casually overlooked by scholars overeager to identify the laity with subversive heterodoxy as an expression of dissent against repressive clerical orthodoxy. See, e.g., Colin Fewer, "The 'Fygyre' of the Market: The N-Town Cycle and East Anglian Lay Piety," *Philological Quarterly* 77 (1998), 117-47.

analyzing a variety of forms of vernacular writing, I chart the discursive fashioning of “lewdness” in the Middle Ages and the theological and political implications of the learned clergy imagining unlearned “lewd people” imagining.

I begin in Part I with the origin of a medieval pedagogical maxim and its transmission to, and appropriation by, subsequent generations of learned writers, the notion that their unlearned counterparts could “read” images the way the clergy and professional religious (monks, nuns, friars, and other adherents of rules of living) read books. This precept was to achieve considerable authority, and its reiteration throughout the centuries paved the way for the eventual reification of a peculiar conception of what it meant to be a lay person. I then explore how later writers conflated two different pedagogical discourses. The first was the by then familiar idea that the laity learn through images. The second, however, originated among learned practitioners and theoreticians of kataphatic or positive mysticism, in which the mediator strives toward an awareness of the immediate presence of God by *imagining* him- or herself participating in events from the historical lives of Jesus and other holy figures. This intermingling of pedagogies of imagery resulted in an explosion of new mystical writing in the vernacular for lay readers of texts—not just images—who were nevertheless conceived as still dependent on imagery and for whom a program of imaginative and participatory meditation on events from the life of Christ was articulated.

Part II offers a consideration and analysis of one lay woman’s response to the imagined identity foisted upon her by the writers she was reading. The well-to-do and well-connected Margery Kempe of Bishops Lynn in Norfolk was an avid reader—or at the very least an avid auditor—of the spiritual classics of the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries, books and treatises that addressed themselves to lay people surrounded by the bodies and bodily things of the material world. We will see in these

chapters how Margery absorbed and reinterpreted the discourses of imaginative mysticism outlined by the *auctores* to whom she turned in the course of her own maturation as one of the most compelling figures in the history of mysticism, a claim substantiated by subsequent readers of her own *Book*, who found in Margery's accounting of her relationship with Christ a voice of authority.

These opening parts set the stage for a survey and analysis of representative examples of plays originating and performed in the towns of Norfolk and Suffolk. In reviewing the case for collecting these diverse productions under the single heading of "East Anglian drama," I consider how the learned playwrights of the drama reproduced pedagogical discourses on the stage. In reading the scripts and reconstructively imagining their original conditions of performance, we can come to recognize a common dramaturgy that bridges the gaps between genres and that is infused by the discourse of contemporary meditative theory practiced by, and prescribed for, "lewd people." In identifying this shared, pedagogically informed discourse, we can also speculate about the original audiences for the drama by comparing the modes of address employed by both vernacular theologians and vernacular playwrights.

In short, this is a dissertation about medieval imaginations, about the pedagogical nexus where Middle English religious prose meets dramatic verse and the ramifications of that intersection, and about imagined identities played out in theological texts and imagined deities played out on the stages of late medieval East Anglia.

PART I  
PEDAGOGY

CHAPTER 1

“A BOOK TO ÞE LEWYD PEPEL”:  
REDEFINING THE GREGORIAN *ILLITTERATI*  
AT THE END OF THE MIDDLE AGES

The early fifteenth-century Middle English dialogue *Dives and Pauper* reports the conversation between a poor man and his rich interlocutor-cum-disciple. Their exchange, ostensibly figured as an exposition of the ten commandments, serves as a wide-ranging theological and social commentary in the vernacular. In discussing the first commandment’s specific injunction against idol worship, Dives, occasionally something of an overly exuberant reformer with Lollard overtones, voices his desire for the destruction of all religious images. Pauper responds by explaining the distinctions between kinds of images and their respective purposes for the edification of Dives and, presumably, of the reader:

Þey [i.e., images] seruyn of thre thynggys. For þey been ordeynyd to steryn manys mende to thynkyn of Cristys incarnacioun and of his passioun and of holye seyntys lyuys. Also þey been ordeynyd to steryn mannys affeccioun and his herte to deuocioun, for often man is more steryd be syghte þan be heryng or redyngge. Also þey been ordeynyd to been a tokene and a booke to þe lewyd peple, þat þey moun redyn in ymagerye and peynture þat clerkys redyn in boke . . . .<sup>1</sup>

For Pauper, images perform affective, pastoral, and pedagogical functions. Firstly, they provide a stimulus for meditating on quintessentially fifteenth-century devotional themes, such as the Passion of Christ. Secondly, Pauper observes that, from a pastoral

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<sup>1</sup> Priscilla Heath Barnum, ed., *Dives and Pauper*, 2 vols, Early English Text Society Original Series nos. 275 and 280 (London: Oxford University Press, 1976-80), 1:82, hereafter cited as Barnum.

perspective, the faithful can comprehend divine mysteries better in images than through hearing, as in sermons, or reading, presumably of Scripture and other works of instruction like the hagiographies that Pauper alludes to in the first of his precepts. Finally, images are particularly suitable pedagogically for catechizing a laity otherwise incapable of learning, as clerks do, from books. In his articulation of the threefold purpose of imagery, Pauper's attention to the spiritual ends of images wanes as imagery's pedagogical value becomes increasingly dominant. What begins with a prescription for men in general turns into a statement on the practicalities of communicating with *lewyd* Christians, for whom access to a religion of the book is significantly restricted by their inability to read Latin.

The *Dives*-author's association of images with lay reading is by no means original. In the Latin West this commonplace dates back at least to the end of the sixth century. Pauper alludes to this history in a subsequent parable about a bishop who, on account of his overweening iconoclasm, incurs the censure of the pope. In recounting this cautionary tale to Dives, Pauper recalls:

we fyndyn þat a bysshop dystroyid ymagys as þou woldist doon and defendede þat noo man shulde wurshepyn ymagys. He was accusyd to þe [pope], Seynt Gregory, queche blamyd hym gretly for þat he hadde so dystroyid þe ymagys. But vttyrly he preysid hym for þat he defendydde meen to wurshepyn ymagys.<sup>1</sup>

Pauper here gestures toward a documented conflict from the papacy of Gregory I, the Great (590-604), between the pontiff and the recalcitrant Bishop Serenus, head of the diocese of Marseilles around the year 600, whom Pauper recasts as his anonymous bishop. Pope Gregory expresses the cause of his dissatisfaction with Serenus in the first of two extant letters, which the pope dispatched to his subordinate in 599 and 600, respectively:

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<sup>1</sup> Barnum, 1:82-83.

Praeterea indico dudum ad nos peruenisse quod fraternitas uestra quosdam imaginum adoratores aspiciens easdem ecclesiis imagines confregit atque proiecit. Et quidem zelum vos, ne quid manufactum adorari possit, habuisse laudauimus, sed frangere easdem imagines non debuisse iudicamus.<sup>2</sup>

[Meanwhile I note that some time ago it came to our attention that your brotherhood, taking note of certain worshippers of images, smashed these same images and cast them from the churches. And certainly we praise you for your zeal, lest anyone might worship something made by hand, but we judge that you ought not to have destroyed those same images.]

The fictional Dives clearly owes much of his characterization to the very real Bishop Serenus whose immoderate zeal earned him this initially gentle rebuke from Gregory.

The pope continues in the 599 letter by locating the proper use of these *imagines* within a catechetical framework:

Idcirco enim pictura in ecclesiis adhibetur, ut hi qui litteras nesciunt saltem in parietibus uidendo legant, quae legere in codicibus non ualent. Tua ergo fraternitas et illa seruare at ab eorum adoratu populum prohibere debuit, quatenus et litterarum nescii haberent, unde scientiam historia colligerent, et populus in picturae adoratione minime peccaret.

[Therefore, truly, a picture is employed in churches so that those who are ignorant of letters may at least read by seeing on walls that which they are unable to read in books. Your brotherhood, therefore, should have preserved them but also prevented the people worshipping them, so that those unfamiliar with letters might have something from which they could gather knowledge by means of a story, and the people should sin not at all by worshipping the picture.]

The second letter from 600 suggests that Serenus's response to this papal admonition and correction failed to satisfy Gregory, whose subsequent missive expresses his displeasure with the bishop of Marseilles much more forcefully.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> S. Gregorius Magnus, *Registrum epistularum libri VIII-XIV, Appendix*, ed. Dag Norberg, Corpus Christianorum Series Latina CXL A (Turnhout: Brepols, 1982), p. 768. All translations from Latin are my own unless otherwise indicated. See also Celia Chazelle, "Pictures, Books, and the Illiterate: Pope Gregory I's Letters to Serenus of Marseilles," *Word and Image* 6 (1990), p. 139.

<sup>3</sup> "Dic, frater, a quo factum sacerdote aliquando auditum est quod fecisti? Si non aliud, uel illud te non debuit reuocare, ut despectis aliis fratribus solum te sanctum et esse crederes sapientem?" [Tell me, brother, what priest has ever been heard to have done what you did? If nothing else, should that not have checked you, that having scorned your brothers you believed yourself alone to be holy and wise?] S. Gregorius Magnus, *Registrum*, pp. 873-74.

My interest here is not in the iconoclastic tendencies and insubordination of a renegade, sixth-century, Frankish bishop, nor in the condemnation from the Pope they provoked, but rather in what might have been only a fleeting reaction to a relatively minor event that nevertheless managed to maintain its relevance to Christian iconology for the next eight hundred years and beyond, namely that those who are illiterate might read in images what they cannot in words.<sup>4</sup> Irrespective of the particular circumstances in Marseilles and Rome in and around the year 600, a fifteenth-century commentator on the ten commandments turned to the same idea, that the *nescii litterarum* could read images in a way somehow analogous to the act of reading words, in penning *Dives and Pauper*.

These excerpts from a relatively brief exposition on images in the otherwise compendious *Dives and Pauper* are, in fact, emblematic of a widespread approach to educating the so-called “lewd” deployed in, and acknowledged by, a number of vernacular theological texts of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. This approach identifies images as especially apt for instructing the unlearned in the ways of Christian doctrine and practice. The chapter begins with Pauper’s claim that images are books to the *lewyd peple* in order to establish a pedagogical context from which we can observe how the late-medieval clergy and professional religious perceived lay people; how, in their writings, they addressed them and, by addressing them, constructed “lay” identity and justified their doing so by appeal to Gregorian pedagogy, or the garbled version of it inherited by late-medieval, vernacular *auctores*;

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<sup>4</sup> For the history of the Gregorian dictum in Latin writings of the Early and High Middle Ages, see Lawrence G. Duggan, “Was Art Really the ‘Book of the Illiterate’?”, *Word and Image* 5 (1989), 227-51. Chazelle, “Pictures, Books, and the Illiterate,” p. 138 and *passim*, has carefully corrected modern scholarly accounts of Gregory’s two letters to Serenus that attribute to the pope ideas that he never expressed, such as the notion that pictures are *biblia pauperum*, “Bibles for the poor,” or that Gregory’s comments reflect his opinions concerning the general purpose of any form of Christian art beyond the specific church wall paintings of holy men and women at the source of this battle of episcopal and papal wills.

and how the laity, in turn, responded to, resisted, and performed these constructed identities.

“Pedagogy” will make numerous appearances throughout this dissertation and, as such, demands definition at the outset. Given that much of the learning occasioned, and encouraged by, the texts that I consider throughout this project transpired outside the walls of the medieval classroom in its most inclusive sense, and even beyond the less definable boundaries of non-institutional and subversive classrooms—the infamous and eventually illicit conventicles of the Lollards—my focus is not so much on the traditional practices associated with historical schools. Nor can the works of instruction that I consider be reduced to the mere vehicles by which information or knowledge is transmitted from *magister* to *discipulus* or *discipula*. Rather, the pedagogical acts that I explore throughout this project are instruments of identity-fashioning: the transmission of knowledge is a transformative process, which, in its execution, alters fundamentally not only the nature of the recipient of previously unfamiliar knowledge, but also the very relationship between the two parties, teacher and student. I understand pedagogical acts as means of evoking and negotiating or, conversely, of contesting and undermining imaginary social relationships, in this case, those that resulted in the concretizing of social identities labeled “clerical” or “lay,” “learned” or “lewd.” In the present discussion of late-medieval pedagogy, we will examine various attempts by the clergy to negotiate their relationships with and to the laity by means of these learned authors’ defining their lay counterparts, according to clerical perceptions of the intellectual capacities of the unlearned and the didactic premise that *lewyd peple* learn best through *ymarye*.

Thus pedagogy is not only about the practice of teaching per se but also about the politics of teaching and, consequently, of the politics of learning structured by and through discourse. Rita Copeland, following Emile Durkheim, offers a useful



perspective on this approach to pedagogy in her recent work on the politics of learning and intellectual culture within Lollard dissenting movements:

In considering pedagogy here, we are tracing out both a set of historical practices and the ideological systems in which those practices take place, or to put it with a slightly different emphasis, the “domains of discourse” to which the processes of education belong and through which these processes are represented. As much as there are sciences of teaching, there are also “imaginaries” of teaching, the ways in which teaching, like other political relations, is figured in cultural imaginations and reproduced as an explanatory mechanism for other political relations.<sup>5</sup>

In what follows this chapter, I will explore first how the discursive tradition of identifying the laity with the images from which they purportedly learned prepared the way for the burgeoning of a veritable industry in the production of vernacular, meditative texts directed at *lewyd peple* and then how one laywoman responded to these writings before ultimately arguing that reading East Anglian dramatic texts alongside works of vernacular theology permits us to analyze how plays replicate pedagogical discourse on the medieval stage in a way that unifies a generically diverse dramatic corpus.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Rita Copeland, *Pedagogy, Intellectuals, and Dissent in the Later Middle Ages: Lollardy and Ideas of Learning* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 8

<sup>6</sup> The classic study of the drama, and the so-called Corpus Christi plays in particular, which interprets them in accord with the doctrine and imagery of other religious writing in the vernacular is that of V. A. Kolve, *The Play Called Corpus Christi* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1966). Kolve’s magisterial account of the genesis of a genre selects amply and impressively from a vast collection of English works in order to paint a general picture of medieval English Christianity pertinent to his study of drama. Kolve, p. 2, acknowledges in his introduction: “The relationship I postulate between the drama and these vernacular religious works is one not of parentage but of cousinship: I draw no conclusions regarding the influence of specific works on specific drama texts. One of the distinguishing marks of a source is its similarity to a later text, but in traditional religious material—the common inheritance of a whole civilization—similarity does not necessarily involve an immediate source relationship: only documentary evidence can actually establish that, and there is little such evidence available.” My own reading of vernacular theology focuses on a much smaller selection of key works but aims to establish a more pronounced pattern of influence with regard to the matter and the techniques of East Anglian drama. Meg Twycross, “Books for the Unlearned,” in *Drama and Religion*, ed. James Redmond, Themes in Drama 5 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp. 65-110, has touched upon many of the same issues and texts that I will examine throughout this chapter. But she too is anxious about arguing direct connections and prefers to think in terms of parallel treatments and techniques (p. 67). The connections I attempt to illustrate throughout this project seem to me more than casual. Most recently, Richard Beadle, “‘Devoute ymaginacioun’ and the Dramatic Sense in Love’s *Mirror* and the N-Town Plays,” in *Nicholas Love at Waseda*, ed. Shoichi Oguro,

### Vernacular Theology and Its Audiences

In the Late Middle Ages, the designations *clericus/laicus*, *litteratus/illitteratus*, and, in English, *lernerd* or *clergie/lewedyd* were unstable and subject to continuous redefinition. M. T. Clanchy has documented the history of the shifting meanings of the terms *litteratus/illitteratus* and *clericus/laicus* throughout the Middle Ages. He observes that the late antique or early medieval *litteratus* was possessed of a certain minimal degree of erudition, whereas by 1300, *litteratus* indicated one who could read Latin, but might not otherwise be erudite by classical standards.<sup>7</sup> Recent scholars of the early medieval period, however, have complicated Clanchy's description of the situation by arguing that even in Gregory's time, the distinction between *litteratus* and *illitteratus* may have been deployed within the pope's monolingual culture strictly to distinguish those who possessed the ability *to read* Latin from those who could not, irrespective of erudition, which in a largely oral society was accessible not only textually but aurally. Roger Wright, for example, has argued that when they were read aloud, Gregory's works, with all the erudition and rhetoric that informed them, would have been intelligible to his Latin-speaking audience, even if they could not read those works directly for themselves.<sup>8</sup>

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Richard Beadle and Michael G. Sargent (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1997), pp. 1-17, has argued for a connection between the Carthusian mystagogue Nicholas Love's system of "devout imagination" in his *Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ* on the N-Town Plays, for which see my chapter 6 below.

<sup>7</sup> M. T. Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record: England 1066-1307*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), pp. 224-34. For the political implications of the usage of the binary *clergie/lewedyd* in fourteenth-century vernacular and "extraclergial" criticisms of the institutional clergy, see Fiona Somerset, *Clerical Discourse and Lay Audience in Late Medieval England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 13-14.

<sup>8</sup> Roger Wright, *A Sociophilological Study of Late Latin* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2003), pp. 51-52. See also Michel Banniard, *Viva voce: communication écrite et communication orale du IVe au IXe siècle en occident latin* (Paris: Institut des études augustiniennes, 1992) and József Herman, "La situation linguistique en Italie au VIe siècle," *Revue de linguistique romane* 52 (1988), 55-67. I would like to thank Professor Jo Ann Moran Cruz for bringing this work on late Latin literacy to my attention in the course of her response to my presentation at the 79<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting of the Medieval Academy of America in Seattle, Washington, on April 3, 2004.

In any event, by the fifteenth century the increasing cachet of English and the gradual decline in the usage of Latin for legal and administrative documents resulted in still greater levels of rudimentary reading ability, but in the new *lingua franca*, English.<sup>9</sup> Still, one's ability to read in the vernacular did not equate with *clergie*; absent formal education the lay reader of English was still considered *lewyd*. When Pauper, therefore, reiterates Pope Gregory's endorsement of images as metaphorical books, he recasts the *nescii litterarum* as *lewyd peple*. What is at issue is no longer the layperson's inability to read, but rather his or her capacity for high-level intellectual activity. For Gregory, the *illiteratus* was ignorant of the ability to read Latin but was probably not completely excluded from learned culture as a result, whereas for the *Dives*-author writing in English, the border separating the *litteratus* and the *illiteratus* was still less clearly demarcated.

Thus in the fifteenth-century Middle English translation of *Le mirouer des simples ames* by the relapsed heretic Marguerite Porete, whose tendencies toward a kind of nihilistic quietism and general resistance to Church authorities earned her book and her person, respectively, a place of dishonor amid the flames of institutional condemnation in Paris in 1310, we find Reason imploring Love to demystify her seemingly paradoxical locutions and to “declare and expowne to þe comune peple þese dowble wordis þat ben hard to vndirstonde, þat summe bi auenture may come to þis beyng, bi whiche þis booke may schewe to alle þe verrey liȝt of troupe and þe perfeccion of charite of hem þat preciousli ben clepid & chosen of God and soueraynli beloued of him.”<sup>10</sup> The distinction here is clearly one of learning, and these “comune

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<sup>9</sup> For the ascendancy of English as the language of government and administration in the fifteenth century, see John H. Fisher, *The Emergence of Standard English* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1996), pp. 16-35.

<sup>10</sup> Marilyn Doiron, ed., “Margaret Porete: ‘The Mirror of Simple Souls,’ A Middle English Translation,” *Archivio italiano per la storia della pietà*, vol. 5 (Rome: Edizioni di storia e letteratura, 1968), p. 266 [26] (emphasis mine). Love responds by asking reason what “double words” the latter has in mind and that need to be further parsed “for þe auditoures of þis booke,” thereby suggesting that

peple” remind us of Pauper’s “lewyd peple.” Yet, in the Son’s complaint before “fyue kenys men,” the roughly contemporaneous translator of St. Birgitta of Sweden’s *Liber celestis* identifies the second category of the five initially as “ylle layman” but equates them elsewhere with “lewed pepill.”<sup>11</sup> The Son here clearly equates the lewd with the laity in social contradistinction to the clergy, the first group of men whom he castigates, without any particular reference to relative levels of learning. By the fifteenth-century in England, the *lewyd* could be that segment of the population who were not in religious orders generally, who could read English but who lacked formal education and were ignorant of Latin, or perhaps even those who could not read at all but who learned by having the vernacular read to them.<sup>12</sup>

The author of *Dives and Pauper* nevertheless seems blissfully unaware of this range of possibilities; what counts for him is the importance of using images to instruct the Gregorian *illitterati* newly recast as *lewyd peple*. He, like other late-medieval writers, seems to equate these two groups in an uncritical way. Thus, images are no longer a marker of the inability to read *per se*, but rather of the rudimentary learning found throughout fifteenth-century English towns. Lewd people acquired this

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many of the writers to be considered in this dissertation may have expected their works to be heard by most of their audience rather than read. This situation parallels that envisioned by Roger Wright for the earliest audiences of Gregory the Great’s pastoral writings. This English translator of Marguerite Porete is known only by his initials, M. N., which he uses to mark off his more than a dozen interventions in an otherwise fairly literal, at least by medieval standards, translation. It is unclear whether M. N. knew of his subject’s condemnation and of her book’s fate, although he occasionally reveals his anxiety about some of the themes of her text. Three Middle English translations of the *Mirouer* exist, in addition to a Latin translation executed by the English Carthusian Richard Methley, for whom see chapter 5 below.

<sup>11</sup> Roger Ellis, ed., *The Liber Celestis of St Bridget of Sweden*, Early English Text Society Original Series no. 291 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), pp. 69, 71. The Latin text of Birgitta’s revelations identifies this group consistently, first as “mali laici” and then as “laicos.” See S. Birgitta, *Revelaciones Book I with Magister Mathias’ Prologue*, ed. Carl-Gustaf Undhagen (Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1978), pp. 361, 362. The remaining four kinds of men, three of whom the Son as Creator decries, are the Pope and the clergy; the Jews; the pagans; and Christ’s friends. This last group is depicted as small in number and surrounded by enemies but fortified by the Son who will fill their hearts with his heat, make their mouths stable as stone, and arm them with impenetrable armor that will melt all spiritual weapons hurled against them.

<sup>12</sup> *MED* s.v. “leued,” 1(a): uneducated, ignorant; unlettered, unable to read Latin; lay, non-clerical, etc.

learning certainly by hearing books read, but there are also plentiful indications of the practice of individual reading. By the end of the Middle Ages pedagogues had transformed Gregory's categories: the *illiteratus* became the *lewyd*; wall-paintings turned into any kind of didactic visual representation, including private meditation on events from the life of Christ (chapters 2-5 below) and drama (chapter 6); and the language of theology shifted from Latin to the vernacular.

Much has been made in recent scholarship of the development of so-called "vernacular theology" during the Late Middle Ages. Nicholas Watson has drawn attention to the varieties of this writing available in English in his article "Censorship and Cultural Change in Late-Medieval England," which concludes with an extensive appendix listing more than seventy-five texts from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. These writings run the range of genres, including mystagogical works (that is, works which teach methods for achieving a form or mystical union with the divine), accounts of revelations, catechetical materials, and treatises on various topics concerned primarily if not exclusively with theology or religious practice.<sup>13</sup> The idea of vernacular theology is neither unique nor original to Watson, who borrows this term from the great contemporary scholar of mysticism, Bernard McGinn. McGinn has identified if not the birth then certainly the maturation of theological writing in the vernacular with the beguines of the Low Countries and Germany in the thirteenth century and the numerous genres in which they wrote.<sup>14</sup> He deploys vernacular

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<sup>13</sup> Nicholas Watson, "Censorship and Cultural Change in Late-Medieval England: Vernacular Theology, the Oxford Translation Debate, and Arundel's Constitutions of 1409," *Speculum* 70 (1995), pp. 859-64.

<sup>14</sup> The Flemish mystic Hadewijch provides an instructive example: her *oeuvre* comprises epistles, accounts of revelations, and poems. Many of the latter imitate the style and vocabulary of the love songs of her contemporaries the Occitan troubadours and the northern French trouvères as transmitted through the probably more familiar compositions of their cultural heirs, the Minnesänger. For Hadewijch's work in modern English translation, see Hadewijch, *The Complete Works*, trans. Mother Columba Hart, O.S.B. (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1980). Note that "vernacular theology" need not encompass only prose, as evidenced, for example, by Hadewijch or, in Italy, Jacopone da Todi, whose output was principally poetic. My arguments, however, will focus largely, though not exclusively, on

theology in contradistinction to the two other mainstream and more familiar forms of scholastic and monastic theology.<sup>15</sup> But what primarily distinguishes this brand of theology is not, in the end, its theological content but its languages of transmission and the new audiences it reached. As a label, vernacular theology is difficult to restrict generically. McGinn observes:

Given the practical and synthetic nature of much vernacular theology, there is some overlap with monastic genres, though vernacular theology has less room for explicit biblical commentary, especially because technical biblical study was inaccessible to most laymen and to all women. Much vernacular theology was expressed in sermonic form, though of many different kinds. A wide variety of treatises and “little books” were employed, as well as hagiography and letters. Poetry was also of significance.<sup>16</sup>

Watson’s definition is similarly all-encompassing, as he himself acknowledges:

The term “vernacular theology” . . . is intended as a catchall, which in principle could include any kind of writing, sermon, or play that communicates theological information to an audience. . . . In principle, the term ‘vernacular theology’ covers a wide range of texts, from the catechetical to the speculative, and from the most scrupulously orthodox Passion meditation to the most outspoken Lollard polemic.<sup>17</sup>

For my purposes here, the increased accessibility to divine matters precipitated by new theological writings in the vernacular is the most noteworthy aspect of the flourishing of this new theology. These texts, in all their variety, opened up ways of thinking

English religious prose. Jacopone’s *laude* are available in English in Jacopone da Todi, *The Lauds*, trans. Serge and Elizabeth Hughes (New York: Paulist Press, 1982).

<sup>15</sup> Bernard McGinn, “Meister Eckhart and the Beguines in the Context of Vernacular Theology,” in *Meister Eckhart and the Beguine Mystics: Hadewijch of Brabant, Mechtild of Magdeburg, and Marguerite Porete*, ed. Bernard McGinn (New York: Continuum, 1994), pp. 1-14; *The Presence of God: A History of Western Christian Mysticism*, vol. III, *The Flowering of Mysticism: Men and Women in the New Mysticism—1200-1350* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1998), pp. 19-24.

<sup>16</sup> McGinn, “Meister Eckhart and the Beguines,” p. 9. McGinn, *The Flowering of Mysticism*, pp. 20-21, emphasizes the importance of hagiography and accounts of visions, either free-standing or as part of other narrative forms. The omission of “explicit Biblical commentary” is perhaps somewhat overstated for the English case. Richard Rolle’s *English Psalter*, though probably written for the female recluse Margaret Kirkeby, provides one outstanding example by an especially authoritative figure. Biblical commentary of a more implicit kind also abounds in the form of Nicholas Love’s immensely popular Gospel paraphrase, *The Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ*, and the less familiar though compelling *Book to a Mother*. For a discussion of these two text’s promotion of biblical hermeneutics among lay readers, see chapter 3 below.

<sup>17</sup> Watson, “Censorship and Cultural Change,” pp. 823-24, n. 4.

about and approaching God to the broadest range of society thitherto conceivable. And despite the possible risk of heresy arising from this democratization of theology, the sheer quantity of texts surviving from the Late Middle Ages suggests that many clergy and religious were themselves eager to embrace the catechetical potential of the new mode.

The generic generosity of both Watson's and McGinn's definitions of vernacular theology, however, obscures at least one very important distinction among kinds of writing in this vein. The emphasis on the linguistic character of these texts overshadows the fact that their individual authors envisioned a variety of readerships, both learned and lewd. Jonathan Hughes has demonstrated the strictly clerical readership for a number of vernacular treatises on pastoral care and specifically the administration of confession at the parish level and for private clients, including the *Pricke of Conscience* and the *Speculum Christiani*,<sup>18</sup> and has argued that the contents of these works "could not have been seriously intended for the illiterate or semi-literate parishioners" of Yorkshire.<sup>19</sup> The compendious scope of *Dives and Pauper* suggests that even this text may only have been penned with the parish priest in need of a primer of the faith in mind.<sup>20</sup> Much more explicitly, the author of *The Cloud of Unknowing*, one of the major contributions to fourteenth-century mystical literature in

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<sup>18</sup> Jonathan Hughes, "The Administration of Confession in the Diocese of York in the Fourteenth Century," in *Studies in Clergy and Ministry in Medieval England*, ed. David M. Smith (York: University of York, 1991), pp. 104-08.

<sup>19</sup> Hughes, "Administration of Confession," pp. 107-08.

<sup>20</sup> Sarah Rees Jones, "'A peler of Holy Cherch': Margery Kempe and the Bishops," in *Medieval Women: Texts and Contexts in Late Medieval Britain: Essays for Felicity Riddy*, ed. Jocelyn Wogan-Browne et al. (Turnhout: Brepols, 2000), p. 391, following Hughes's observations, suggests the possibility—a possibility I am reluctant to accept—that *The Book of Margery Kempe* was in fact written "by men, for men, and about men." Gibson, *Theater of Devotion*, p. 33, notes that Robert Bert, a Bury St. Edmunds chaplain, was accused of professing Lollard beliefs on account of his ownership of a copy of *Dives and Pauper*, which was considered heretical by his accusers. Bert was evidently associated with other alleged heretics, and so it is just as likely that his ownership of *Dives and Pauper* was merely a convenient excuse for persecution, or *Dives and Pauper* may have suffered from a case of guilt by association with a known Lollard. In any event, it is worth nothing that we have in Bert an instance of clerical, rather than lay, ownership of the text. See also Anne Hudson, *The Premature Reformation: Wycliffite Texts and Lollard Heresy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), p. 167.

the vernacular, expresses serious misgivings about uninformed readers laying hands on his treatise. *The Cloud of Unknowing*, for its part, often seems to have more in common with writings in the Latin mystical tradition, and especially with St. Bonaventure's *Itinerarium mentis in Deum*, than with other English vernacular treatises, even other works of fourteenth-century English mysticism such as Walter Hilton's *Scala perfectionis*, about which I will have more to say in chapter 2. That Bonaventure's *Itinerarium* and the *Cloud* flow from the same stream is by no means an original observation. Patrick Gallacher, the editor of a recent edition of the *Cloud*, notes as much in his introduction to the text.<sup>21</sup> The mysticism of ascent outlined in stages by Bonaventure which leads the contemplative from that which is *extra eum* (chapters 1 and 2 of the *Itinerarium*) to that which is *in eum* (chapters 3 and 4) and ultimately to that which is *supra eum* (chapters 5 and 6) is echoed by the *Cloud*-author in that text's eighth chapter:

In þe lower partye of actiue liif a man is wiþ-ouen him-self & bineeþ him-self. In þe hiȝer party of actyue liif & þe lower party of contemplatiue liif, a man is wiþ-inne him-self & euen wiþ him-self. Bot in þe hiȝer partie of contemplatiue liif, a man is abouen him-self & under God.<sup>22</sup>

What interests me is not the definition of mystical union as that which is achieved through a defined progression imagined as an ascent from matter external to realities eternal by way of the human internal, but rather the very rhetoric with which St. Bonaventure and the *Cloud*-author construct their respective audiences in their prologues. In both the *Itinerarium mentis* and *The Cloud* we witness similar concerns over readers un- or under-prepared for the mystical meanderings about to be sketched, although (as will become clear in my discussion of the *Scala perfectionis* in chapter 2)

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<sup>21</sup> Patrick J. Gallacher, ed., *The Cloud of Unknowing*, Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1997, p. 5.

<sup>22</sup> Phyllis Hodgson, ed., *The Cloud of Unknowing*, Early English Text Society Extra Series no. 218 (London: Oxford University Press, 1944), p. 32, hereafter cited as Hodgson.



these concerns are less democratically motivated than those of, say, Walter Hilton. In his prologue, Bonaventure cautions the overzealous reader that progress toward mystical union requires preparation. He writes,

Non enim dispositus est aliquo modo ad contemplationes divinas, quae ad mentales ducunt excessus, nisi cum Daniele sit vir desideriorum. Desideria autem in nobis inflammantur dupliciter, scilicet per clamorem orationis, quae rugire facit a gemitu cordis et per fulgorem speculationis, qua mens ad radios lucis directissime et intensissime se convertit.<sup>23</sup>

[For no one is in any way disposed for divine contemplations that lead to spiritual transports unless, like the prophet Daniel, he is also a man of desires. Now such desires are enkindled in us in two ways: through the outcries of prayer, which makes us groan from anguish of heart, and through the refulgence of speculation by which our mind most directly and intently turns itself toward the rays of light.]

Desire prompted by prayer and meditation, *oratio et speculatio*, opens the path to those who would seek it. So far the *Itinerarium* appears generally welcoming, yet Bonaventure is quick to caution those who expect an easy road. The soul must be prepared, cleansed by contrition, for the risks are great:

Exerce igitur te, homo Dei, prius ad stimulum conscientiae remordentem, antequam oculos eleves ad radios sapientiae in eius speculis relucentes, ne forte ex ipsa radiorum speculatione in graviorem incidas foveam tenebrarum.<sup>24</sup>

[First, then, O man of God, arouse in yourself remorse of conscience before you raise your eyes to the rays of divine Wisdom reflected in its mirrors, lest perchance from the very beholding of these rays you fall into a more perilous pit of darkness.]

Bonaventure warns the unprepared whose sin-stained souls seek to tread on sacred ground. The threat of damnation issued to the spiritually uninitiated is quickly followed by an admonition to the intellectually unwilling:

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<sup>23</sup> Saint Bonaventure, *Itinerarium Mentis in Deum*, ed. Philotheus Boehner, O.F.M. (Saint Bonaventure: The Franciscan Institute, Saint Bonaventure University, 1956), p. 32, hereafter cited as Bonaventure. The translations are Boehner's.

<sup>24</sup> Bonaventure, p. 34.

Rogo igitur, quod magis pensetur intentio scribentis quam opus, magis dictorum sensus quam sermo incultus, magis veritas quam venustas, magis exercitatio affectus quam eruditio intellectus. Quod ut fiat, non est harum speculationum progressus perfunctorie transcurrendus, sed morosissime ruminandus.<sup>25</sup>

[I entreat the reader to weigh the intention of the writer rather than the work, the meaning of the words rather than the uncultivated style, the truth rather than the adornment, and the exercise of the affections rather than the instruction of the mind. He who would achieve this ought not to run hurriedly through these considerations, but rather take his time and mull them slowly.]

Mystical contemplation is not to be entered into frivolously or impatiently.

Bonaventure, moreover, encourages his reader to focus on what he meant to write rather than what he actually writes, *intentio scribentis quam opus*.

In his discussion of Middle English textual criticism, Tim William Machan has questioned modern assumptions about the authority of a “text,” that is, the actual words and punctuation as they appear in a given manuscript, in defining a “work,” that is, the meaning intended by authoritative versions of writing.<sup>26</sup> He reminds us of the medieval commonplace from St. Augustine forward that the *sententia* (in the Middle English sense of the word) or *res* exerted primacy over the individual *verba* which expressed that *res*. Machan continues:

Since the mental conception of a *res* remains prior to the *verba* and is not affected in any important way by them, what was not fixed was the *text*. For a medieval reader, when there was disparity between the *res* and the *verba* of a literary work, the latter was inevitably judged in error and emended or supplemented, if not completed, by the reader’s own understanding. When such a supplement was physically incorporated into the texts of subsequent documents, it thereby altered the *verba* (but not the *res*) for other readers.<sup>27</sup>

Machan is of course thinking about Middle English literary works, not medieval Latin ones, but his observations are relevant to the *Itinerarium mentis*, and suggest that the

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<sup>25</sup> Bonaventure, p. 34.

<sup>26</sup> Tim William Machan, *Textual Criticism and Middle English Texts* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1994), p. 138.

<sup>27</sup> Machan, *Textual Criticism*, p. 142.

act of reading such a text requires effort, that is, “work” of a different sort. In subsequent chapters we will see in more explicit detail how the successful consumption of mystical texts in particular depends not only on careful and accurate reading but more importantly on the felicitous execution in practice of theories explicated textually. More than interpretation is at stake. This process, and the work it entails, ideally and uniquely effects a change in the reader’s relative spiritual proximity to his or her creator. Thus the necessity of distinguishing *res* from *verba* is intended to discourage the casual reader not already perturbed by Bonaventure’s previous and more direct admonitions.

The *Cloud*-author echoes Bonaventure’s concerns in his own prologue. He encourages all those who encounter his text to be sure that they read or hear it completely from beginning to end, for the full meaning of some sections is not immediately clear and will only become so once the entire work has been digested. The peril in failing to do so rests in the adoption and consequent spreading of error.<sup>28</sup> The *Cloud*-author further restricts the field of “readers,” in the extended sense of that word which includes also writers, performers, and auditors:

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<sup>28</sup> For another example of this trope, see M. N.’s third gloss in his Englishing of Marguerite Porete’s *Mirouer* in which he tries to make sense for his reader of the idea that the soul in her understanding becomes “nouȝt,” a key and problematic term for Marguerite Porete, paradoxically by acquiring an abundance of knowledge: “O, þese wordis semen ful straunge to þe rederis, þat seiþ þe soule is lost in þe riȝt hiȝe bi plente of knowinge, and bicom nouȝt in hir vnderstandinge. And not oonli þese wordis, but also many mo oþir wordis þat ben writen bifore and aftir, semen fable or errour, or hard to vnderstande. But for þe loue of God, ȝe reders, demeyþ not to soone, for I am siker þat who so rediþ ouer þis booke bi good avisement twies or þries and be disposid to þo same felynges, ȝitt hem schal þenke þat it is al wel yseid. But who so takeþ þe nakid wordis of scriptures and leueþ þe sentence, he may liȝtli erre.” See Doiron, “Margaret Porete,” p. 256 [16]. The final sentence of this gloss with its reference to the “nakid wordis of scriptures” places this entire passage within a particularly politically loaded context in which modes of reading can betray heretical affiliations. The naked text of Scripture was a watch-phrase of Lollard hermeneutics and polemic; thus Marguerite Porete’s continental, early fourteenth-century heresy of the free spirit is obscured by M. N.’s current and seemingly orthodox preoccupation with late-fourteenth-century Lollard approaches to texts and reading, especially in the vernacular. The trope of multiple readings, particularly when deployed in vernacular theological texts, should perhaps then be interpreted as more than conventional and as a warning against casual and unreflective reading at a time when certain approaches to reading and even book-ownership were potentially fatal activities.

Fleschely ianglers, opyn preisers & blamers of hem-self or of any oþer, tiping tellers, rouners & tutilers of tales, & alle maner of pinchers: kept I neuer þat þei sawe þis book, for myn entent was neuer to write soche þing unto hem. & þerfore I wolde þat þei medel not þer-wiþ, neiþer þei ne any of þees corious lettred or lewed men. 3e þou3 al þat þei be ful good men of actiue leuyng, 3it þis mater acordeþ noþing to hem.<sup>29</sup>

The merely curious are encouraged to avoid casually reading *The Cloud* as are the very conspicuously invoked “lewed men,” and the *Cloud*’s author, who addresses himself only to those who “take hem tyme to rede,”<sup>30</sup> echoes Bonaventure’s claim that the material is *morosissime ruminanda*.

These parallel phrases, moreover, are perhaps not merely fortuitous. The rhetoric of exclusivity deployed by the two authors is telling; the *res*, in other words, may be the point, but the particular *verba* are not inconsequential. To cite a single example of parallel passages, both texts employ language marked by various combinations of parallelism, homoeoteleuton and homoeoptoton, and other highly rhetorical colors in constructing their audiences. Bonaventure addresses his admonitions to

[p]raeventis . . . divina gratia, humilibus et piis, compunctis et devotis, unctis oleo laetitiae et amatoribus divinae sapientiae et eius desiderio inflammatis, vacare volentibus ad Deum magnificandum, admirandum et etiam degustandum . . . .<sup>31</sup>

[to those . . . who are already disposed by divine grace, to the humble and pious, to the contrite and devout, to those who are anointed with the oil of gladness, to the lovers of divine wisdom and to those inflamed with a desire for it, to those who wish to give themselves to glorifying, admiring, and even savoring God . . . .]

Bonaventure offers to the reader the opportunity to associate himself with a series of substantivized subject positions, an approach recalled by the *Cloud*-author who addresses “what-so-euer þou be þat þis book schalt haue in possession, ouþer bi

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<sup>29</sup> Hodgson, pp. 2-3.

<sup>30</sup> Hodgson, p. 1.

<sup>31</sup> Bonaveture, pp. 32, 34.

propirte ouþer by keping, by bering as messenger or elles bi borowing” and implores them almost legalistically

þat in as moche as in þee is by wille & auisement, neiþer þou rede it, ne write it, ne speke it, ne 3it suffre it be red, wretyn, or spokyn, of any or to any, bot 3if it be of soche one or to soche one þat haþ (bi þi supposing) in a trewe wille & by an hole entent, purposed him to be a parfite folower of Criste . . . .<sup>32</sup>

Bonaventure and the *Cloud*-author distinguish the elect among their readers with a polished rhetorical presentation and refinement. *The Cloud of Unknowing* clearly owes a debt to the Latin mystical tradition with which it shares so much.<sup>33</sup>

This brief excursus suggests that the term “vernacular theology” as a catchall, to borrow Nicholas Watson’s word, may occasionally result in associating some texts that need to be separated. Despite its vernacularity, *The Cloud of Unknowing* is much more akin to perhaps the greatest and most influential work of mysticism composed in Latin during the Middle Ages, Bonaventure’s *Itinerarium*. But catechetical works like *Dives and Pauper* and mystagogical works like Walter Hilton’s *Scala perfectionis* and Nicholas Love’s *Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ*, which I examine in the next chapter, suggest that for the general English-reading and hearing population, the intellectualism and esotericism of *The Cloud* was considered pedagogically

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<sup>32</sup> Hodgson, pp. 1-2.

<sup>33</sup> Indeed, it is worth noting that the *Cloud* even prompted two independent Latin translations, the *Caligo ignorancie* (Cambridge, Pembroke College MS 221) and the *Nubes ignorandi* (Oxford, Bodleian MS 856). See Hodgson, pp. xxv-xxvii. Walter Hilton’s *Scala perfectionis*, however, was also translated into Latin, thereby suggesting that the language of transmission alone is not sufficient for making claims about audience, as Jonathan Hughes has likewise suggested for the vernacular. Richard Rolle’s *Incendium amoris* can be instructive here, for in his prologue Rolle humbles his clerical audience by recasting them with the vocabulary of ignorance, of the *lewyd*: “Istum ergo librum offero intuendum, non philosophis, non mundi sapientibus, non magnis theologis infinitis quescionibus implicatis, sed *rudibus et indoctis*, magis Deum diligere quam multa scire conantibus” [I therefore offer this book, intending it not for philosophers, nor for the wise ones of the world, nor for those enmeshed in great and infinite theological questions, but *to the ignorant and the unlearned*, to those endeavoring to love God more than to know many things]. Margaret Deanesly, ed., *The Incendium amoris of Richard Rolle of Hampole* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1915), p. 147 (emphasis mine). Nicholas Watson, “The Middle English Mystics,” in *The Cambridge History of Medieval English Literature*, ed. David Wallace (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 554, observes, however, that the *Cloud*-author’s *Book of Privy Counsel* maintains that the *Cloud*’s ideal readers are, in Watson’s words, “those least sullied by the corruption of clerical learning.”

inappropriate. These factors may explain the absence of any (surviving) medieval translation of Bonaventure's *Itinerarium mentis in Deum* into English yet the existence of some four dozen complete or nearly complete manuscript and early print copies of Nicholas Love's vernacular version of the *Meditationes vitae Christi* thought also to be by Bonaventure during the Middle Ages.<sup>34</sup>

### Gregory's Legacy: The Lollard Controversy and the Orthodox Response

As catechetical instruments for instructing the lewd, images were a hotly contested ideological battleground in the Late Middle Ages, particularly in East Anglia,<sup>35</sup> and certainly in the wake of Lollard antagonism toward them. Dives's initial iconoclastic tendencies and Pauper's subsequent admonitory tale recall not only Serenus of Marseilles but also, and probably more immediately for the fifteenth-century reader, John Wyclif. The Oxford intellectual engaged in numerous disputes with the institutional Church on matters that included the validity of the priesthood, pilgrimages, and the sacraments and insisted on the necessity of translating the Bible into English, thus giving rise to a native heresy, commonly known as Lollardy, which later achieved significant support outside of the academy.<sup>36</sup> Lollards, like Serenus of

<sup>34</sup> Michael G. Sargent, ed., *Nicholas Love's Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ*, Garland Medieval Texts no. 18 (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1992), pp. lxxii-lxxxiv, hereafter cited as Sargent.

<sup>35</sup> See Kathleen Kamerick, *Popular Piety and Art in the Late Middle Ages: Image Worship and Idolatry in England 1350-1500* (New York: Palgrave, 2002).

<sup>36</sup> The classic study of Wycliffe and Lollardy is, of course, Hudson, *Premature Reformation*. Hudson, pp. 2-4, freely interchanges the terms "Wycliffite" and "Lollard." The vernacular term of choice in fifteenth-century East Anglia would have been more or less exclusively "Lollard," as in, for example, the Latin glosses in Nicholas Love's *Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ* alongside passages that espouse doctrinal opinions "contra Lollardos," e.g., next to a passage condemning those who deny the doctrine of transubstantiation (Sargent, p. 153); in the accusations against Margery Kempe leveled by monks at Canterbury that she should "be brent [as a] fals lollare" (Sanford Brown Meech with Hope Emily Allen, eds., *The Book of Margery Kempe*, Early English Text Society Original Series no. 212 [London: Oxford University Press, 1940], p. 28, hereafter cited as Meech and Allen); and in the Virgin Mary's recollection of her son's counsel to his disciples to stand firm against their detractors, "[t]how bei 3ow calle lollard, whych or elue" in John Capgrave's *Life of St. Katharine* (John Capgrave, *The Life of St. Katharine of Alexandria*, ed. Carl Horstmann, Early English Text Society Original Series no. 100 [London: K. Paul, Trench, Trübner, & Co., 1893], p. 190). Capgrave, like his contemporary Margery

Marseilles some eight centuries earlier, fretted over idolatry. A brief tract against images survives among a collection of Lollard writings on a variety of subjects from dicing to “weddid men and ther wyvis and ther childere” to the religious orders.<sup>37</sup> Like Dives, the tract-writer’s concern is idolatry and more specifically its avoidance, but he portrays the dangers inherent in religious images much more severely and as particularly imperiling for that seemingly ubiquitous personage, the *lewid* man. After reminding his audience of God’s specific injunction against idolatry in the ten commandments he denounces a particularly current and relevant trend, namely devotion to especially graphic depictions of the Passion:

But syþen Crist was makid man, it is suffrid for lewid men to haue a pore crucifix, by þe cause to haue mynde on þe harde passioun and bittere deþ þat Crist suffrid wilfully for þe synne of man. And 3it men erren foul in þis crucifixe makyng, for þei peynten it wiþ greet cost, and hangen myche siluer and gold and precious cloþis and stonnes þeronne and aboute it, and suffren pore men, bouzte wiþ Cristis precious blode, to be by hem nakyd, hungry, thursty and in strong preson bounden, þat shulden be holpyn by Cristis lawe wiþ þis ilke tresour þat is þus veynnely wastid on þes dede ymagis.<sup>38</sup>

Note that the writer authorizes the possession of personal, devotional crucifixes; they are permitted, for, as Pauper reminds us, they recall for the *lewid* man the suffering of Christ.<sup>39</sup> The problem, then, is not the crucifix itself, but the degree of its artifice. He tolerates possession, provided the crucifix in question is a “pore” one. Danger arises when the ostentation of the devotional object obscures the stark simplicity of the

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Kempe, was a native of Bishops Lynn in Norfolk. See Capgrave, p. 16, for Capgrave’s account of himself in the prologue to his *vita* of St Katherine. I shall therefore generally prefer the term Lollard, with the understanding that it applies to any disciple of John Wycliffe or proponent of his ideas, learned or *lewyd*.

<sup>37</sup> The manuscript is British Library MS Addit. 24202. The treatise on images is printed in Anne Hudson, ed., *Selections from English Wycliffite Writings*, Medieval Academy Reprints for Teaching 38 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), pp. 83-88.

<sup>38</sup> Hudson, *Selections from English Wycliffite Writings*, p. 83.

<sup>39</sup> Margaret Aston, *Lollards and Reformers: Images and Literacy in Late Medieval Religion* (London: The Hambleton Press, 1984), pp. 162-64.

original historical moment. The Lollard polemicist inveighs against this objectionable practice by recalling the words of Jesus describing the Final Judgment in the Gospels:

Thanne the kyng schal seie to hem, that schulen be on his rizthalf, ‘Come 3e, the blessid of my fadir, take 3e in possessioun the kyngdoom maad redi to 3ou fro the makyng of the world. For Y hungride, and 3e 3auen me to ete; Y thristide, and 3e 3auen me to drynke; Y was herboreles, and 3e herboriden me; nakid, and 3e hiliden me; sijk, and 3e visitiden me; Y was in prisoun, and 3e camen to me.’<sup>40</sup>

The sin of such images, then, rests not in their attempted depiction of the divine, though that is surely part of it; more importantly, the wealth squandered on dressing up the Crucifixion ought to be put to the service of the poor who continue to suffer. The opportunity missed in performing the corporal works of mercy required by the Gospels results in the eternal suffering of the possessors of such crucifixes.

The author of this treatise offers a simple solution, in which he wittingly or not recalls the now familiar Gregorian dictum as a simple given:

And siþ þes ymagis ben bokis of lewid men to sture þem on þe mynde of Cristis passion, and techen by her peyntur, veyn glorie þat is hangid on hem [is] an opyn errour a3enus Cristis gospel. Þei ben worþi to be brent or exilid, as bokis shulden be 3if þei maden mencion and tauzten þat Crist was naylid on þe crosse wiþ þus myche gold and siluer and precious cloþis, as a breeche of gold endentid wiþ perry, and schoon of siluer and a croune frettid ful of precious iewelis . . . . And so of ymagis of pore apostlis of Crist, and oþer seyntis þat lyueden in pouert and gret penaunse, and dispiseden in worde and in dede þe foule pride and vanyte of þis karful lif, for þei ben peyntid as þoghe þei hadde lyued in welþe of þis world and lustus of þeire fleyshe as large as euere did erþely man.<sup>41</sup>

Such images do not, in fact, provoke mere idolatry; they incite outright heresy. Since images are books for the unlearned, a presupposition that the author of the treatise readily accepts without further comment (thereby acknowledging its pedagogical

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<sup>40</sup> Matthew 25:34-36. All references to the Later Wycliffite Bible are to Rev. Josiah Forshall and Sir Frederic Madden, *The Holy Bible, Containing the Old and New Testaments with the Apocryphal Books, in the Earliest English versions made from the Latin Vulgate by John Wycliffe and His Followers*, 4 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1850), hereafter cited as Forshall and Madden.

<sup>41</sup> Hudson, *Selections from English Wycliffite Writings*, pp. 83-84.



cachet in late-medieval England), the Lollard author holds them to strict standards of verisimilitude. The author articulates the identification of book with image so completely here that he eliminates all possibility for license in artistic representations. He extends the proscription against erroneous writing to the pictorial arts, and even consigns these heretical representations to the same fate as condemned texts: just as any book that described a dazzling Christ bedecked in gold and precious jewels hanging from the cross would be burned, or at least outlawed, as an affront to the poverty practiced by Jesus and his Apostles in the Gospels, so too should offending images be committed to the flames.<sup>42</sup> The concept of images as books for *lewid* people completely dominates the fabric of this passage of the treatise and the outlook of its author. Celia Chazelle and James Duggan have debated whether or not any medieval writer from Gregory forward could really have intended to suggest that images functioned precisely as books with regard to their ability to impart new knowledge not previously encountered. In other words, could images really explain a completely unfamiliar concept without the addition of some further verbal gloss or previous familiarity (in which case the function of images is more accurately a mnemonic one)? For the author of the Lollard treatise against images, the answer appears to be an affirmative one. An image of an adorned man on a cross suggests that such a man with golden pants and silver shoes was crucified, and that this in turn should be what Christians recall in their devout meditations. Indeed, if images were not books for *lewid* people, but only *like* books for *lewid* people—the transition from simile to metaphor is key here—they would not be so potentially dangerous.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Aston, *Lollards and Reformers*, p. 163.

<sup>43</sup> In the next chapters, I consider current scholarship that suggests a tendency toward the infantilization of the laity on the part of mainstream, institutional writers and Church leaders, yet it is clear from passages such as these that some Lollard authorities could hold the intellectual capacities of the laity in relatively low esteem, whereas some orthodox pedagogues actively encouraged non-literal reading and complex interpretation of images as well as Scripture.

The Lollard tract ironically resonates with a similar pedagogical stance adopted by John Mirk in the fifteenth century, who, in a sermon pointedly condemning Lollard tenets, remarks:

And þerfor roodes and opyr ymages ben necessary in holy chirch, whateuer þes Lollardes sayn. . . . For, as Ion Bellet tellet, ymages and payntours ben lewde menys bokys, and I say boldly þat þer ben mony þousand of pepul þat couþ not ymagen in her hert how Crist was don on þe rood, but as þai lerne hit be syzt of ymages and payntours.<sup>44</sup>

The occasion for the sermon is that most important of late-medieval English holy days, the Feast of Corpus Christi. Mirk's condemnation of the Lollards forms part of his disquisition on the reasons for the institution of the Eucharist as sacrament, namely, in this part, that the re-enactment at its center puts one in mind of the Passion. The Eucharistic body of Christ, then, becomes one symbol among many within the Church that serves to stimulate reflection on the Passion. Not coincidentally, Mirk continues his argument with an apologia for the adornment of churches with crucifixes. And, as if he were anticipating the objections of, or even responding directly to, the Lollard tractor, Dives, and Serenus of Marseilles, Mirk contends that if images such as crucifixes "nade ben profitable, goode holy faders þat haue be tofore vs wold haue don hem out of holy chirch many a 3ere gon."<sup>45</sup> Mirk's source here is the twelfth-century liturgist John Beleth, whose *Summa de ecclesiasticis officiis* provides an authoritative touchstone for a number of Mirk's sermons. In chapter 85 of *De ecclesiasticis officiis*, "De particulari officio quadragesime," Beleth derails his own

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<sup>44</sup> John Mirk, *Festial: A Collection of Homilies*, ed. Theodor Erbe, Early English Text Society Extra Series no. 96 (London: K. Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., Ltd., 1905), p. 171; cited in Kolve, *The Play Called Corpus Christi*, p. 5.

<sup>45</sup> Alan J. Fletcher, "John Mirk and the Lollards," *Medium Ævum* 56 (1987), pp. 218-19, has argued that Mirk's original intention in collecting the sermons of the *Festial* may have been to combat preemptively Lollardy in Shrewsbury during the early days of the popularizing of Wyclif's ideas. He demonstrates that Erbe's base manuscript for the Early English Text Society edition of the *Festial*, Oxford, Bodleian, MS Gough Eccl. Top. 4, routinely substitutes "Lombards" for "Lollards" in the preceding sermon for Trinity Sunday, thereby obscuring Mirk's larger concern with the influence of the Lollards, whose heresy he associates in the Corpus Christi sermon not with their Eucharistic teaching but with their opposition to images.

discussion of appropriate texts (versicles and prefaces) for Quadragesima in order to remark on changes made to the appearance of the church itself. He comments:

Sed quoniam ea, que hucusque diximus, ad clericos maxime pertinere uidentur, nunc pauca dicenda sunt de laicorum scriptura. Scriptura autem laicorum in duobus consistit: [i]n picturis et ornamentis. “Nam”, ut ait Gregorius, “quod est clerico littera, hoc est laico pictura.”

Picturarum autem alie sunt supra ecclesiam ut gallus uel aquila, alie extra ecclesiam ut in fronte forium bos et leo, alie intra ecclesiam ut yconie, statue et figure et diuersa picturarum genera, que uel in uestibus uel in parietibus uel in uitrealibus depinguntur.<sup>46</sup>

[But because these matters about which we have thus far spoken seem to pertain primarily to the clergy, a few words should be said concerning the Scriptures of the laity. The Scriptures of the laity, then, consist of two parts: pictures and ornaments. “For,” as Gregory says, “the letter is to the cleric what the picture is to the layperson.”

Some of these pictures are atop the church, such as the cock or the eagle, others outside of the church or before the doors, such as the ox and the lion, while still others are inside the church, such as icons, statues, and figures as well as many other kinds of pictures, which are depicted either on the vestments or on the walls or on the vessels.]

Beleth promotes a continuous narrative in images which begins outside the physical church and the liturgy and continues within, so that his twelfth-century lay congregations might at no time be excluded from the mysteries from the faith, even if the finer points of the two prefaces used for Quadragesima, which he details in the preceding section of *De ecclesiasticis officiis*, are lost on them and even if the spiritual significance of the *gallus* atop the church might be misread by the more meteorologically minded. In any case, we should hardly be surprised by now to hear John Mirk echoing John Beleth repeating a condensed version of Gregory the Great’s letter to Bishop Serenus.

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<sup>46</sup> Iohannes Beleth, *Summa de ecclesiasticis officiis*, ed. Herbert Douteil, Corpus Christianorum Continuatio Mediaevalis XLI A (Turnhout: Brepols, 1976), pp. 154-55.

Ironically, both the Lollard tractator and John Mirk, following Beleth, sanction, and indeed take for granted, that at the end of the Middle Ages, the lewd can and do “read” in the images set before them, and without external guidance, that which they do not already know. Nor must the fact be overlooked that at no point does the Lollard writer, for all his seemingly iconoclastic inclinations, deny the value of images as a pedagogical tool especially suitable for the unlettered; rather, poor crucifixes encourage acceptable devotion while highly ornamental crucifixes imperil the soul.<sup>47</sup> What precisely “reading” imagery entailed for the medieval English laity varied from author to author and even within individual works. *Dives and Pauper* provides an explicit, though hardly straightforward, assessment of this very process. Following their initial exchange over the potential for idolatry inherent in religious images, a relentless Dives reasonably inquires of Pauper: “How shulde I rede in þe book of peynture and of ymagerye?”<sup>48</sup> The importance of images as affective rather than intellectual stimuli becomes immediately clear in Pauper’s description of the lewd “reading” process, a distinction which I explore length in the next chapter:

Qhanne þu seeist þe ymage of þe crucifix, thynke on hym þat deyid on þe cros for þin synne and þi sake and thanke hym of his endeles charite þat he wolde suffryn so mechil for the. Take heid be þe ymage how his hed was corownyd wyt þe garlond of thornys tyl þey wentyn into þe brayn and þe blod brast out on euery syde for to dystroyze þe heye synne of pryde þat shewyt hym most in mannys hed and wommanys, and make an ende of þi pryde. Take heid also be þe ymage how hese armys weryn spred abrod and drawyn wol streyte vpon þe tree tyl þe senuys and þe veynys crakyddyn, & how hese hondys weryn naylid to þe cros and stremedyn on blode for to dystroyze þe synne þat Adam and Eue dedyn wyt here hondys qhanne þey tokyn þe appyl azens Godys forbode. Also he suffryd þis for to dystroyin þe synne of wyckyde dedys and wyckyde

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<sup>47</sup> Aston, *Lollards and Reformers*, pp. 136, 137, remarks that “[o]pposition to images can be regarded as one of the most consistent features of the Lollard heresy, and was a criterion for distinguishing its adherents at the beginning of the movement and at its end,” but that “[i]nvestigation of this opposition, however, soon makes it clear that Lollard iconomachy embraced a wide range of different opinions, from moderate critics to extreme purifiers and passionate radicals.” Aston, pp. 137-143, numbers Wyclif among those moderate critics.

<sup>48</sup> Barnum, 1:83.

werkys þat meen and wommen doon wyt here hondys, and make an ende of þinne wyckydde werkys. Take heid also be þe ymage how his syde was openyd and his herte clouyn on too wyt þe sharpe spere and how he shadde blod and water to shewyn þat 3yf he hadde had more blod in his body, more he wolde a 3ouyn for mannys loue. He shadde blod to raansom of oure soulys and water to wasshyn vs from oure synnys. . . . On þis maner, I preye the, rede þin book and falle doun to grounde and thanke þin God þat wolde doon so mechil for the, and wurshepe hym abouyn alle thyngge, nought þe ymage, nought þe stok, stoon ne tree, but hym þat deyid on þe tree for þin synne and for þin sake, so þat þu knele, 3yf þu wylt, aforþ þe ymage nought to þe ymage.<sup>49</sup>

Despite Pauper's citation of Gregory's letters to Serenus, this kind of highly affective, visual meditation is something new which extends well beyond, for instance, Mirk's lay people imagining "in her hert how Crist was don on þe rood" or the Lollards reading the naked text of Scripture in crucifixes and painting. Yet in chapters vi and vii of the first book of *Dives and Pauper*, Pauper describes how to read the book of "ymagerye in special" and "in comoun and in general," two methods of reading which sound more like what Gregory, if not necessarily his intellectual descendents, likely had in mind. The former method of reading consists, for example, in recognizing individual saints or holy figures by the "tokens" with which they are depicted, such as St. Peter's keys, and in recognizing the spiritual significance of these tokens, namely, in the case of Peter, that access to Holy Church and the eternal kingdom are in his charge. Common or general imagery is more broadly applicable and suggests widespread rather than individual character traits. By way of example, Pauper notes that the Apostles are frequently depicted barefoot in token of their poverty, despite evangelical attestation of Apostolic galoshes:

Neuertheles þey wentyn nought fully barefoot but, as Seynt Mark sey3t in his gospel, þey vsedyn gallochis, a soole benethyn wyt a festyng abouyn þe foot, of queche gallochis, as sey3t Beda in his orygnal, þe aungel spak to Seynt Petyr qhanne he seyde: 'Calcia te caligas tuas, Doo on þinne gallochis.'<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Barnum, 1:87-88, 89.

<sup>50</sup> Barnum, 1:91-93

These tools for recognizing and correctly interpreting symbols in religious art clearly differ from the affective meditation on images described by Pauper above in response to Dives's initial question about the process of reading in *ymagerye*.

Thus, *Dives and Pauper* struggles in an ultimately unsatisfactory and contradictory way with the seemingly two-sided nature of imagery. This tension is the consequence of a clerical re-situation of learned meditative discourse (to be discussed in chapter 2 below) within a vernacular idiom that was itself dominated by an irresistible pedagogical imperative further complicated by the pressures exerted on this nexus by ceaseless debates over the very nature of reading images and texts ongoing throughout the period. In the following section, we will explore in greater depth another late-medieval approach to the reading of imagery.

#### From Pedagogy to Dramaturgy: The *Tretise of miraclis pleyinge*

To argue, as I do in chapter 6, a derivation of the didacticism of plays from the Gregorian conception of images made current by writers like the *Dives*-author, John Mirk, and even our Lollard polemicist, simply based on the drama's obvious dependence on the visual as its chief mode of representation would be too ingenuous to be persuasive.<sup>51</sup> Fortunately, we possess a further Lollard invective which explicitly links images as books for *lewid* people to dramatic representations. British Library Manuscript Additional 24202 contains, besides the Lollard condemnation of images we have just been discussing and other ostensibly Lollard tracts, the unique copy of the longest, sustained critique in Middle English of contemporary playmaking,

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<sup>51</sup> The connections between traditional iconography and the staging of medieval plays has received a significant amount of scholarly attention. See, e.g., the articles in Clifford Davidson and Thomas H. Seiler, eds., *The Iconography of Hell* (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1992), and Clifford Davidson, ed., *The Iconography of Heaven* (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1994), as well as Clifford Davidson, *Visualizing the Moral Life: medieval Iconography and the Macro Morality Plays* (New York: AMS Press, 1989).

which the rubric at the head of f. 14<sup>f</sup> of that manuscript identifies as “a tretise of miraclis pleyinge.”<sup>52</sup>

The *Tretise* is in two parts, each apparently by a different author and the first of which concludes with a series of six responses to the putative benefits of dramatic representation advanced by an imaginary collection of play enthusiasts.<sup>53</sup> These half dozen objections to the treatise’s author’s condemnation of playing—including the worship done God and the stirring of devotion occasioned by playing, as well as the more mundane and pragmatic claims that some Christians can only be converted “by

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<sup>52</sup> For a facsimile to of Addit. 24202, see the plates at the end of Clifford Davidson, ed., *A Tretise of Miraclis Pleyinge*, Early Drama, Art, and Music Monograph Series 19 (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1993), hereafter cited as Davidson. For a convenient review of scholarship through 1990 on the dating of the *Tretise* and the evidence for its authorship by a follower of John Wycliffe at the universities or of a subsequent non-academic sympathizer, see Davidson, p. 34, n. 1. The evidence for dating is inconclusive, but the text was clearly a product of either the late-fourteenth or early-fifteenth century.

To speak of “the longest, sustained critique” of medieval English playmaking is somewhat disingenuous, since there is little critique of any other kind with which to compare it. Among the few scant references, however, we might number Dives’s suspicion that “[s]teraclis, pleyys and dauncis þat arn vsid in grete festis & in Sondagys” are contrary to the Third Commandment because merrymaking ill suits the solemnity of the Sabbath. See Barnum, 1:293-94. Pauper responds that mirth is a means of rejuvenating the soul, just as rest from physical labor on the Sabbath invigorates the body, provided that entertainment is devotional in character and free of error. Dives objects by citing St. Augustine, who “seith þat it were lesse wycke to gon at þe plow & at þe carte & cardyn & spynnyn in þe Sondag þan to ledyn dauncis.” With characteristic subtlety, Pauper distinguishes between contemporary forms of playing and “swyche dauncis & pleyys as wern vsyd in his [i.e., Augustine’s] tyme whan cristene people was muchil medelyd with heþene people & be old custom & example of heþene peple vsyd vnhonest dauncis and pleyys þat be eld tyme wern ordeynyd to steryn folc to lecherie & to opir synnys,” noting that such ribaldry is still forbidden. In the anti-fraternal satire *Pierce the Ploughmans Crede*, the Franciscan from whom Piers seeks to learn the *Credo* argues his own virtue and that of his order by noting their absence at plays:

Of all men opon mold we Menures most scheweth  
The pure Apostells life, with penance on erthe,  
And suen hem in saunctite, and suffren well harde.  
We haunten none tavernes ne hobelen aboute;  
At marketts and myraclis we medleth us nevere.

The poem’s insistence on the hypocrisy of all four orders suggests that, in that poet’s opinion, the Franciscans are great frequenters of the theater, which necessarily tarnishes the reputation of “myraclis” through association. See James Dean, ed., *Six Ecclesiastical Satires*, (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1991), p. 11, ll. 103-07.

<sup>53</sup> Davidson, p. 4, discusses his reasons for claiming multiple authorship of the *Tretise* in *A Tretise of Miraclis Pleyinge*. He divides the two parts into lines 1-385 and 386-749. See also Paul A. Johnston, Jr.’s article on the dialect of the *Tretise* in that same volume, especially his conclusions, pp. 77-79.

gamen and pley” and that spiritually-minded recreation trumps other forms of pastime—conclude with a well-known analogy to the pictorial arts:

Also sithen it is leveful to han the miraclis of God peintid, why is not as wel leveful to han the miraclis of God pleyed, sithen men mowen bettere reden the wille of God and his mervelous werkis in the pleyinge of hem than in the peintage? And betere they ben holden in mennes minde and oftere rehersed by pleyinge of hem than by the peintage, for this is a deed bok, the tother a quick.<sup>54</sup>

Following fast on the heels of the two aforementioned pragmatic arguments, the fictitious proponents of playing rally in support of the pedagogical value of plays, which by their very theatricality exploit the mnemonic capacities of their spectators more effectively than static visual forms, though precisely how they do so is not clear at this point.<sup>55</sup> As if by ventriloquism, the nameless voices which advocate the continuance of playing miracles<sup>56</sup> do so, moreover, by means of a metaphor of reading and books: Christians read the will of God in visual art forms, the images before them fulfilling the role of words on a page in a book. In this imagined readerly world,

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<sup>54</sup> Davidson, p. 98. The preceding five pro-theatrical arguments span ll. 147-78 in Davidson’s edition.

<sup>55</sup> For the memory-aiding qualities of East Anglian drama in particular, see chapter two of Victor I. Scherb, *Staging Faith: East Anglian Drama in the Later Middle Ages* (Madison: Farleigh Dickinson University Press, 2001), pp. 43-54 and *passim*. While I agree with Scherb’s assessment of the mnemonic properties of drama, I shall nonetheless argue throughout this dissertation that one of the dramatists’ primary aims was to encourage participation in the events staged at the moment of performance; in other words, East Anglian drama was as grounded in the action of the present as in the recollection of the past, if not more so.

<sup>56</sup> For the many valences of *miraclis* in the *Tretise*, see Davidson, pp. 1-2; Lawrence Clopper, “*Miracula and The Tretise of Miraclis Pleyinge*,” *Speculum* 65 (1990), pp. 878-905 and *Drama, Play, and Game: English Festive Culture in the Medieval and Early Modern Period* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2001), pp. 63-107. Although Davidson and Clopper argue for the polysemousness of *miraclis*, it is clear in this early part of the *Tretise* and indeed in numerous places throughout that oftentimes *miraclis* does not signify some specific dramatic genre or range of genres, but rather simply the deeds of Christ himself which are in turned played, as in the *Tretise*-author’s first use of the word in his opening gambit: “Miraclis, therefore, that Crist dude heere in erthe outhur in himsilf outhur in hise seintis weren so efectuel and in ernest done that to sinful men that erren they broughten forgivenessse of sinne, settinge hem in the weye of right bileve; to doutouse men not stedefast they broughten in kunning to betere plesen God, and verry hope in God to been stedefast in him; and to the wery of the weye of God, for the grette penaunce and suffraunce of the tribulacion that men moten have therinne, they broughten in love of brynninge charite to the which alle thing is light, yhe to suffere dethe, the whiche men most dreden, for the everlastinge lif and joye that men most loven and disiren of the which thing verry hope puttith away all werinessse heere in the weye of God.” See Davidson, p. 93.



furthermore, there exist different kinds of books: the “quick,” that is, living or dynamic, books of the dramatic and the “deed” or static books of inanimate art. Images are signifiers that must be read by communities well versed in the conventions of the form in order to generate proper meanings.

We find that the terms of the first *Tretise*-author’s argument are hardly arbitrary and reflect the longstanding tradition of describing images as “bokis to lewid men” at the heart of current pedagogical discourses. In his riposte to his fictitious antagonist, the author of the *Tretise* answers his own bookish metaphor with a similar analogy:

And to the laste reson we seyn that peinture, yif it be verry withoute menging of lesingis and not to curious, to myche fedinge mennis wittis, and not occasion of maumetrie to the puple, they ben but as nakyd lettris to a clerk to riden the treuthe. But so ben not miraculis pleyinge that ben made more to deliten men bodily than to be bokis to lewid men. And therefore yif they ben quike bookis, they ben quike bookis to shrewidnesse more than to godenesse. Gode men therefore seinge ther time to schort to ocupien hem in gode earnest werkis, and seinge the day of ther rekeninge neighen faste, and unknowing whan they schal go hennys, fleen alle siche idilnessis, hyinge that they weren with her spouse Crist in the blisse of hevene.<sup>57</sup>

Painting, provided the painter held his imagination in check—the ideal for the *Treatise*-author, like his fellow Lollard commentator on images in general, would seem to be verisimilitude—offers the reader of the metaphor bare letters, that is words in which there is no ambiguity of meaning.<sup>58</sup> Painting’s stasis equates with strict literalness; there should be ideally no room for over- or misinterpretation on the part of the reader. The distinction between *res* and *verba* again proves instructive in teasing out Lollard artistic hermeneutics: the *res* and the *verba*, what an image

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<sup>57</sup> Davidson, p. 104.

<sup>58</sup> In various of its configurations, the “literal sense” of Scripture included metaphorical and other figurative expressions, for which see A. J. Minnis, “‘Authorial Intention’ and ‘Literal Sense’ in the Exegetical Theories of Richard Fitzralph and John Wyclif,” *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy* 75 (1975), 1-31.

represents and how the image represents it, ought to be coterminous, the *verba* merely a material reflection of the eternal *res*.

To put it another way, the constituent images of painting within this peculiar pedagogical conception should not act as a source of pleasure—or worship—in and of themselves; rather they point always to some transcendent ideal beyond the locus of the material image. They are to be read, not enjoyed. The author of this part of *A Tretise of Miraclis Pleyinge* identifies precisely this facet of pleasure in the means of expression as the stumbling block inherent in playing. The dramatic enterprise does not concern itself with the transcendent signified, only with the immediate signifiers that are the conventions of the medieval theater and which fail within a pedagogical framework to lead the audience outside of their own delight, grounded as they are in human flesh, to the spiritual truth beyond. “Miraclis pleyinge” amounts to no more than clever sequences of moving images that delight and entertain by means of audience manipulation, the opposite of the stripped down and transparent images of painting aimed at spiritual elevation. In short, plays remain rooted in the carnal, and can therefore never attain to the status of other “bokis to lewid men.”<sup>59</sup>

The authors of the *Tretise*, moreover, do not arbitrarily relegate playing to the realm of the sensual. Nor am I imposing a discussion of signifiers and signifieds, of *verba* and *res* on unwitting medieval authors. Rather, the spectatorship-readership equivalence, or lack thereof, established in the *Tretise* constitutes only one part of a larger discussion of the nature of what this anti-theatrical diatribe calls “figure” and which the author of the second part conducts in terms of the biblical and patristic opposition between flesh and spirit so prevalent in the Middle Ages. The authors of the *Tretise* fundamentally object to the value of playing on the grounds that dramatic

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<sup>59</sup> We will observe in chapter 2 that it is precisely to the carnal that a second group of late-medieval pedagogues will appeal in instructing the lewd.

representation is always mere figuration, an act itself devoid of any of the meaning ultimately locatable in the transcendent figured. The playing of hell serves as an early example in the *Treatise* of this dichotomy. The author of the first part expresses his concern that dramatizations of hell have the unintended effect of convincing their spectators that no hell actually exists, but that the idea of a place of eternal punishment is rather a propagandistic tool wielded by God to instill obedience and discipline among his followers. The *Tretise*-author concludes: “And therefore many men wenen that ther is no helle of everelastinge peine, but that God doth but thretith us, not to do it in dede, as ben pleyinge of miraclis in signe and not in dede.”<sup>60</sup> Dramatic reenactment corresponds to no particular reality; it is an indeterminate sign lacking fixed meaning that furthermore devalues the very real—for the author at least—hell.<sup>61</sup>

The specific language of figuring is reserved for the second part of the *Tretise*, and although composed by a different author, the writer of this disquisition nevertheless adopts his predecessor’s trajectory, which he articulates in more precise terms. The author of part two delineates a complicated theory of figuration predicated on the notion that two opposite conditions cannot coexist without the better supported triumphing at the cost of the less well-supported. With regard to playing, the author presumes that the fleshly delights inherent in theater and discussed at the conclusion of part one of the *Tretise* will, by their very sensual appeal, always triumph: “than

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<sup>60</sup> Davidson, p. 100.

<sup>61</sup> For Birgitta of Sweden, the inherent meaning of the signifier is crucial to understanding the transcendent signified. Thus, after relating how Moses intervened with God on behalf of the Israelites following their erecting and worshipping of the Golden Calf, Christ tells Birgitta in the first book of the *Liber celestis* that he is “þe same Moises in figure” in order to explain the mysteries of the Resurrection and the divine will in an act of anagogical hermeneutics: “Mi godhede spekes to þe manhede as to Moises and sais, ‘Lo, howe þi pupill settes me at nozt and dispises me. All þe cristen sall be slaine and þaire faith sall be distroied.’ Mi manhede answers, ‘Lorde, nai. Haue minde þat I broght throwe þe see þi pupill in mi blode, when I was all torent fro þe hight of þe heued to þe sole of þe fete. I hight to þaime þan endeles life. Parefore haue merci on þaim for mi passion.’ With þese wordes is þe godhede gretli plesit and sais, ‘Be þi will done, for þe is gifen all dome.’ Lo, frendes, howe mikill mi charite is.” See Ellis, *Liber Celestis*, p. 87. The familiar story of the Golden Calf provides a way of understanding the complex relationship of the Persons of the Trinity.

pleyng that is fleschely with the werkis of the spirit is to harming of ever either, and most schal the fleysh hurtyn the spirit, as in suche pleyng the fleysh is most meintenyd and the spirite lasse.”<sup>62</sup> The *Tretise* immediately follows this passage by relating playing to figuration both in theory and with specific reference to the biblical event of Ishmael’s “pleyng” with Isaac. Ishmael and his mother Hagar were dismissed from the household of Abraham because Ishmael dared to play with his brother. For the *Tretise*-author, mother and son’s expulsion were fitting punishment, for, according to a rather dazzling albeit disingenuous bit of double entendre, “by sicke pleyng Ismael, that was the sone of the servant, mighte han begilid Isaac of his heretage, that was the sone of the fre wif of Abraham.”<sup>63</sup> At the level of tropological reading, the ramifications of this form of child’s play are profound, and return us to the notion of the incompatibility of opposites: “sithen Ismael was born after the fleysh, and Isaac after the spirit, as seith the apostele, to exsaumplen that pley of the fleysh is not convenable ne helpely to the spirit but to the bynimming of the spiritus heretage.”<sup>64</sup> The implications at the allegorical level, in which Ishmael’s flesh figures typologically the Old Testament and Isaac’s spirit the New, are even more severe:

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<sup>62</sup> Davidson, p. 107.

<sup>63</sup> Davidson, p. 107.

<sup>64</sup> Davidson, p. 107. Lollards were generally suspicious of the three so-called mystical or “ghostly” levels of biblical interpretation (allegorical, tropological, anagogical). The “General Prologue” to the later Wycliffite Bible declares that “it is nedful to hem, that wolen profite in the stodie of holy scripture, to bigynne at the vndirstonding of literal sence, moost sithen bi the literal sense aloone, and not bi goostly sencis may be maad an argument, either preef, to the preuyng, either delcaring, of a doute, as Austin seith in his Pistle to Vincent Donatiste.” Forshall and Madden, p. 53. Earlier the author of the Prologue warns that “these thre goostly vndirstondingis ben not autentik either of beleue, no but tho ben groundid opynly in the text of holy scripture . . . either whanne the gospelis either other apostilis taken allegorie of the eelde testament, and confeerymyn it.” Forshall and Madden, p. 43. In other words, the three “ghostly” interpretations are legitimate only when Scripture itself gestures in their direction. Notably, the Lollard author’s example is the story of Ishmael as reinterpreted in the Letter to the Galatians. For fourfold exegesis generally, see A. J. Minnis and A. B. Scott with David Wallace, eds., *Medieval Literary Theory and Criticism, c. 1100-c. 1375: The Commentary-Tradition* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), pp. 197-276. For Wyclif’s approach to hermeneutics, see A. J. Minnis, ““Authorial Intention.”” For the exegetical program of the *Tretise*, see Ruth Nissé, “Reversing Discipline: The *Tretise of Miraculis Pleyng*, Lollard Exegesis, and the Failure of Representation,” *Yearbook of Langland Studies* 11 (1997), 163-94.

“and yif it be hooly kept with the testament of the spirit, it doith awy verre fredom and bynimmeth the heretage of hevne.”<sup>65</sup> In the final anagogical exposition of the Isaac-Ishmael story, the *Tretise*-author offers his most developed statement on the evils of figuration and, consequently, of theatrical imagery:

Thanne sithen the pley of Ismael was not leveful with Isaac, myche more fleysly pley is not leveful with the gostly werkis of Crist and of his seintis, as ben hise miraclis to converten men to the bileve, bothe for fer more distaunce of contrarite is bitwene fleysly pley and the earnestful dedis of Crist than bitwene the pley of Ismael and Isaac, and also for the pley bitwene the fleysch and the spirit. . . . And as in good thingis the figuride is evermore bettere than that that is figure; so in yvel thingis that that is figurid is fer wese than the figure . . . Than pleyinge with the miraclis of God disservith more venjaunce and more sinne is than disservyde the pleyinge of Ismael with Isaac, and lasse yvel was; and as felawchip of a thral with his lord makith his lord dispisid, so myche more pleyinge with the miraclis of God makith hem dispisid sithen pleyinge to comparisoun of the mervelouse werkis of God is fer more cherl than ony man may ben cherl of a lord . . . [M]yche more mennus pley with the mervelouse werkis of God is reprovab and worthy to ben put out of ther cumpanye.<sup>66</sup>

The act of figuring at the center of the dramatic art, then, upsets humanity’s natural relationship to its creator, and the chumminess with God encouraged by playing miracles—those quick books for *lewid* people—leads these spectators dangerously astray.

Throughout this chapter I have attempted to call attention to a late-medieval pedagogical insistence on imagery as a tool of lay instruction in order to establish the didactic context out of which East Anglian spiritual and dramatic texts would ultimately emerge. The notion that teachers of England’s *lewyd peple* should approach their audience through images was axiomatic, a general fact of life and faith firmly rooted in a living tradition which, in its appeal to papal authority, obscured a history of reinterpretation and reinvention. The Gregorian dictum—“quod est clerico

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<sup>65</sup> Davidson, p. 107.

<sup>66</sup> Davidson, pp. 107-08.

littera, hoc est laico pictura,” in the liturgist John Beleth’s simplified construction—proved extraordinarily malleable as new generations of vernacular writers justified their teachings by citing it while simultaneously and unconsciously adapting their *auctor*’s intentions to a new time and place, a time and place which would have been totally unrecognizable to Pope Gregory the Great and Bishop Serenus of Marseilles. Nor did pedagogical appropriations of Gregory’s equation of the *nescii litterarum* with *picturae* end with the *Dives*-author, John Mirk, or the Lollards, whose immediate and intended audiences are not always clear and in any event were probably not the lewd at the center of their discussions; as we shall see in the remaining chapters of this part, this axiomatic association of *lewyd peple* with *ymagerye* at the end of the fourteenth century spurred an entirely new trend of writing specifically and exclusively directed toward lewd people, a trend that at one and the same time was in its consumption unprecedentedly popular and in its methods inescapably, but probably unconsciously, learned.

CHAPTER TWO  
INVENTING LAY MEDITATION:  
WALTER HILTON, NICHOLAS LOVE, AND JOHN WYCLIF

In seeking sources for clerical conceptions of lay people, I have been rehearsing a common medieval intellectual genealogy with its authoritative roots in the catechetical opinions of Gregory the Great. But this pursuit obscures a second, more immediate source for a preference for images in vernacular theological writings that has little to do with the papal perceptions of the laity. The image-as-book metaphor, expanding from the realm of early medieval church wall-paintings to encompass John Belet's cocks and bulls and even the Lollard critic's *miraculis pleyinge*, ultimately paved the way for an even more culturally significant departure from earlier pedagogical norms, as practices that were coded "lay" because of their refraction of Gregorian precepts began increasingly to incorporate, and resemble, learned monastic and clerical habits. In Gregory's time, images were the pedagogical and ideological medium identifying the laity as the passive recipients of specific (and specifically limited) knowledge, the possession of which was considered essential to full incorporation into the body of the faithful. The emergence of an audience for vernacular writings by the fourteenth century, however, resulted in the pedagogical redeployment of images in a way that offered the laity a mode of active participation in the faith concerned not with the attainment of intellectual understanding *through* images but rather with affective response *to* images.

Late in the fourteenth century, the popularity not only of original but also of translated mystical and mystagogical works in the vernacular exploded. Scholars have often noticed that mysticism, a term that can be used loosely to describe practices or experiences directed toward achieving a consciousness of the immediate presence of

God,<sup>1</sup> attracted both lay people and the clerical or quasi-clerical authors attempting to reach them.<sup>2</sup> The strong visual component of much late-medieval mystical writing, particularly the branch that emphasized kataphatic or positive meditation on concrete images of the divine as its primary mode of operation, made it an obvious medium for promoting lay religious formation.<sup>3</sup> These texts invited lay, vernacular readers or auditors to cultivate a preference for affective meditation, which was articulated as an extension of the foundational premise of medieval catechesis, namely that the laity were best able to understand their faith through images. Thus this chapter will unfold the history of this development through a consideration of the “theoretical” delimitations of images within medieval debates that bear witness to competing clerical formulations of the proper operations of imagery within lay piety, and in the

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<sup>1</sup> Bernard McGinn, *The Presence of God: A History of Western Christian Mysticism*, vol. I: *The Foundations of Mysticism: Origins to the Fifth Century* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1991), pp. xv-xx.

<sup>2</sup> The hermit Richard Rolle, though not a priest or monk, was a key figure for subsequent generations of lay mystics. For his influence on Margery Kempe, see chapters 4 and 5 below.

<sup>3</sup> Mysticism, of course, also had its drawbacks, not least of which was the question of the authority of direct, unmediated revelation that resulted in much clerical warning about, for instance, the proper discernment of spirits. Indeed, lay people themselves did not always embrace the directness of this unfettered authority, as in book I, chapter 59 of *The Book of Margery Kempe*, in which the protagonist expresses her distrust of her visions concerning the saved and the damned: “Sche wolde not heryn it ne beleuyn þat it was God þat schewyd hir swech thyngys & put it owt of hir mende as mech as sche myth. . . . Sche wolde zeuen no credens to þe counsel of God but rapar leuyd it was sum euyl spiryt for to deceyuyn her.” The Son subsequently punishes her with twelve days of lecherous thoughts for her distrust. See Meech and Allen, p. 144. Even the excessively learned and impeccable heroine of John Capgrave’s *vita* of St Katharine of Antioch routinely expresses her familiarity with the necessity of discerning well-intentioned spirits from ill as an exemplum for her readers or auditors. Katharine demands of the old man who has come at the behest of the Virgin Mary to proclaim Christianity to the scholar-queen:

Good syre, tell me how may þis be—  
ffor of 3oure persone be we sore dysmayde—  
þat we so sodenly 3ow in oure presens see,  
I-come þus a-lone wyth-owte oþer menee?  
þis ask we fyrst, for sekyr wete we must;  
Wheythyr þis is truthe or apparens, it schall be wust.

What-manere mane myght make 3ow so maisterlye  
To clyme oure wallys which are so hye?  
I trow, be enchauntment or be nygromancye  
Are 3e entyrd now here before oure y3e!

See Capgrave, *Life of St. Katharine*, pp. 194, 196.



chapter that follows, we will see how clerical and lay objectives intersected to produce a species of collaborative piety.

From *intellectus* to *affectus*: Mystical Pedagogies

The *Scala perfectionis* by the later fourteenth-century Augustinian canon Walter Hilton provides a useful example of how to write new books for *lewyd peple*, that is, non-metaphorical texts in the vernacular for lay audiences, and of how the cultural commonplace that images convey knowledge to the laity was adapted and adopted among an audience of presumed vernacular readers. The *Scala* opens with a conventional address to a female recluse that harks back in the English tradition to the *Ancrene Wisse*, and even further in Latin instructions for anchorites and anchoresses, especially Aelred of Rievaulx's *De institutione inclusarum* (a work I consider in the next chapter). Hilton insists that the life of one dead to the world<sup>4</sup> is worthless if the inner person is corrupt. In the first of two books, Hilton focuses on the *vita contemplativa* as the superior life, and divides the act of contemplation into three distinct components.<sup>5</sup> The first component is the attainment of knowledge through reason, which Hilton identifies as the preserve of "lettred men and grete clerkes."<sup>6</sup> The second is affection stirred up through the act of meditation on mental imaginings of the Passion or other deeds of Christ, an activity particularly conducive to the capacities of "simple and unlettrid men."<sup>7</sup> The final stage of contemplation is the

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<sup>4</sup> Medieval anchoresses were ritually mourned as dead upon their enclosure.

<sup>5</sup> Hilton's invocation of the *vita contemplativa*, as distinguished from the *vita activa*, has its roots in Luke's account of Jesus' visit to the house of Mary and Martha in Bethany (Luke 10:38-42). Jesus' approval of Mary's life of contemplation as the better part was conventionally adopted as a sanction for monastic and anchoritic life and, more polemically, for the eremitic life. For a concise history of the often unsystematic development of conceptions of the active and contemplative lives during the Middle Ages, and of the invention of a third, intermediate category, the so-called "mixed life," see Nicholas Watson, *Richard Rolle and the Invention of Authority*, Cambridge Studies in Medieval Literature 13 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 9-15.

<sup>6</sup> Walter Hilton, *The Scale of Perfection*, ed. Thomas H. Bestul (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2000), p. 34, hereafter cited as Hilton.

<sup>7</sup> Hilton, p. 35.

knowing and loving of God in what might be called mystical union, or, to use the common Middle English term, *oonyng*, that is “one-ing” or “joining.”<sup>8</sup> Hilton follows the general mystical outline of his predecessors, including Bonaventure and the *Cloud*-author, but he does so by noting that the first component of contemplative activity, “knowynge,” poses a particular challenge for the simple and unlettered, those whom the author of *Dives and Pauper* would come to call *lewyd peple*.

Already there is a perceptible shift here from images as vehicles for knowing to images as the stimulus of affective response, a shift that gradually becomes palpable as Hilton pursues and further refines his exposition of contemplation in the *Scala*. For Gregory and his pedagogical inheritors, images were the metaphorical words of the *illitterati*, building blocks which produced meaning through processes of cognition and intellection that mirrored similar processes employed by *litterati* reading words. When late-medieval vernacular writers introduced the old wine of images into the new skins of mysticism, however, *intellectus* yielded to *affectus*. Gregory separated Serenus’s flock into two camps: those who could read and those who could not, yet he held forth a common objective for both parties: acquisition of knowledge. In the *Scala perfectionis*, Hilton reappropriates knowledge itself, his “knowynge” resident in the faculty of “cognicion,” for lettered men and clerks. According to the Augustinian canon, moreover, *knowynge* is itself devoid of any inherent moral association and may be utilized for charitable or nefarious ends according to the disposition of its possessor and the prompting of the Holy Spirit. To simple and unlettered men Hilton assigns the opposite of “knowynge,” namely “felynge,” which resides in the faculty of human “affeccioun.” Hilton then attributes to *felynge*, which is achieved through meditation

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<sup>8</sup> According to McGinn, “Meister Eckhart and the Beguines,” p. 12, n. 24, the phrase *unio mystica* is an invention of the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

on images, a moral status superior to that of *knowynge*, for the former “mai not be had without greet grace.”<sup>9</sup>

After establishing his theoretical outline of *what* contemplation is, Hilton turns to *how* one contemplates. It becomes clear at this moment that despite the traditional opening address to the female recluse, this latter figure is merely a convention, and that Hilton imagines a less restricted English-reading audience. That Hilton probably had more than just anchoresses in mind is suggested by the *Scala*'s departure from the tradition of the *Ancrene Wisse* and Aelred of Rievaulx's *De institutione inclusarum*: the instructions prevalent in these texts concerning the conduct of the anchoress's daily life—the receipt of visitors and contact with the outside world, the condition of one's cell, the liturgy of the hours, and so on—are conspicuously absent from the *Scala perfectionis*, and their absence suggests that these were not immediate concerns for the imagined audience as they surely would have been if Hilton's reflections on contemplation had been conceived as part of a *regula* prescribing the anchoritic lifestyle. Elsewhere, Hilton invokes the familiar, tripartite formulation of the monastic *lectio divina* comprised of *lectio*, *oratio*, and *meditatio*, but he immediately dismisses the usefulness of the first, *lectio*, for his present audience: “Redynge of Holi Writ mai thu not wel use, and therefore thee bihoveth more occupye thee in prayer and in meditacioun.”<sup>10</sup> The author of the *Scala* imagines an audience capable of reading

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<sup>9</sup> Hilton, p. 36. The third part of contemplation combines *cognicion* and *affecion*, which initially seems necessarily to exclude the unlettered who are less likely to achieve *knowynge*. But *knowynge* does not automatically preclude the unlettered from *oonynge*; it is described only as *especially* fitting for the learned, since it is chiefly acquired through “resoun, bi techynge of man and bi studie of Hooly Writ” (p. 33). Nevertheless, the third part of contemplation may be achieved by anyone who is able to progress by special divine dispensation beyond external, bodily feeling to internal, spiritual feeling, a transition that is always ultimately a gift of grace anyway, a gift that “God gyveth where that he wole, to leird or to lewed, men or women ocupied in prelacie, and to solitarie also, but it is special and not comone.” See Hilton, p. 39. Indeed Hilton argues that this achievement is found most commonly among solitaries, that is those engaged in eremitic life.

<sup>10</sup> Hilton, p. 45. Twycross, “Books for the Unlearned,” p. 67, also notes this passage in asserting that the equation of *lewyd* with a complete lack of learning should not be assumed for fourteenth and fifteenth century Middle English texts.

English, but not the Latin of Scripture. Whereas we ought not to assume that a compendium of catechetical material composed in English, such as *Dives and Pauper*, was necessarily compiled for a lay audience solely on account of its vernacularity, we may assume that Hilton generally addresses lay readers competent in reading English but not even the relatively negotiable and familiar Latin of the Bible.<sup>11</sup>

Book I of the *Scala perfectionis* ultimately seeks to offer its reader a program for union with the Godhead that can be partially achieved in this life but only fully experienced in the eternal bliss of heaven. The *Scala*'s mystical trajectory entails arriving at contemplation of the Godhead by way of imagining the humanity of Christ. Proper imagining is a divine gift and recognized, according to Hilton, by the following tokens:

whanne it is so that thou art *stired* to devocion, and sodeynli thi thought is drawn up from alle worldli and fleischli thinges, and thee thenketh as thu *seighe* in thi soule thi Lord Jhesu Crist in bodili liknesse as He was in erthe, how He was taken of the Jewes and bounded as a theef, beten and dispisid, scourgid and demed to the deeth; how mekeli He baar the Cros upon his bak, and hou crueli He was nailed therupon; also of the crowne of thornes upon His heed, and upon the scharp spere that stonge Him to the herte. . . . thanne whanne the mynde of Cristis passioun or ony poynt of His manhede is thus maad in thi herte bi siche goostli *sight*, with devout *affeccioun* answeyng therto, wite thou wel thanne that it is not thyn owen werkyng, ne feynyng of noo wikkid spirt, but bi grace of the Holi Goost, for it is an openyng of the goostli *eye* into Cristis manhede.<sup>12</sup>

Hilton prompts the lay reader to seek God by focusing on the humanity of Christ, not only on the suffering of Christ's flesh, but also on any event relating to Jesus' time on earth. Imaginative meditation grants access to the divine, and Hilton thus writes "a book to þe lewyd peple," that is, a treatise for English readers, which describes

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<sup>11</sup>And regardless of whether Hilton *intended* his *Scala* for those outside of the cell, the history of the production and circulation of the text in manuscript and Margery Kempe's own attestations of its place within her program of religious education indicate that it was certainly being read more broadly during the fifteenth century. For Margery Kempe's ability to read English, or lack thereof, see chapter 4 below. For the evidence from manuscripts of Hilton's readers, see chapter 6 below.

<sup>12</sup>Hilton, p. 68 (emphasis mine).

mystical assent in terms of that other metaphorical Gregorian “book to þe lewyd peple,” imagery. As we shall soon discover, moreover, Hilton’s emphasis on witnessing Christ’s gruesome suffering—note his use of words like *seighe*, *sight*, and *iye* in the passage of the *Scala* excerpted above—and his sense that lay attempts to understand the divinity of God must begin with his humanity are typical of the tropes employed in these mystagogical texts for “simple and unlettrid men.” In those, affective response to visual stimuli—note too his use of words like *stired* and *affeccioun*—replaces reading in images what clerks read in books.

Nicholas Love’s *Mirroure of þe blessedde life of Jesu Criste* develops the form of meditation on events from the life of Christ sketched in the *Scala perfectionis* into a system. Love, the prior of the Carthusian house of Mount Grace in Yorkshire, translated in 1410 (that is, about the same time that *Dives and Pauper* was composed) the *Meditationes vitae Christi* thought to be the work of St. Bonaventure but probably that of Johannes de Caulibus.<sup>13</sup> The *Mirror* leads the reader through a series of narrated meditative scenes organized liturgically according to the seven days of the week and beginning on Monday with the common late medieval amplification of Psalm 84 featuring the disputation among the four Daughters of God in Heaven. From there, Love guides the meditator from the Incarnation of the Son through the resurrected Christ’s Ascension and the sending of the Holy Spirit to the Apostles on Pentecost. Love’s *Mirror* is no mere translation, however; it might more appropriately be called an amplification, for Love routinely expands upon the Latin original, though he also claims to excise material that might potentially frustrate his enlarged audience.

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<sup>13</sup> On the question of authorship, see Sargent, pp. xv-xvi. For an example of a manuscript of the *Meditationes vitae Christi* with copious illustrations inspired by the text’s imaginative reconstruction of biblical narrative, see Isa Ragusa and Rosalie B. Green, eds., *Meditations on the Life of Christ: An Illustrated Manuscript of the Fourteenth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961).

Indeed, Love expresses his concerns for his audience in his first major addendum to Pseudo-Bonaventure, his new preface.

In this proem, Love addresses a vernacular-reading audience in the most explicit terms we have yet seen and redefines the *lewde* specifically as readers of English. Because all people are moved to desire everlasting life, writes Love, not only Scripture but also “diuerse bokes & trettes of devoute men” have been written “not onelich to clerkes in latyne, but also in Englysche to lewde men & women & hem þat bene of symple vndirstonding.”<sup>14</sup> “Lewde” here clearly carries the sense of “not erudite” or “uneducated,” yet Love also anticipates an audience capable of reading his English version of the *Meditationes*. Love recognizes the need for books for *lewde* people, and indeed one of the text’s first objectives is a recasting of Pseudo-Bonaventure’s audience, from the again conventional female religious dedicatee of the Latin *Meditationes* to the *Mirror*’s people of simple understanding. Love further acknowledges his project as not just a translation; he calls it a “drawing out,” which he has undertaken at the behest of some unnamed but assuredly devout souls concerned for the spiritual edification of their less learned brothers and sisters in Christ. Love describes his project as a

boke of cristes lyfe wryten in englysche with more putte to in certeyn partes & wipdrawyng of diuerse auctoritis [and] maters as it semeth to þe wryter hereof moste spedefull & edifyng to hem þat bene [of] symple vndirstondyng to þe which symple soules as seynt Bernerde seye contemplacion of þe monhede of cryste is more likyng more spedefull & more sykere þan is hy3e contemplacion of þe godhed ande þefore to hem is pryncipally to be sette in mynde þe ymage of cristes Incarnacion passion & Resurreccion so that a symple soule þat kan not þenke bot bodyes or bodily þinges mowe haue somewhat accordyng vnto is affecion where wip he maye fede & stire his deuocion wherefore it is to undirstonde at þe bygynyng as for [a] pryncipal & general rewle of diuerse ymaginacions þat folowen after in þis boke þat þe discruyng or speches or dedis of god in heuen & angels or opere gostly substances bene only wryten in þis manere, & to þis entent þat is to saye as devoute ymaginacions & likenessis

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<sup>14</sup> Sargent, p. 10.

stryryng symple soules to þe loue of god & desire of heuently þinges for as Seynt Gregory seiþ, þefore is þe kyngdome of heuene likenet to erþly þinges þat by þo þinges þat bene visible & þat man kyndly knoweþ, he be stired & rauyshede to loue & desire gostly inuisible þinges, þat he kyndly knoweþ not.<sup>15</sup>

Here we have a literal and a figurative book for *lewyd* people, that is, a textual artifact composed with a lay audience of English-readers in mind that provides instruction for imaginative meditation. Love's emphasis on *affecion* corresponds to Hilton's and signals their shared belief that *knowyng* is ultimately of less importance for the laity than *felynge*.

The *Mirror*'s narrative of the mounting of Jesus on the cross represents in microcosm the quite literally visceral affectivity of the work as a whole:

And þan he þat was on þe laddere behynde þe crosse takeþ his riht hande & naileþ it fast to þe crosse. And after he þat was on þe lift side draweþ wiþ alle his miht þe lift arme & hande, & driveþ þerþorh a nopere grete naile. After þei comen done & taken away alle þe laddres & so hangeþ oure lorde onely by þoo tweyn nailes smyten þorh hees handes without sustenance of þe body, drawyng donwarde peynfully þorh þe weiht þerof.

Herewiþ also a nopere harlote rennþ to, & drawþ done hese feete with all his miht, & anoþer driveþ a grete longe naile þorh boþe hese feete ioynede to oþer. . . .

Þan rennene out of his blessed body þee stremes of þat holiest blode, on alle sides abundantly from þo grete wondes, & so is he constreynede & artede þat he may not meue bot his hede.

Wherefore hangyng þe body onely by þo thre nailes no doute bot þat he suffereþ so bitter sorowes & peynes þat þere may no herte þenke, nor tonge telle.<sup>16</sup>

Love establishes the enormity of Christ's suffering cumulatively, proceeding body part by gory body part and drawing attention not only to Jesus' traditional wounds but also to the discomforting effects of gravity and the immobilizing agony of crucifixion.

This catalogue of pain culminates, finally, in a failure of the human imagination to

<sup>15</sup> Sargent, p. 10 (emphasis mine). Love bypasses, however, "miche processe of the gospel & many chapitres of þe forseid boke of Bonaventure . . . for þe litel edificacion of hem as it semeþ nedeful to symple soules, to whеч þis boke is specialy writen in english." See Sargent, p. 88 and also p. 107 for an additional example of this censoring of "tedyouse" material.

<sup>16</sup> Sargent, pp. 177-78.

grasp the depth of Christ's anguish. But lest the reader of the *Mirror* mistake its agenda as one promoting pure sentimentality for sentimentality's sake, Love concludes his narrative of the Crucifixion with his own gloss on Pseudo-Bonaventure's text in which he stresses the importance of prolonged and intensive study, an emphasis that also gestures toward an inherent paradox in his method:

Pis is a pitevouse siht & a ioyful siht. A pitevouse siht in him for þat harde passion þat he suffrede for oure sauacion, bot it is a likyng siht to vs, for þe matire & þe effecte þat we haue þerbye of oure redempcion. Soþely þis siht of oure lord Jesu hangyng so on þe crosse by deuoute ymaginacion of þe soule, is so likyng to sume creatours þat after longe exercise of sorouful compassion þei felen sumtyme so grete likyng not onely in soule bot also in þe body þei kunne not telle, & þat no man may knowe, bot onely he þat by experience feleb it.<sup>17</sup>

Through dedicated effort, the meditative subject, in keeping with the mystical nature of the work, aspires to achieve an ineffably joyful experience, both bodily and spiritual, through which the soul participates in both the sorrow of the Crucifixion and in its ultimate transformation into the delight that comes from conquering death.

In this elaborated conception of the role of imagery, pedagogy intersects with theology and especially Christology: meditation on spiritual matters that are directly accessible, primarily figured as the humanity of Christ, will lead the reader to those that are not directly accessible, namely the Godhead. The importance of this feature of both Hilton and Love's teachings, a sense of continuity between the imminent and the transcendent, cannot be understated. We will see in chapters 4 and 5 how Margery Kempe has completely internalized this approach in her own visions and how the drama likewise borrows this meditative technique in chapter 6. In fact, the notion that "bodies and bodily things" are the lay persons' point of entry into divine contemplation is never far from the surface throughout the works considered in this study.

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<sup>17</sup> Sargent, p. 181.



An early meditation on the appearance of the Archangel Gabriel to the Blessed Virgin Mary at the Annunciation typifies Love's systematic deployment of bodies as gateways to spiritual understanding surpassing the *knowynge* of those whom Hilton identifies as "clerks." Love's meditation here also highlights the presence of the meditative subject in the scene as an actor, another distinctive characteristic of his brand of spirituality. Thus, the *Mirror* not only enjoins the reader to witness God the Father's command to Gabriel that the archangel appear to Mary and announce the salvation of humanity; it also invites him or her to accompany God's messenger on his journey:

Now take hede, & ymagine of gostly þinge as it were bodily, & þenk in þi herte *as þou were present in þe sizt of þat blessed lord*, with how benyng & glad semblant he spekeþ þees wordes. And on þat oþer side, how Gabriel with a likyng face & glad chere vpon his knen knelyng & with drede reuerently bowyng receueþ þis message of his lord. And so anone Gabriel risyng vp glad & iocunde, toke his flizt fro þe hye heuen to erþe, & in a moment he was in mannis liknes before þe virgine Marie, þat was in hire pryue chaumbure þat tyme closed & in hir prayeres, or in hire meditaciones perauentur redyng þe prophecie of ysaie, touchyng þe Incarnacion.<sup>18</sup>

The act of seeing Gabriel's kneeling, his smiling, his reverent bowing, and of Mary's praying and reading of what medieval exegetes and liturgists commonly maintained to be Isaiah's prophesying of the Incarnation (e.g., Isaiah 9:2-7) enables the meditator to "ymagine," to conceive of, "ghostly" or spiritual matters in familiar, bodily terms. This attention to details of gesture, countenance, and clothing parallels developments in fifteenth-century painting, too, as in Jan van Eyck's *Annunciation*. Yet the *Mirror's* narrative elaborations surpass even the sense of presence evoked by the realistic detail of Flemish art. Love's pedagogical commitment to understanding what he identifies as the "ghostly" by way of the bodily is intended to lead the meditator closer to an

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<sup>18</sup> Sargent, pp. 21-22 (emphasis mine).

actual consciousness of the presence of God.<sup>19</sup> And so the meditative subject does not merely recreate the Annunciation in mental images; he or she witnesses the very act of Gabriel's mission as if he or she were actually standing alongside him first before God himself and then before that emblem of perfect medieval humility, the Blessed Virgin Mary. And whereas Robert Campin in his famous Annunciation triptych (the so-called Merode Altarpiece) strands his patron literally on the outside of the scene in the left panel looking in through the door at Mary and Gabriel, Love's visually detailed contemplative narrative invites the reader's participation through a variety of roles. Rather than warn his reader against anthropomorphizing spiritual beings he instead assigns to his divine and angelic actors all too human characteristics such as God's "benyng & glad semblant" or Gabriel's smiling, kneeling, bowing, and—less humanly, of course—his taking flight. Thus, in Love's *Mirror*, we witness a movement away from images as units of knowledge in a process of intellection that leads the lewd person to understand God and toward images as affective stimuli which prepare the individual soul for communion with God. The realm of images' operation shifts from *intellectus* to *affectus*, from *knowynge* to *felynge*.<sup>20</sup>

### Contesting the Image: Trinitarian Theology and Wycliffite Realism

Lest the significance of the *Mirror's* turn to bodies and bodily things as the first step toward "ghostly" things be underestimated, we need to pause in order to consider contemporaneous debates within learned circles concerning the theological

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<sup>19</sup> Bonaventure, of course, likewise emphasizes a path of ascent through that which is external to the mystic as a means of approaching the divine, but this philosophical and intellectual Neoplatonism takes on a new guise in the form of Love's "bodies and bodily things" specifically geared toward the latter's people of simple understanding.

<sup>20</sup> This shift explains, moreover, the apparent tension in *Dives and Pauper's* description of how precisely one reads images discussed above. Pauper, unsuccessfully, tries to reconcile the Gregorian tradition with this new meditative one and offers an account of image-reading seemingly at odds with itself.

legitimacy of certain applications of images in the simple, pictorial sense. Within these disputes, the specific question of how to represent the Trinity encouraged acute antagonism given the centrality of Trinitarian theology to statements of Christian doctrine throughout the medieval period, and the perceived potential for error in the articulation thereof. John Wyclif's *Tractatus de mandatis divinis*, a kind of fourteenth-century Latin predecessor in scope and organization of the early fifteenth-century, vernacular *Dives and Pauper*, provides a useful place to begin our inquiry. Indeed, Wyclif's *De mandatis divinis* relates more than casually to its vernacular intellectual successor, since Wyclif, too, cites Gregory the Great's letters to Serenus, and does so more accurately than any other medieval commentator, in the course of condemning the very practice of anthropomorphizing the Persons of the Trinity that Nicholas Love will later encourage. Wyclif argues for a careful approach to the indisputable, didactic benefits of images deployed in accord with Gregorian pedagogy that nonetheless avoids an overly simplistic and inappropriate application of those same images to theological matters of some sophistication and complexity in a passage worth quoting at length:

In primitiva autem ecclesia non tantum multiplicabantur ymages, licet beatus Silvester legatur depinxisse imperatori ymages Petri et Pauli; ac multa miracula narrantur in ecclesia occasione ymaginum floruisse. Unde beatus Gregorius in Registro, libro IX, epistola IX ad quendam episcopum ita scribit: Dudum ad nos pervenit quia fraternitas vestra quosdam ymaginum adoratores aspiciens easdem ymages confregit atque de ecclesia proiecit; quem quidem zelum nos, ne quid manifestum adorari possit, habuisse laudamus, sed frangere non debuisse easdem ymages iudicamus. Idcirco enim picture in ecclesiis adhibentur, ut qui literas nesciunt saltem in parietibus videndo legant qui in codicibus legere non valent. Et libro X, epistola XIII ad episcopum Serenum: si quis ymages facere voluerit, minime prohibe; adorare vero ymages omnino veta. Sed hoc sollicite fraternitas tua admoneat, ut ex visione rei geste ardorem compuncionis percipiant, et in adoracione solius trinitatis prosternantur. . . . Et patet quod ymages tam bene quam male possunt fieri: bene ad excitandum, facilitandum et accendendum mentes fidelium, ut colant devocius Deum suum; et male ut occasione ymaginum a veritate fidei aberretur, ut ymago illa vel latria vel dulia adoretur, vel ut in pulcritudine,

preciositate aut affecione impertinentis circumstancie minus debite delectetur. Sic enim laici depingunt infideliter trinitatem, ac si Deus pater foret grandevus paterfamilias, habens in genibus Deum filium suum crucifixum et Deum Spiritum Sanctum columbam utrique descendentem. Et sic de multis similitudinibus, ex quibus nedum laici sed superiores ecclesiastici errant in fide, putantes Patrem vel Spiritum Sanctum aut angelos esse corporeos.<sup>21</sup>

[In the early Church, moreover, images were not much used, although it may be read that St. Sylvester painted images of Peter and Paul for the emperor; but a great many astonishing events are said to have flourished in the Church concerning of images. Thus, St. Gregory in his Register, book IX, letter IX, wrote in this way to a certain bishop: “Some time ago it came to our attention that your brotherhood, taking note of certain worshippers of images, smashed these same images and cast them from the Church; and certainly we praise you for your zeal, lest anyone might have worshipped something made by hand, but we judge that you ought not to have destroyed those same images. For, truly, pictures are employed in churches so that those who are ignorant of letters may at least read by seeing on walls that which they are unable to read in books.” And in book X, letter XIII, to the Bishop Serenus: “If anyone should wish to make images, hinder him not in the least; but forbid him to worship images at all cost. But let your brotherhood warn them diligently that they may feel the heat of compunction by seeing deeds, but should prostrate themselves in adoration before the Trinity alone.” . . . And it is clear that images can be as good as they can be evil: good, in stirring up, predisposing, and inciting the minds of the faithful, so that they worship their God more devoutly; and evil, in that by means of images one may be led astray from the truth of faith, so that either by their beauty or their preciousness or their state unbecoming their surroundings he may be seduced away. In that way the laity (*laici*) inappropriately represent the Trinity, so that God the Father seems a grand head of a household, having on his knees his Son the Crucified God with God the Holy Spirit as a dove descending from both. And so it is in many similar situations, on account of which not only the laity but great ecclesiastics (*superiores ecclesiasticis*) err in the faith, supposing the Father or the Holy Spirit or the angles to be corporeal.]

Wyclif acknowledges here, and throughout the commentary on images that constitutes part of his discussion of the First Commandment, the catechetical value of religious images. His outlook thus parallels and probably influences the formulations of the later vernacular Lollard critics of the last chapter. Wyclif’s opinion also suggests than

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<sup>21</sup> Johannes Wyclif, *Tractatus de Mandatis Divinis accedit Tractatus de Statu Innocencie*, ed. Johann Loserth and F. D. Matthew (London: C. K. Paul & Co., 1922), pp. 155-56, hereafter cited as Wyclif. Aston, *Lollards and Reformers*, pp. 138-39.

any claim of unqualified iconoclasm on behalf of Lollardy is itself misleading.<sup>22</sup>

Wyclif specifically notes the effects *in bono* and *in malo* of images while intimating throughout this passage, and stating so explicitly further on in the *De mandatis divinis*, that care must be taken to ensure that the distinctions between *latria*, the adoration due to God alone (“reverencia . . . que soli Deo est debita”); *dulia*, that due to creatures (“reverencia pure debite creature”); and *hyperdulia*, due to Christ as simultaneously Creator and creature (“reverencia debita Christo qui secundum duplicem naturam est simul creator et creatura”) be preserved among the laity.<sup>23</sup> Yet it is precisely because of this willing accommodation of images that anthropomorphizing representations of the Trinity and angels act as a lightning rod for Wyclif’s unrelenting scorn here, for in reading the naked text of these images one can only arrive at the conclusion that the essence of God the *paterfamilias* can be located in matter contrary to his true nature as divinity.

Wyclif’s position on corporeal representations of non-material beings attracted much attention in late fourteenth- and early fifteenth-century theological debates. He exerted, for example, a palpable influence on the vernacular Lollard treatise on images discussed in the previous chapter, which opens with a brief attack on depictions of the Trinity before addressing crucifixes specifically.<sup>24</sup> Reading, whether of images or words, is a problematic process for both Wyclif and the Lollard tractator: an *ad litteram* hermeneutic applied to the “reading” of images necessarily entails the belief that God exists as an old man, that Jesus wore gold shoes, or that the Holy Spirit flits around on dove’s wings. Elsewhere in his *Tractatus de mandatis divinis*, Wyclif adumbrates his realist tendencies in discoursing on Augustinian Trinitarian

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<sup>22</sup> Aston, *Lollards and Reformers*, p. 140.

<sup>23</sup> Wyclif, p. 161. For *Pauper’s* take on *latria* and *dulia*, see Barnum, 1:107-09. See also Kamerick, *Popular Piety and Art*, pp. 32-37, 44-54.

<sup>24</sup> Hudson, *Selections from English Wycliffite Writings*, p. 83.

psychology.<sup>25</sup> Since Augustine locates the distinct operations of the Trinity in the human soul, specifically in the faculties of memory, will, and understanding, Wyclif concludes that any attempt to love God must begin by recognizing God, not by means of external and material *signa*, but through that which is already imprinted in the human soul:

Sed cum nihil amatur nisi cognitum, patet quod ordo vere noticie de Deo inducit racionem in eius amorem, et licet a creaturis capiant philosophi evidenter noticiam de Deo, ut patet Sapiencie 13:1 et Romanes 1:20, compendiosior tamen est via et cercior a qua secundum raciones exemplares vel esse intelligibile creaturarum in Deum ascenditur. Ille ergo qui dismissis sensibilibus simulacrisque eorum et fantasmatis secundum partem superiorem animi in fontale subiectum omnium istorum suspenditur, statim habet quem diligit, cuiusmodi est vir cuius oculi sunt clausi et affectus obturati a peregrinis impressionibus sensibilium. Ille enim tamquam bonus studens subpeditat voces et caracteres sensibiles et colligit omnes vires suas ad apprehendendum sententiam libri vite mundi sapientibus occultatam. Ideo est de philosophis contemplativis et laicis intuentibus hunc mundum sensibilem, sicut foret de duobus intuentibus librum sumptuosius fabricatum, quorum unus principaliter quietatus quoad intellectum et affectum quiesceret in his signis, alius vero suspendens eorum noticiam quantum sufficeret quiesceret in signatis.

Unde optima doctrina esset mihi et mei similibus non attendere ad aliqua transitoria quoad cogitacionem vel affeccionem, nisi de quanto in illis spiritualia contemplantur; quia experimento didici quod minima mora in illis quoad intellectum vel affectum indisponit ad contemplacionem et per consequens ad Dei dileccionem.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> The debate over the nature of universals forms a major chapter in the history of medieval philosophy. Wyclif was a proponent of philosophical and theological realism, maintaining a belief in the general existence of universals whose properties he establishes in several important works. See, e.g., Johannes Wyclif, *Tractatus de Universalibus*, ed. Ivan J. Mueller and trans. Anthony Kenny (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985); *Miscellanea Philosophica*, vol. II, ed. Michael Henry Dziewicki (London: Trübner & Co., 1905). The *De universalibus* edited by Dziewicki for the 1905 Wyclif Society edition is not the same text as that of the identical title edited by Mueller and translated by Kenny. Opposed to this belief in universals were the nominalists, who held that being was located in individual things and denied the existence of universals in favor of linguistic labels lacking in being per se. This is, of course, an overly simplistic presentation of a major on-going debate. For a summary treatment of the problem of universals for medieval thinkers, see Marilyn McCord Adams, "Universals in the Early Fourteenth Century," in Norman Kretzmann et al., eds. *The Cambridge History of Later Medieval Philosophy: From the Rediscovery of Aristotle to the Disintegration of Scholasticism, 1100-1600* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), pp. 411-39. For Wyclif's so-called ultrarealist metaphysics, see Gordon Leff, *Heresy in the Later Middle Ages: The Relation of Heterodoxy to Dissent c. 1250-c. 1450*, 2 vols. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1967), 2:500-16.

<sup>26</sup> Wyclif, pp. 96-97.

[But since nothing is loved unless it is known, it appears that the true order of knowledge of God leads reason into love of him, and although the philosophers may evidently seize upon knowledge of God by means of created things, according to Wisdom 13:1 and Romans 1:20, the way is broader and more certain by which one ascends to God through exemplary causes or the intelligible essence of created things. He, therefore, who, having dismissed sensible things and their likenesses and phantasms in accord with the higher part of the soul, is suspended in the spring-like source of all these things, immediately possesses that which he desires, whatever man he is whose eyes are closed and whose feelings are shut off from wandering sensory impressions. The one seeking such a good furnishes his own sounds and signs and musters all his forces for the purpose of apprehending the *sentence* of the book of life hidden from the wise ones. So it is for the contemplative philosophers and the laity (*laicis*) gazing upon the sensible world, like two persons gazing upon the most sumptuous book ever made, the first of whom principally is content to the extent that he may repose intellect and feeling in these signs, the other, truly, suspending knowledge of them is satisfied just as much to rest in what they mean.

Thus for me and those like me the best doctrine is not to attend to such transitory matters as understanding or feeling, except to the extent that we consider spiritual matters in these things; for through experience I learned that the slightest delay in these matters will confuse the intellect or the affect for the purpose of contemplation, and consequently of loving, God.]

For Wyclif, the philosophers seeking meaning by way of material signs are no better than the unlearned satisfied with the blandishments of the signs themselves, for the signs of the material world are mere shadows and point only in the general direction of occluded realities; true knowledge, and consequently true love of the divine, must begin in the transcendent world. *Signa* and *ymagines* are the misleading phantasms of philosopher and fool alike with their eyes wide open. And so loving the Trinity requires knowing the Trinity, and knowing the Trinity is the goal of a quest grounded in spiritual realities. To represent the Trinity with corporeal signs, therefore, is to misrepresent the path to truth.

The opposing stance is represented by an orthodox apologist for images, considered by most scholars to be none other than Walter Hilton, in a tract entitled *De adoracione ymaginum*. In this relatively brief, scholastic text, Hilton, if he is indeed

the author, responds to a series of six attacks on images, the last of which echoes Wyclif's concern—as well as his diction—about misleading visual representations of the Trinity. The writing attributed to Hilton may therefore be considered a direct rebuttal of Wyclif's argument in *De mandatis divinis*, whose point he summarizes before offering a response:

Videtur quod magnus sit error in ecclesia tolerare quasdam ymagines. Solent enim homines pingere et formare ymagines quasi ad similitudinem beatissime Trinitatis, Patrem videlicet in figura hominis et eciam Filium in specie consimili, et Spiritum Sanctum in specie columbe. Sed hoc videtur erroneum quia nulla hominis similitudo reperitur in ipsa natura beatissime Trinitatis, quia Pater est summum Spiritus, increatus, inuisibilis, incorporeus et incircumscribitus, et sic Filius et sic Spiritus Sanctus, et hii tres vnus Spiritus et vnus Deus. Ergo videtur erroneum tales formas ymaginarias ascribere beatissime Trinitati.<sup>27</sup>

[It seems that it is a great error to tolerate those images in the Church. Indeed, men are accustomed to paint and fashion images as if in the likeness of the most blessed Trinity, the Father of course in the figure of a man and likewise the Son in a similar form, and the Holy Spirit in the shape of a dove. But this seems erroneous because no human likeness is to be found in the nature of the most blessed Trinity, for the Father is utmost spirit, uncreated, invisible, incorporeal, and uncircumscribed, and so too the Son and the Holy Spirit, and these three are one Spirit and one God. Therefore it seems erroneous to ascribe such imaginary forms to the most blessed Trinity.]

The author of *De adoracione ymaginum* contests this particular charge of his ventriloquized objector with a sophisticated theological argument about the triune nature of the Christian God and the particular activities associated with each of the three Persons:

Ad vltimum argumentum respondetur sic: Quod tales ymagines nomine Trinitatis figurate non sunt signa falsa sed vera, et ideo tolerande sunt, quia licet ipsa beatissima Trinitas incorporea et inuisibilis sit in seipsa et sic nullo modo figurabilis, dici potest tamen quod propter distincta opera vnicuique persone specialiter appropriata nobis corporaliter ostensa, fiunt ymagines ad

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<sup>27</sup> John P. H. Clark and Cheryl Taylor, eds., *Walter Hilton's Latin Writings*, 2 vols., Analecta Carthusiana 124 (Salzburg: Institut für Anglistik und Amerikanistik, 1987), 1:185, hereafter cited as Clark and Taylor.



honorem eiusdem Trinitatis; non ut astruatur illam formam ymaginum habere ueram similitudinem beate Trinitatis, sed ad recordacionem et designacionem aliorum operum que ipsa Trinitas per talem corpoream similitudinem operari dignata est.<sup>28</sup>

[To the final argument I respond thus: that such images fashioned in the name of the Trinity are not false but true signs, and therefore must be tolerated, since although the same Trinity is incorporeal and invisible in itself and thus figurable in no way, it can nevertheless be said that, according to the distinct operations especially befitting each individual Person demonstrated to us materially, images may be made in honor of the same Trinity, not so that the form of these images may be affirmed to possess a true likeness of the blessed Trinity, but for the sake of remembering and indicating the works of each which it is fitting for the Trinity to perform through such a material likeness.]

In other words, these representations are agreed upon conventions acknowledged as such for representing the individual activities of the Three Persons in the material world which otherwise would be indescribable given that the Trinity is ultimately unrepresentable. These are corporeal signs that metaphorically point to an immaterial reality but that do not imply that the Persons are either separate in substance or material in being. Moreover, the author continues, these conventions are not the tools of man but those of the Trinity itself, and so he construes the reference in Matthew 3:17 to the “paternal” voice of the Father as an appropriate and divinely appointed convenience for communicating the divine and uncircumscribable will to a material world.<sup>29</sup> So too dovish representations of the Holy Spirit simply reinforce identifications already present in Scripture without suggesting that Holy Spirit is anything other than immaterial and eternal:

Non enim illa columba que apparuit erat Spiritus Sanctus, cuius substantia inuisibilis et incommutabilis existit; sed facta est ex tempore in cuius specie visibiliter ostenderetur Spiritus Sanctus, scilicet ut exterioribus visis corda hominum commota a temporali manifestatione venientis, ad occultam

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<sup>28</sup> Clark and Taylor, 1:209.

<sup>29</sup> “Non enim illa vox Patris audita Pater fuit, nec aliquid substantie eius que incommutabilis existit, sed temporaliter formata est ad demonstrandum sensibilibus discipulis eius voluntatem beneplaciti ad Filium eius, Dominum nostrum.” Clark and Taylor, 1:208-09.

eternitatem semper presentis conuerterentur, sicut dicit beatus Augustinus, libro secundo *De Trinitate*.<sup>30</sup>

[The dove that appeared was not the Holy Spirit, whose substance is invisible and immutable; but it happened at that time that the Holy Spirit was revealed in that visible form, so that through the visible and external, the hearts of men might be moved from the temporal manifestation of the one coming and converted to the hidden eternity of the one always present, just as St. Augustine says in the second book of *De trinitate*.]

We thus find the author of *De adoracione ymaginum* embroiled in the pervasive late-medieval battle over proper understanding of the relationship between material *signa* and immaterial *signata*, to repeat the terms used by these late-medieval writers, a battle which displays a familiar preoccupation with pedagogy. In an earlier remark that reminds us of Hilton's and Love's awareness of the intellectual limitations of their audiences, the author of *De adoracione ymaginum* observes that

[i]nter que signa statuit ecclesia ymagines Domini nostri crucifixi et sanctorum eius sub isto modo adorandas: non quod adorarent ipsas ymagines cultu latrerie vel dulie cum intellectu et affectu mentis tanquam Deum vel aliquem sanctum eius, nec quod finalis intencio adorantis figatur in ymaginem acsi esset aliquid diuinum in illa, sed ut per inspeccionem ymaginum reuocaretur ad memoriam passio Domini nostri Ihesu Christi et aliorum sanctorum passiones, et sic ad compunccionem et deuocionem mentes pigre et carnales excitarentur, et hec erat pia causa et racionabilis. Sic enim pie Apostolus fecit qui licet perfectam Dei sapienciam in misterio absconditam tantum loquebatur inter perfectos, verumptamen aliis infirmis et carnalibus condescendebat predicando eis plana et capaciora, dicens sic Corinthiis: Non potui vobis loqui tanquam spiritualibus sed ut carnalibus. Vnde nichil iudicaui me scire inter vos nisi Ihesum Christum et hunc crucifixum.

Isto modo facit ecclesia. Habet enim ecclesia filios quosdam adultos et grandiusculos, perfectos scilicet, vel proficientes ydoneos ad mensam patris, qui non indigent lacte corporalium signorum nutriri, vel ymaginum inspeccione erudire, quia solido cibo ueritatis et spiritualis adoracionis intus pascuntur. Propter tales enim ecclesia ymagines nunquam stauisset adorandas, nec aliqua signa corporalia, cum eis non indigeant nisi solum signa sacramentalia que sanctificant suscipientes. Habet tamen ecclesia alios filios paruulos in fide et caritate tepidos, imperfectos scilicet laicos simplices: hos

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<sup>30</sup> Clark and Taylor, 1:210.

lacte potat corporalium signorum. Propter istos enim principaliter erant talia signa significancia ordinata.<sup>31</sup>

[among these signs the Church established images of the crucifix of our Lord and of his saints to be worshipped in this way: not that they adore these images with the worship of *latria* or *dulia*, with the intellect and the mind's affect as if they were God or any saint of his, nor that the ultimate attention in adoration is fixed on the image as if there were something divine in it, but so that by gazing upon images, the Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ is called to mind—as well as the passions of the other saints—so that sluggish and fleshly minds may be stirred to compunction and devotion, and this was a pious and rational cause. Thus, indeed, the devout Apostle did, who, although he spoke so much among the perfect concerning the perfect wisdom of God that is shrouded in mystery, nevertheless condescended to preach to these other infirm and fleshly people in plain and more comprehensible words, saying thus to the Corinthians: “I could not speak to you as people of the spirit but only as people of the flesh. Therefore I have judged myself to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and the crucifix” (1 Corinthians 2:2).

The Church does it this way. The Church indeed has those adult and nearly grown children, namely the perfect, or those making progress, fit for the table of the father, who do not need to be nourished with the milk of material signs, or to be educated by gazing upon images, because they are fed within by the solid meat of truth and spiritual worship. For such as these, the Church never appointed images to be adored, nor other material signs, since they do not need these except as sacramental signs which sanctify the recipients. But the Church also has children young in the faith and lukewarm in love, the imperfect, namely the simple laity: she feeds these with the milk of material signs. For these then such signs were principally ordered with meaning.]<sup>32</sup>

The author of the tract, citing the authority of St. Paul in the letter to the Corinthians, separates the Church into *perfecti* and *imperfecti*, the two parts corresponding to those who are fed with the meat of truth and do not need images and the simple laity, nourished by the milk of material signs. The treatise here carefully and subtly reminds both adherents and detractors alike of the necessity for disentangling *latria* and *dulia*, the worship owed the deity and the reverence suitably demonstrated toward sacred images.

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<sup>31</sup> Clark and Taylor, 1:188-89.

<sup>32</sup> The distinction between milk and meat has several Scriptural sources, another of which is also from 1 Corinthians (3:2).

This defense manages to condense into two paragraphs another pedagogical premise that resounds through fifteenth-century vernacular theology and that has deeper roots than the more familiar and pervasive Gregorian dictum concerning books for the *illitterati*.<sup>33</sup> In Book II of the *Scala perfectionis*, one of three instances in that work which cite this same passage from 1 Corinthians and which further justify the cause for attributing *De adoracione ymaginum* to Hilton, we find an explication of the bipartite division of knowledge of God that reiterates this distinction of metaphorical foods for thought, or more appropriately for *knowynge* and *felynge*:

For ther is two maner of knowynge of God. On is had principali in imaginacion, and lital in undirstondynge. This knowynge is in chosen soulis bigynnyng and profityng in grace, that knowen God and loven Hym al manli not goostli, with manli affeccions and with bodili liknesse, as I have bifore seid. *This knowynge is good, and it is likned to mylk bi the whiche thei aren tendirli norischid as children, til thei ben able for to come to the fadris boord and taken of his hande hool breed.* And that othir knowynge is principaly felt in undirstondynge, whanne it is comforted and illumyned bi the Hooli Goost, and lital in imagynacion. For the undirstondynge is ladi, and ymaginacion is a maiden, servande to the undirstondynge whanne nede is. This knowynge is oolde breed, mete for perfite soulis, and it is reformynge in feelynge.<sup>34</sup>

Not only does the language of the *Scala* (as in the passage I have emphasized) unmistakably parallel that of the *De adoracione ymaginum* usually attributed to Hilton, it also mimics in aureate English the scholastic, Latin diction of a text like Wyclif's *De mandatis divinis* ("knowynge," "affections," "liknesse," "principaly,"

<sup>33</sup> Copeland, pp. 72-75 and *passim*.

<sup>34</sup> Hilton, pp. 211-12 (emphasis mine). In book I of the *Scala*, Hilton distinguishes "contemplacion" from "devocioun" by recourse to the same passage from Corinthians with a further citation from Hebrews appended neatly at its conclusion: "That othere partie [devocioun] is mylk for children, this [contemplacion] is hool mete for perfite men, which han assaied wittes to knowe the gode from the yvel, as Seynt Poul seith: *Perfactorum est solidus cibus qui habent sensus exercitados ad discrecionem boni et mali* (Hebrews 5:14)." See Hilton, p. 39. The third passage comes at a relatively early moment in Book II, where Hilton again distinguishes the *perfecti* from the *imperfecti*, who "aren symple soulis, the whiche feelen not the gifte of special devocion ne gostli knowynge of God, as some gosteli men doon, but trowen generali as Holi Chirche troweth, and witen not fulli what that is, for it nedeth not to hem," "worldli men and women and othere, that han but a childisch knowynge of God and ful lital feelynge of Hym, but aren brought forth in the bosom of Holi Chirche and norischid with the sacrament as children aren fed with mylk." See Hilton, p. 151.

“perfitte,” etc.) while conclusively determining that the knowledge that comes from “imaginacion” through “manli affections and with bodili likenesse” is good knowledge, not the vain pursuit of Wyclif’s *laici* gazing upon the pretty ornaments of sumptuous books. And so too does Nicholas Love prescribe meditation on images of the Manhood of Christ for “lewde men & women & hem þat bene of symple vndirstondyng” so “that a symple soule þat kan not þenke bot bodyes or bodily þinges mowe haue somewhat accordyng vnto is affecion where wiþ he maye fede & stire his deuocion,”—compare the tract’s *laicos simplices*—and, in a well-known passage from the proem, Love identifies these “symple creatures” as “childryn hauen nede to be fedde with mylke of lyzte doctryne & not with sadde mete of grete clargye & of hye contemplacion.”<sup>35</sup> These here are fighting words directed consciously against the teachings of Wyclif and his successors and in terms of conflated but complementary pedagogies, parallel only in how they divide the faithful into camps of learned and lewd, *perfecti* and *imperfecti*, adults and children.

Nicholas Love’s proem, then, his original addition to Johannes de Caulibus’s Latin original is more than an articulation of orthodox teaching about, and orthodox teaching through, images. It is a sweeping condemnation, unprecedented in its means of delivery, of Lollard iconoclasm, an ostensibly didactic text presented as a simple aide to the undereducated, book-reading, spiritually hungry lay men and women of England. In a supremely calculated assault on heresy, Love offers “in Englyshe to lewde men & women & hem þat bene of symple vndirstondyng” a devout meditation “of cristes lyfe more pleyne in certeyne partyes þan is expressed in the gspell of þe foure euangelistes.”<sup>36</sup> It is a Gospel paraphrase that also promotes orthodox iconology in the face of Lollard antagonism; in reappropriating the material world as the unique

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<sup>35</sup> Sargent, p. 10.

<sup>36</sup> Sargent, p. 10.

preserve of lewd people, Love tacitly but definitively repudiates Wyclif's realist propositions that *signa* are vain and empty and that knowledge and love are to be sought in transcendent forms, and he does so with a distinctively Wycliffite touch by offering his lay audience a vernacular paraphrase of Scriptural texts. To be sure, he offers no English Bible, but judging by the sheer number of surviving manuscripts of *The Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ*, he provides an acceptable substitute—and, in Love's *coup de grâce*, a text made more accessible in parts than even the four Gospels themselves!<sup>37</sup> It comes then as no surprise to find Love adding the following warning about imagining the Trinity to Pseudo-Bonaventure's original text:

What tyme þou herest or þenkest of þe trinyte or of þe godhede or of gostly creatours as angeles & soules þe wech þou maist not se in hire propre kynde with þi bodily eye, nor fele with þi bodily witte, study not to fer in þat matere, occupy not þi wit þerwiþ als þou woldest vndurstande it, by kyndly reson, for it wil not be while we be in þis buystes body lyuyng here in erþe. And þerfore when þou herest any sich þinge in byleue þat passeþ þi kyndly reson, trowe soþfastly þat it is soþ as holy chirch techeth & go no ferþer.<sup>38</sup>

Sarah Beckwith interprets Love's remarks about the pitfalls of mis-imagining the Trinity as a form of condescension toward, and control of, Love's people of simple understanding.<sup>39</sup> Given his very particular invocation of the Trinity right before this passage and his pointed warning not to imagine that "þe fadere þe son & þe holi gost bene as þre erþly men, þat þou seest with þi bodily eye," I am certain that Love is here really addressing, before summarily dismissing, John Wyclif.

Finally, a memorandum appended to a number of the surviving manuscripts of Love's Englishing of the Pseudo-Bonaventurean *Meditationes* reveals not only the

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<sup>37</sup> Anne Hudson, "Laicus litteratus: The Paradox of Lollardy," in *Heresy and Literacy, 1000-1530*, eds. Peter Biller and Anne Hudson, Cambridge Studies in Medieval Literature 23 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 234-35, similarly argues that in combating Lollardy Nicholas Love appropriated some of the very terms of his opponents' arguments.

<sup>38</sup> Sargent, p. 22.

<sup>39</sup> Sarah Beckwith, *Christ's Body: Identity, Culture and Society in Late Medieval Writings* (London: Routledge, 1993), pp. 65-66.

strict orthodoxy of Love's work, despite his seeming to play fast and loose with the authority of Scripture, but also the desire of the head of the Church in early fifteenth-century England, Thomas Arundel, to disseminate the text as widely as possible. This note, where it appears in the manuscripts, reads:

Memorandum quod circa annum domini Millesimum quadrigentesimum decimum, originalis copia huius libri, scilicet Speculi vite Christi in Anglicis, presentatur Londoniis per compilatorem eiusdem N Reuerendissimo in Christo patri & domino, Domino Thome Arundell, Cantuarie Archiepiscopo, ad inspiciendum & debite examinandum antequam fuerat libere communicata. Qui post inspeccionem eiusdem per dies aliquot, retradens ipsum librum memorato eiusdem auctori, proprie vocis oraculo ipsum in singulis commendauit & approbavit, necnon & auctoritate sua metropolitana, vt pote catholicum, publice communicandum fore decreuit & mandauit, ad fidelium edificacionem, & hereticorum siue lollardorum confutacionem. Amen.<sup>40</sup>

[Note that about the year of the Lord 1410, the original copy of this book, namely of the *Mirror of the Life of Christ* in English, was presented in London by the compiler of the said book, namely N[icholas], to the most reverend father and lord in Christ, Lord Thomas Arundel, Archbishop of Canterbury, that it be inspected and duly examined prior to its being freely circulated. After having inspected it for several days, and returning the book of this same aforementioned author, he commended and approved it in each part by declaration of his own voice, and, in fact, with his authority as bishop, he ordered and commanded it to be circulated publicly for the edification of the faithful, that they might be better Catholics, and for the confutation of heretics or Lollards. Amen.]

In 1401 Parliament had promulgated *De heretico comburendo* under which the first relapsed Lollard heretics were condemned to death by burning at the stake,<sup>41</sup> an act which Archbishop Arundel followed in 1409 with the proclamation of his famous *Constitutions*. Arundel's sixth constitution forbade reading of any "book or treatise made by John Wickliff, or others whomsoever, about that time or since, or hereafter to be made" in "schools, halls, hospitals, or other places whatsoever," unless such works had been previously examined and cleared by a panel of twelve Cambridge or Oxford

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<sup>40</sup> Sargent, p. 7.

<sup>41</sup> *Rotuli Parliamentorum*, 7 vols. (London, 1767), 3:467.

academics appointed by the Archbishop; the seventh constitution further restricted the supply of licit reading materials by outlawing not only vernacular translations of the Bible but even the ownership and reading of “any text of the Scripture [in] English or any other tongue . . . until the said translation be allowed by the ordinary of the place, or, if the case so require, by the council provincial.”<sup>42</sup> It is important to stress here that Arundel’s seventh constitution does not ban Scriptural translation outright, only those vernacular versions circulating without metropolitan approval. And although the *Mirror* is only a Gospel paraphrase, it is nevertheless a paraphrase replete with Scriptural citation in the vernacular. In many of the extant manuscripts, moreover, the scribe draws attention to these biblical passages by copying them in red ink. Within this charged atmosphere of theological dissent and the political censorship it engendered, then, the addition of Archbishop Arundel’s explicit imprimatur to the *Mirror* is no trivial matter.

Within contemporary scholarship there is an unacknowledged tendency to efface the distinction between the laity in the broadest sense of that word and Lollard dissenters as a specific subset of the parent category. Amidst the challenges to institutional authority occasioned by the spread of Wyclif’s teachings, it is easy to assume that Latin as well as vernacular statements of orthodoxy—like *De adoracione ymaginum*, the *Scala Perfectionis*, and Love’s *Mirror*—represent attempts to control and constrain *lewyd peple*, whose aspirations in turn are perceived as an inherent threat to the social, intellectual, and sacramental authority of the clergy. Love’s *Mirror* was, after all, precisely *not* a vernacular Bible, the very ownership of which was potentially punishable by death following a decade which witnessed both the

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<sup>42</sup> The *Constitutions* are found in David Wilkins, ed., *Concilia Magnae Britanniae et Hiberniae*, 4 vols. (London, 1737), 3:314-19. The English translation is that of John Foxe in George Townsend, ed., *The Acts and Monuments of John Foxe* (London: Seeley, Burnside, and Seeley, 1844), 3:245 (emphasis mine), from which I quote following Watson, “Censorship and Cultural Change,” p. 826, n. 12.



legislation of *De heretico comburendo* and the pronouncement of Arundel's *Constitutions*. Access to sacred Scripture remained by no means the only but certainly one of the most significant markers of the division between clergy and laity. Thus, in order to stave off the potential social and ecclesiological disruptions posed by the Lollards, the institutional Church can be seen as offering a second-rate vernacular alternative, a devotional biblical paraphrase which even took up the very narrative of the Gospels, that satisfied the perceived need for devotional works in English while preserving the imaginary social relations between clergy and laity at the end of the Middle Ages. By addressing the readers of these texts as *lewyd* and as men and women of *symple vnderstondinge*, these writers, then, attempted to keep the laity in check by regularly repeating the differences that divided society; in responding, the laity in turn reinforced the imagined social hierarchy articulated for them each time they read or circulated the texts in question.

In her analysis of the power structures that divided medieval society into opposed groups competing for interpretive authority over the symbolic significance of Christ's body, Sarah Beckwith posits precisely such a negotiation of imaginary social relations between learned and lewd. Beckwith identifies religion as a set of symbols, chief among them the symbolic body of Christ, by means of which clerical culture generates itself as the only available culture and subsequently imposes itself throughout the social realm from the top down.<sup>43</sup> Specifically citing Love's affiliation of simple souls with "bodies and bodily things," Beckwith locates at the heart of late-medieval Christianity "an anxiety that is as much social as it is doctrinal." She contends that "[t]he incarnation of Christ then becomes a means of social and linguistic condescension, a model not so much of ascent as of descent. And this model of descent seems intent on limiting the creative damage that the hybridizing figure of

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<sup>43</sup> Beckwith, *Christ's Body*, p. 6.

Christ in its blurring and movement of categories might be in danger of introducing into social relations.”<sup>44</sup> She frames the social interaction between clergy and laity as one of competing interests and cultural contestation at the site of the symbolic body of Christ as the product of hegemonic aspirations or, in Beckwith’s phrase, “clerical fantasies.”<sup>45</sup>

Yet over these many battlegrounds of late-medieval ideological contest—the debates over pedagogies of reading texts as well as images, the legitimacy of imagining the Trinity, control of bodies and bodily things—an implicit tendency to align the laity with dissenting movements and the clergy with staunch orthodoxy casts a long and distracting shadow. It is easy to interpret the appellation “people of simple understanding” employed by Nicholas Love and his contemporaries pejoratively and to label the pedagogical rhetoric of feeding milk to the laity as a kind of degrading infantilization of the *lewyd*, a word whose modern English descendant is, of course, less than flattering in its implications. And while we are certainly right to recognize in Arundel’s *Constitutions* a program of what Nicholas Watson calls censorship, we must also bear in mind that the debates in question were ultimately over the preservation, or

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<sup>44</sup> Beckwith, *Christ’s Body*, p. 65. On the preceding pages, Beckwith contrasts access to the symbolic body of Christ in the guise of the clerical monopoly on the sacramental power and authority to transubstantiate Eucharistic elements with access to Christ’s body in vernacular meditative texts like Love’s and suggests that these texts threatened the clerical hegemony.

<sup>45</sup> Beckwith, *Christ’s Body*, p. 45. For an alternative theory of late-medieval clerical-lay interaction, see John V. Fleming, *An Introduction to the Franciscan Literature of the Middle Ages* (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1977), p. 158. Fleming assesses Franciscan sensibilities about audiences in his discussion of a medieval preacher’s how-to manual, John of Wales’s *Communiloquium*: “John of Wales places a very high value on ‘relevance.’ The *homo evangelicus* who would preach to blacksmiths and armorers must know the lingo of the trade, and thus forge and burnish the irons of gospel truth. Soldiers will the sooner understand faith in Christ if it is described to them in terms of obedience to military superiors; when the weaver understands that spiritual raiment, like his woolen shirts, must be carded, spun, woven, and dyed, he will the sooner set about preparing for himself a glorious garment.” So too, then, Nicholas Love, in translating his Franciscan source, writes in terms of bodies and bodily things for those who know only bodies and bodily things. We must recall, and the flourishing of texts like the *Communiloquium* or the *Lay Folks’ Catechism* reminds us, that the clergy were legitimately and earnestly preoccupied with the needs of the faithful whose souls were entrusted to them, especially in the wake of the Fourth Lateran Council and Archbishop Pechams’s attempts at lay reform as a consequence of that Council. For Pecham’s reforms, and Arundel’s extension thereof, see Watson, “Censorship and Cultural Change,” pp. 827-28.

conversely the disruption, of the imagined social relations articulated in terms of orthodoxy—whether learned or lewd, clerical or lay—and heresy. Thus, with regard to images, the same pedagogical positions are assumed by the Lollard commentator on crucifixes and by John Mirk in a sermon condemning Lollardy as it celebrates Corpus Christi: lewd people read images. Both the institutional and the dissenting intellectuals participate in this condescension, if that is what we ought to call it, and both sides court the support of the masses. It is in their methods that they differ, and we must continuously remind ourselves that Arundel, Love, Mirk, and others like them sought not to further the cause of clerical fantasy by heavy-handedly infantilizing the English laity, but rather to enlist the aid of an untapped constituency, those people of simple understanding, in a common defense of the faith against John Wyclif and “others whomsoever.” So, as an alternative to Sarah Beckwith’s competitive model of lay-clerical interaction, as well as Nicholas Watson’s model of the clerical stymieing of vernacular experiments in theology, a model that undervalues the impact of translation and the staying power of the fourteenth-century achievements of the English mystics, I would like to offer a collaborative model that unites clerical and lay interests in a common cause.

CHAPTER THREE  
LEARNING TO BE LEWD:  
GHOSTLY READINGS AND COLLABORATIVE VISIONS

In later chapters of this study, we will see how a priest's tutelage of a lay woman benefited student and teacher equally, and how a widow of some means endowed communal, monastic and private, secular libraries with donations of books, thereby supporting the educational and devotional objectives of learned and lewd alike, the two divisions widely imagined to constitute between them all of late medieval English society. It is perhaps natural to expect a certain amount of antagonism to structure the interactions between these constituencies, and yet it is precisely at the pedagogical intersection of clergy and laity that we can discover, if we are looking, an astonishing collaborative enterprise. In this present chapter, then, I want to explore the origins of two religious practices, biblical exegesis and contemplative meditation, with clerical, Latinate origins that were nonetheless conveyed to new, unlettered audiences in the later Middle Ages textually decked out with all the discursive trappings of "lewdness" I have been discussing. It was in their cultivation of these activities that the English laity learned to be lewd.

Hermeneutics for the Masses: Interpreting Bodily Narratives

One of the major goals of Lollard dissent was, of course, the democratization of Scriptural reading. Wyclif and his followers sought to bare the "naked text" of the Bible to lay readers of the vernacular.<sup>1</sup> His deeply ingrained anticlericalism drove his

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<sup>1</sup> See Copeland, *Pedagogy, Intellectuals, and Dissent*, pp. 99-140 for an investigation of the politics of *ad litteram* Scriptural hermeneutics of the kind promoted by the Lollards as a protest against prevailing pedagogies that identified literal reading with childishness or, conversely, with a different kind of refined, scholastic reading practice pursued by an intellectual elite.

efforts to wrest Scripture from the hands of its mediators, but among Wyclif's successors a conservative politics of reading paradoxically accompanied this desire to liberate the Word from its sacerdotal keepers. Fourfold interpretation of sacred texts according to their literal, allegorical, tropological, and anagogical meanings, was a common feature of medieval hermeneutics, though variations within the system abounded. Precisely what literal reading entailed was in and of itself a matter of tremendous discussion among schoolmen in the wake of Aristotle's reintroduction in the West, a discussion that it is beyond the scope of this project to revisit. It is sufficient for now to note the traditional distinction articulated by medieval exegetes between the literal or historical meaning of biblical texts and their so-called mystical interpretations. While the Lollards keenly supported lay reading of the Bible in the vernacular, they nevertheless were deeply suspicious when lewd people embarked on interpretive flights of fancy that violated the *sensus litteralis* of the text or, in the Scripturally derived language of the "General Prologue" to the later Wycliffite Bible, "whanne vndirstonding, that passith beestis, is maad soget to the fleisch in suyng the lettre."<sup>1</sup> In popularizing Scripture, the Lollards were careful to restrain lewd imaginations. It should not surprise us, then, to find Nicholas Love, in true anti-Lollard form, approving "ghostly" reading in his translation of the *Meditationes*, for although Love's *Mirror* offers its readers what is clearly a highly mediated Gospel paraphrase, the Carthusian prior and intimate of the Lollard-hunting Archbishop Arundel nonetheless expounded in his work a program for interpreting biblical narrative in strikingly non-literal, and non-lewd, ways.

Love illustrates the movement from bodily meditative re-creation of Gospel stories to ghostly understanding of a specifically non-literal variety on a number of occasions throughout the *Mirror*. His account of Jesus' comforting of His disciples by

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<sup>1</sup> Forshall and Madden, p. 44.

calming a tempest-tossed sea provides an instructive and simple example. In setting the meditative scene, Love relates that Jesus proceeded barefoot from the hill upon which he was praying down the stony path—the suffering so central to Love’s later Passion narratives is already suggested in Jesus’ unshod descent along the stones—and onto the sea which calmed immediately in response to the presence of its master. Love comments, and the importance of his comment is highlighted by a standard gloss in several of the surviving manuscripts by an annotator, that here “we haue gostly doctrine & ensauple of pacience in tribulacion . . . . [w]herfore we shole vndurstonde þat as it felle with þe disciples bodily, so it falleþ with vs alday gostly.”<sup>2</sup> Peter and company literally embody in their nautical misadventures the kinds of spiritual tribulations and disease which afflict the Christian soul regularly, and in both interpretations of the Gospel that Love offers, the literal and the allegorical, the only salve is *the* Healer, Christ Himself.<sup>3</sup>

Interpreting the “bodily” narratives of Scripture through “ghostly” understanding becomes a key theme for Love. In his Thursday meditation on the death of Lazarus, Love reports Jesus’ words to his disciples: “Lazare, oure frende slepeþ bot I wole go fort[o] wake him & reise him fro slepe.”<sup>4</sup> Love again deploys the conceit of the ingenuously bodily disciples, who almost comically mistake their master’s words by interpreting them literally, not only erroneously concluding that Lazarus is still alive but also “reading” his sleep as a natural token of the healing process. Love notes their “fleshly understanding” and what he calls the “gret

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<sup>2</sup> Sargent, p. 110. The gloss reads “Notabile.”

<sup>3</sup> The continued elaboration of the allegorical meaning of this Gospel narrative emphasizes that suffering spiritual—and what we might even call psychological—torments should be willfully undertaken, for through endurance the wretchedness of the self can be discovered, which in turn leads to spiritual restitution in the bliss of heaven. Margery Kempe takes this teaching to heart in her generally good-natured acceptance of the slanderous talk that gravitates toward her, but in something of a reversal of Love’s teaching in this passage, identifies in her non-physical suffering with the fleshly tortures visited especially upon the crucified Jesus.

<sup>4</sup> Sargent, p. 130.

homelynes of oure lord with hees disciples.”<sup>5</sup> That Jesus speaks to his disciples “in maner of bouredyng,” that is, by way of joking with them, reflects the intimacy that He shares with His followers. This meditation implies, of course, that just because the Scriptural narrative originates in the bodily—here the soon to be resurrected body of Lazarus that figures near the end of the Son’s ministry as a type for *the* Resurrection—it need not remain there. Lazarus’s slumber signifies not sleep, or even physical death, but rather spiritual death which only the Savior can remedy. As Jesus remarks in the *Mirror*, he spoke “mistily” at first so that the belief of the disciples might ultimately be the greater and firmer. The raising of Lazarus points to levels of understanding beyond the fleshly and positions Love’s lay readers as a privileged class with access to a form of ghostly understanding that supercedes even that of Jesus’ handpicked followers.

Much is at stake here. Love’s insistence on developing a knack for ghostly understanding is crucial, for within the charged political climate of Arundel’s England, *The Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ* is not merely a medieval how-to book of imaginative meditation. In a vernacular text worked over by its translator for the sake of maximum accessibility, it offers not only translated Scriptural verses, though never, admittedly, an extended text, but also an explanation for interpreting Scripture presented such that those who practice Love’s methods are elevated to a rank above the Apostles themselves and, of course, the followers of Wyclif who generally eschewed “ghostly” biblical hermeneutics in favor of literal reading.

In its promotion of non-literal hermeneutic approaches to the Gospels, moreover, the *Mirror* shares a great deal with an unusual reformist text with heterodox tendencies that nevertheless endorses a similar agenda for lay people punctuated with repeated appeals for clerical reform. The *Book to a Mother*, composed by an

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<sup>5</sup> Margery Kempe likewise comments on the homeliness that characterizes her relationship with Christ.

anonymous fourteenth-century priest, is a generically various text that includes primer-like instruction in proper forms of prayer with exposition of the ten commandments, the corporal works of mercy, the gifts of the Holy Spirit, and the sacraments; meditative passages on the life of Christ; English translations of selections from John's Gospel; the First and Second Letters of John; the Letters of Jude, James, and Peter; and the Letters to the Thessalonians (First and Second), Timothy (First), Corinthians (First and Second), and Hebrews.<sup>6</sup> In the course of writing a book probably for his actual mother, but also for a wider audience of unlearned Christians, the anonymous priest not only introduces Scripture to readers of the vernacular; he teaches how to read in a non-literal way. Nicholas Watson has described the *Book* as “a composite text that both uses and deconstructs several genres of didactic writing by showing how they find their summation in Christ” and as “a ‘samplerie’, an exemplar of the works and words of Christ for the reader to write in her heart.”<sup>7</sup> What Watson elsewhere calls the *Book*'s initial “disorderly impression of a work heaving with polemical digressions from a rambling line of argument that itself lacks any sustained depiction of the way of life it advocates”<sup>8</sup> can obscure what is perhaps the prevailing pedagogical thrust of *Book to a Mother*, namely its self-avowed program of biblical interpretation. The author of the *Book* writes for those who wish to “understonde suche maner gostlich speche of Holi Writ in þe Olde Lawe and also in þe Newe, þer Crist spekeþ so mucche in ensamples for men schulde þe bettir lerne it.”<sup>9</sup> The author of

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<sup>6</sup> Adrian James McCarthy, ed., *Book to a Mother: An Edition with Commentary*, Studies in the English Mystics, vol. 1 (Salzburg: Institut für Anglistik und Amerikanistik, 1981), pp. xxiii, xxxv-xxxviii, 150-90, 251-53, hereafter cited as McCarthy.

<sup>7</sup> Nicholas Watson, “Fashioning the Puritan Gentry-Woman: Devotion and Dissent in *Book to a Mother*,” in *Medieval Women: Texts and Contexts in Late Medieval Britain: Essays for Felicity Riddy*, ed. Jocelyn Wogan-Browne et al. (Turnhout: Brepols, 2000), pp. 177-78.

<sup>8</sup> Watson, “Fashioning the Puritan Gentry-Woman,” p. 175.

<sup>9</sup> McCarthy, p. 39.



the *Book* regularly reminds his addressee of the need to bridge the gap between the “bodily” meaning of material signifiers and their truer, “ghostly” referents.

Throughout *Book to a Mother*, the narrator emphasizes the importance of the reader’s honing her “gostliche” understanding. In a passage inveighing against “boþe men and wommen, boþe lerede and lewede” who seek to make themselves “semliche” in the eyes of their neighbors and instead enlist in the camp of Mammon and not Christ, the author of *Book to a Mother* cites Jesus’ rebuke in Luke to the women who lamented his Passion on the road to Calvary: “Douȝtres of Ierusalem, wepe ȝe not for me, but for ȝou-self and for ȝoure children. For ȝif men don þus wiþ þe grene tre . . . what schal befall of þe drie tre?” (Luke 23:28, 31).<sup>10</sup> The vernacular expositor here contrasts the moistness occasioned by grace and virtue in Christ with the spiritual dryness of the Daughters of Jerusalem, women like Margery Kempe, who relates in her *Book* her early and deleterious preoccupation with sartorial splendor.<sup>11</sup> He compares the heads of such women to those of blind owls, “boþe bodili and gostli”:<sup>12</sup> just as owls are blinded by the daytime sun and avoid other birds so that they be not “ascrið,” choosing instead to lurk among shadows and to prey upon mice and rats at night, so too are fashion-conscious women blind to the light of righteousness who eschew virtue for fear of those other birds, the proud, who thrive on social recognition.<sup>13</sup> The vaingloriously and snobbily ornamented head of the medieval fashionista is likened to that of an owl: blind owls “mow not se ariȝt for here heiȝe hornes of cacchinge muse,”<sup>14</sup> nor can the pompously appareled understand the peril of

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<sup>10</sup> McCarthy, pp. 114-15.

<sup>11</sup> Meech and Allen, p. 9.

<sup>12</sup> McCarthy, p. 115.

<sup>13</sup> McCarthy, p. 243, suggests that this avian comparison may be inspired by Jerome’s complaint about headdresses in the *Epistola ad Eustochium*.

<sup>14</sup> McCarthy, p. 117.

their own sinfulness, symbolized most strikingly by their own horns, that is, their headwear.

The author of the *Book* adduces the further authority of the champion of books for *lewed peple*, Gregory the Great in his exposition of the raising of Lazarus and the obstinacy of the biblical *dives* by observing that “no man . . . useþ such gai appareile but for ueinglorie, in tokene þat men coueiten no suche, but forte be seie,” that is, the rich dress ostentatiously only for the morally empty purpose of being seen by others.<sup>15</sup> The vernacular commentator protracts his moralizing concatenation of owls and wealthy women with the advice that the latter ought to “drawe in þer hornes, or ellis þei schulde be ascried as oules ben of briddes.” The author of *Book to a Mother* elaborates the multiple valences of the horns, in which symbol “ben understonde not onliche bodili hornes but more, I charge gostliche hornes.” In the previous metaphor, the owls’ horns signify pride through their visual likeness to arrangements of women’s hair and head-coverings familiar to the author.<sup>16</sup> The horns of the owl are the horns of women’s hair are the horns of sin with which “wommen and men fizten wiþ God and putten him fro hem; and he þat is most sinful openliche or priueliche haþ most horrible hornes.”<sup>17</sup> The comparison of similarly shaped bodies yields to a metaphorical

<sup>15</sup> McCarthy, pp. 118-19. The reference is to Gregory’s Gospel homilies.

<sup>16</sup> *MED* s.v. “horn” 6d(a) and 6d(b).

<sup>17</sup> McCarthy, p. 119. The *MED* cites a poem by Lydgate which British Library MS Laud Misc. 683 calls a “Dyte of Womenhis Hornys” with the repeated refrain “Beute wol shewe, thogh hornys wer away.” See Henry Noble McCracken, ed., *The Minor Poems of John Lydgate*, Part II: Secular Poems, Early English Text Society Original Series no. 192 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1934), pp. 662-65. The poem’s envoy implores “[n]oble pryncessis” to cast away their horns, taking as their model in a series of stanzas the Virgin Mary. Lydgate’s invocation of Mary likewise progresses from a bodily to a ghostly reading; in stanza 7, Mary’s appearance at the Nativity is recalled: “[she] hadde a premynence/Above alle women, in Bedlem whan she lay,/At Crystys birthe no cloth of gret dispence,/She wered a kouercheef, hornes wer cast away” (ll. 53-56). The following stanza suggests that her lack of external horns reveals the absence of internal horns by identifying Mary as the “rose of Iericho, ther greuh non suych in may,/Pore in spirit, parfit in pacyence,/In whom alle hornes of pride wer put away” (ll. 62-64). In his remarkable autobiographical account in the *Incendium amoris* of the censure he suffered from three different women on account of his youthful indiscretions, Richard Rolle recalls that the first of these ladies chastised him for examining her sartorial ornaments too closely: “[D]ixit quod non debui eas tam considerare ut scirem utrum essent cornute uel non, et ut mihi uidetur bene me redarguit, et erubescere fecit” [She said that I ought not to inspect them so much so as to know

understanding of horns as a spiritual impediment. The horns of pride already present in the sinful soul pave the way for the pomposity of late-medieval headdresses. The external trappings exist as an accidental attribute to the substantial evil at the core of the Daughters of Jerusalem who are blind to their own fallen state. This passage also recalls the author's earlier application of the biblical narratives of Jesus' temptation in the desert to his workaday world; to those three temptations can all of the Devil's subsequent snares be reduced. The English commentator illustrates the contemporary relevance of Jesus' trials in the desert thus:

furst [þe deuel] stureþ [men and wommen] to pamppe and pompe her flesche, desiringe deliciouse metes and drinkes, and so hoppen on þe piler wiþ her *hornis*, lockes, garlandes of golde and of riche perlis, calles, filettis and wimples and ridelede gownes and rokettis, colers, lakis, iackes, paltockes, wiþ here longe cracowes—and þus þe deuel bereþ hem up on þe piler to teche hem to fle aboute oþere simple folk, and seiþ þei schullen not hurte hem; but he lieþ falslich. For but þei ben as sori þefore as euere þei weren glad, þei schullen lepen adoun fro þe piler to þe put of helle.<sup>18</sup>

This extended and contorted explication of the polyvalent symbol of the horn in the *Book to a Mother* exemplifies for the lay reader a hermeneutical approach to reading both in bodily and ghostly senses which the author develops throughout the *Book*. The *Book*-author also anticipates another feature of Nicholas Love's approach to Scripture by recommending the spiritual benefits of meditation on the Annunciation to his imagined reader. But whereas Love invests his reader in the present witnessing of the event for the sake of the moment's affective benefits, the author of *Book to a Mother* insists on the immediacy and necessity of reinterpreting the experience. He beseeches his "dere modir" that when she hears "ony þing þat Crist spac or dide, or his Apostlis, Prophetis or Seintes in Holi Writ, þenk it is to þe and for þe, for þe time þat

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whether they were horned or not, and so it seemed to me good that she rebuked me and I blushed]. Deanesly, *Incendium Amoris*, p. 178.

<sup>18</sup> McCarthy, pp. 55-56.

þou wert in dedli synne or ourt of dedli sinne.”<sup>19</sup> Thus, in recounting the Annunciation, he not only locates the meditative subject at the scene as a spectator, but in an act of spiritual inscription, he locates her in the scene: she assumes the role of Gabriel himself in a way that marks the immediate vehicle of bodies and bodily things as inferior to their spiritual tenor:

Also 3if þou wolt be angel Gabriel gostlich þou maist, for angel bitokeneþ a god messenger, and Gabriel strengþe of God. Be þou strong þanne in þe loue of God, and so Gabriel; and be a good messenger, tellinge hem þat liueþ wiþ þe, wiþ goode desires of þin herte or wiþ goode wordis or wiþ goode werkes, hou 3if þei wollen haue condiciouns of Marie þei schullen conceiue Crist. Pat is, 3if þei haue bittur sorew for þer synnes and 3if þei wollen be a sterre 3euynge li3t to men wiþ her goode liuinge, þat þei mowe se þe wei to heuene.<sup>20</sup>

In a radical gesture that threatens to render all Scripture allegorical—and concomitantly rendering the vernacular New Testament translations in the second half of the *Book* doubly problematic—the author of *Book to a Mother* provides instruction in a program of lay reading that all but ignores literal readings of Scripture in favor of nuanced tropological and anagogical interpretations. Thus, late in the *Book*, the author glosses Herod’s command to the Magi to return to him by admonishing his “modir” to pass “fro Heroud and folewe þe sterre; do as þe angel tau3te, turne þou not a3ein to Heroud” and glossing the passage allegorically, tropologically, and anagogically: “Passe þe se of þis world in a shup of penaunce, þat is bitokened bi Cristis cros; and loke wel aboute, for Heoud wol, 3if he mai, brenne þi shup as he brende þe shupes of Tars for wrapþe þat þe þre kinges passeden into here contre in a shup of Tares.”<sup>21</sup> In his *coup de grâce*, he decontextualizes the passage entirely and relocates his interpretive readings in the late fourteenth-century world of his mother:<sup>22</sup> “Perfore

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<sup>19</sup> McCarthy, p. 44.

<sup>20</sup> McCarthy, p. 45.

<sup>21</sup> McCarthy, p. 196.

<sup>22</sup> Watson, “Fashioning the Puritan Gentry-Woman,” p. 183, similarly concludes that “a set of intellectually demanding reflections . . . constantly return the reader to the world in which she lives, inculcating an attitude not of devotion but of boldly public condemnation.”

modir, aske þou no conseil of suche citesynes ne burgeysis of þis world, for þei ben aliens fro þe blisse of heuene, and liers to God, as Daudid wittnesseþ; for wiþ here mouþ þei seien þei gon to heuene ward, and neuerþelatter wiþ here werkes þei rennen toward helle.”<sup>23</sup> What appears occasionally rambling in the text is actually remarkably sophisticated: for the *Book*-author, interpreting Scripture entails numerous levels of interpretation along with de- and re-contextualizations, all so that the recipient of the book may order her life in accord with Christian living and not with the horn-bedraggled women he expends so much ink lambasting. Here is no condescension, but clerical discontent with the secular world, from which the *Book*-author seeks an escape by interpreting its literalness in favor of its “ghostly significance.” As we will see in chapter 5, the East Anglian lay woman Margery Kempe, whose own struggle with the secular world is portrayed in her *Book*, will likewise sublimate the corrupt world by seeking the divine significance in, of all things, sewer slime.

Nicholas Love and the author of *Book to a Mother* were working in very different milieux. Nicholas Watson, following James McCarthy, dates *Book to a Mother* to the 1370s, the product of a “friar or country priest.”<sup>24</sup> The author exhibits pre-Wycliffite reformist tendencies—his obvious if unstated approval of vernacular biblical translations and his pervasive anticlericalism—though on matters of, for example, sacramental theology and the legitimacy of image veneration he remains strictly orthodox.<sup>25</sup> His New Testament translations predate, if McCarthy and Watson are correct, the heyday of John Wyclif and Lollardy, the 1381 rebellion, and most importantly Parliament’s passage of *De heretico comburendo* and the *Constitutions* of

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<sup>23</sup> McCarthy, p. 196.

<sup>24</sup> Watson, “Fashioning the Puritan Gentry-Woman,” pp. 171, 173.

<sup>25</sup> Watson, “Fashioning the Puritan Gentry-Woman,” p. 171. Watson emphasizes the intermingling of reformist and devotional ideologies in *Book to a Mother*, despite modern scholarship’s tendency to separate them. The most significant stumbling block for the *Book*-author in terms of orthodoxy, is his apparent predestinarianism as reflected in an early comment that the Church consists of “alle that schulle be saved.” See McCarthy, p. 2.

Archbishop Arundel in the first decade of the fifteenth-century. But, most importantly, the whole of the *Book to a Mother* is an endorsement of a non-literal hermeneutic for lay readers, from the likes of which Wyclif and his followers remained ever distant. Love, on the other hand, was the prior of Mount Grace Charterhouse writing, with official ecclesiastical sanction, a book for the confutation of heretics and Lollards in a time when mere possession of vernacular Bibles was theoretically punishable by burning at the stake, even if executions were a rarity. Yet both move beyond mere strategies of lay containment in favor of explaining to their *lewed* audiences *how* to read English and *how* to interpret the snatches of Scripture to be found in *Book to a Mother*, *The Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ*, or popular vernacular, theological poems like the *Pricke of Conscience* or *Piers Plowman*. Thus, like Nicholas Love's *Mirror*, the *Book to a Mother* of the anonymous fourteenth-century friar or priest offers not merely vernacular condescension but a sympathetic program for lay reading and, more importantly, for lay interpretation of sacred writings. Pedagogues like Nicholas Love and the author of the *Book to a Mother* do not only provide paraphrases or even outright translations of the Bible for the laity; they instruct the laity in modes of reading Scripture. They advise the lay reader to eschew a literal understanding of the text in favor of a ghostly hermeneutic, a prescient refutation of what would become identified as Lollard pedagogy.

### Lay People Behaving Learnedly

In promoting non-literal hermeneutical approaches to Scripture, Nicholas Love made accessible to the laity learned practices of reading presented within the terms of pedagogical discourses that counseled seeking the divine through familiar and negotiable bodies and bodily things. Nor is this the only example of a recasting of

learned practice in lewd terms discernible in Love's *Mirror*. In advancing a mystagogy predicated upon meditation on images, Love (as well as Walter Hilton and others) looked, whether consciously or not, to a longstanding tradition of initially clerical discursive models and practices. Rather than creating a kind of "safe" lay arena *ex nihilo* for religious self-expression that was socially and linguistically contained, constrained, and, to borrow from Sarah Beckwith, condescending, the clergy adapted their own methods to make them suitable for lay consumption in an ultimately collaborative act.

Although here is not the place to discuss fully the history of the development of mysticism in the Middle Ages, it is important to note that this intense devotion to the body of Christ as a gateway to the divine marks a particular shift in Christian aesthetic, theological, and devotional sensibilities whose impact was lasting. In an important analysis of Franciscan mystical traditions, Ewert Cousins notes that prior to Francis of Assisi's appearance on the spiritual scene, most medieval mystical forms of expression, whether apophatic or kataphatic, were metaphysical and speculative.<sup>26</sup> Francis's life, rather than his few writings, with its culmination in the first historical instance of the stigmata atop Mt. LaVerna in 1224,<sup>27</sup> provided his immediate and not-so-immediate disciples a model for mystical experience in which the figure of Christ crucified attained a new level of significance. From Francis on, according to Cousins, a second stream of affective devotion flowed alongside of speculative mysticism in which Christ the Logos or even Christ resurrected was displaced by Christ as the incarnate redeemer.

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<sup>26</sup> Ewert Cousins, "Francis of Assisi: Christian Mysticism at the Crossroads," in *Mysticism and Religious Traditions*, ed. Steven T. Katz (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), pp. 163-90.

<sup>27</sup> See the account of Francis atop LaVerna and his receipt of the stigmata in the first life of Thomas Celano in Marion A. Habig, ed., *St. Francis of Assisi: Writings and Early Biographies: English Omnibus of the Sources for the Life of St. Francis* (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1973), pp. 308-311.

Within this new affective model, Cousins identifies more specifically what he calls “mysticism of the historical event,” defined as a “type of consciousness [in which] one recalls a significant event in the past, enters into its drama and draws from it spiritual energy, eventually moving beyond the event towards union with God.” Continuing his dramatic metaphor, a metaphor whose metaphoricity will eventually yield to true dramatic expression as we will see in chapter 6 below, Cousins explains:

In this form of prayer, one imagines the physical setting of the event—the place, the persons, the circumstances, for example the birth of Jesus in the stable at Bethlehem, with Mary and Joseph, an ox and an ass. However one does not remain a detached spectator, but enters into the event as an actor in the drama, singing with angels and worshipping the infant with the shepherds.

While Cousins limits himself in his subsequent analysis of this conceptualization of affective mysticism to a discussion of the writings of Bonaventure, especially the *Lignum vitae*, and the Seraphic Doctor’s appropriation of the model of Francis’s life, we can clearly ascribe to this tradition the Franciscan Johannes de Caulibus’s *Meditationes vitae Christi* and Nicholas Love’s fifteenth-century Englishing thereof. Finally, in his articulation of the features of mysticism of the historical moment, Cousins makes an important observation about the temporal and cognitive aspects of this mode: he warns that, properly understood, such devotional practices exceed the mere act of recollection, “for it makes us present to the event and the event present to us.”<sup>28</sup> Recent work on the early English drama, most notably for the present study Victor I. Scherb’s *Staging Faith: East Anglian Drama in the Later Middle Ages*, has emphasized the mnemonic function of the drama, that is, its power to recall to the mind of the spectator that which is already known, such as familiar biblical narratives. But this emphasis on the past, on recollection, distorts our view of the drama that is mystical and the mysticism that is dramatic; ultimately the function of this dramatic

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<sup>28</sup> Cousins, “Francis of Assisi,” p. 167.



mysticism is to make the divine present to the spectator and the spectator present to the divine. We shall return to the emphasis on the present, active spectator in chapter 6.

These, then, are the techniques identified throughout Middle English religious prose as especially suitable for the laity, as we have seen throughout the foregoing discussion of Nicholas Love's presentation of participatory meditation on the life of Christ. But lest we be left with the impression that "mysticism of the historical moment" in England was invented particularly for the benefit of the lewd, I want to explore the nature of "native" clerical and monastic devotion as it contributed to this phenomenon in order to argue for a translation of religious culture that accompanied the translation of texts into English for a new reading audience.

This entails a return to the "origins" of so much of late-medieval piety, the twelfth century. The Cistercian Aelred of Rievaulx has left among his writings an extremely influential treatise that can be numbered among the literature of "mysticism of the historical moment" *avant la lettre*. Aelred presents his *De institutione inclusarum* as a response to his sister's<sup>29</sup> request for a guide to the enclosed religious life of the anchoress. Framed as such, the *regula* Aelred proposes serves as a commentary useful for the modern scholar on life within English religious communities as Aelred attempts to correct contemporary abuses. The first two parts of this three part work—the division into parts is a convenient editorial convention—serve as a series of proscriptions for the religious life. In this regard, the *De institutione inclusarum* is analogous to, and was indeed a major source for, the early Middle English *Ancrene Wisse*, with which it shares a number of conventional similarities. It is, however, the third part which primarily interests me here.

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<sup>29</sup> His address to his *soror* has occasioned much discussion over whether "sister" should be understood in the biological or spiritual sense.

Aelred begins the final section of his discussion by noting the two elements that comprise the love of God: *affectus mentis* and *effectus operis* [the disposition of the mind and the effort of works].<sup>30</sup> To the latter belong the activities routinely prescribed in rules for religious life; these help prepare the mind for meditation, which in turn is necessary for the soul “ut ille dulcis amor Iesu in tuo crescat affectu” [so that the sweet love of Jesus may grow in your mind].<sup>31</sup> Aelred is here proposing a distinction common in religious discourse between the *vita contemplativa* and the *vita activa* which flows easily from his preceding discussion of Mary and Martha. For Aelred, the contemplative life is requisite for a full appreciation of what he calls the “spiritualis gustus dulced[o]” [the sweetness of spiritual taste].<sup>32</sup> And the way to cultivate this *dulcedo*, according to Aelred, is a threefold meditative program divided between past, present, and future, “id est de praeteritorum recordatione, de experientia praesentium, de consideratione futurorum” [that is, of recollection of things past, of experience of things present, and of consideration of things to come].<sup>33</sup>

In recalling the past, Aelred’s instruction coincides with many of the principles of the mysticism of the historical moment that Ewert Cousins attributes to the subsequent century in the form of Francis of Assisi’s life and Bonaventure’s writings. The twelfth-century Cistercian encourages his disciple, for example, to imagine herself reading with Mary at the moment of the Annunciation or assisting the Virgin during the birthing process. Aelred’s suggestion for meditation on the Flight into Egypt, a popular scene in the later English biblical drama, is worth quoting at length,

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<sup>30</sup> Aelredus Rievallensis, *Opera omnia*, vol. 1, ed. A. Hoste, O.S.B. and C. H. Talbot (Turnhout: Brepols, 1971), p. 662, hereafter cited as Aelred.

<sup>31</sup> Aelred, p. 662.

<sup>32</sup> Aelred, p. 662.

<sup>33</sup> Aelred, p. 662. David Knowles notes several further examples among Aelred’s prayers and sermons of this threefold form of meditation as well as instances of a similar system in the writings of Aelred’s contemporary and spiritual mentor, Bernard of Clairvaux. See Aelred of Rievaulx, *Treatises, The Pastoral Prayer*, ed. David Knowles, vol. 1, Cistercian Father Series no. 2 (Spencer: Cistercian Publications, 1971), pp. 79-80, n. 3.

for his legitimizing of meditation on extra-Scriptural narratives anticipates the same practice as articulated for lay readers by Nicholas Love and by the biblical playwrights:

Noli in tua meditatione Magorum munera praeterire, nec fugientem in Aegyptum incommittatum relinque.

Opinare uerum esse quod dicitur, eum a latronibus deprehensum in via, et ab adolescentuli cuiusdam beneficio ereptum. Erat is, ut dicunt, principis latronum filius, qui praeda potitus, cum puerulum in matris gremio conspexisset, tanta ei in eius speciosissimo uultu splendoris maiestas apparuit, ut eum supra hominem esse non ambigens, incalescens amore amplexatus est eum, et: O, inquit, beatissime paruulorum, si aliquando se tempus obtulerit mihi miserendi, tunc memento mei, et huius temporis noli obliuisci. Ferunt hunc fuisse latronem qui ad Christi dexteram crucifixus, cum alterum blasphemantem corripuisset, dicens: *Neque tu times Deum, quod in eadem damnatione es, et nos quidem iuste, nam digna factis recipimus. Hic autem nihil mali fecit.* Conuersus ad Dominum, eum in illa quae in puerulo apparuerat intuens maiestate, pacti sui non immemor: *Memento, inquit, mei cum ueneris in regnum tuum.* Itaque ad incentiuum amoris haud inutile arbitror hac uti opinione, remota omni affirmandi temeritate.<sup>34</sup>

[Do not pass over in your meditation the gifts of the Magi; nor leave him [Jesus] fleeing into Egypt unaccompanied.

Believe what is said to be true, that he was taken by thieves on the way, and escaped with the help of a certain youth. He was, they say, the son of the ruler of the thieves, who, after he seized the booty, when he saw the child in the lap of his mother, the majesty of the splendor appeared to him so great in his most beautiful face, that not doubting him to be more than human, burning with love he embraced him, and he said, "O most blessed of children! If ever the time presents itself for having mercy on me, then remember me, and do not forget this time." It is said that this is the thief who was crucified to the right of Christ saying, when he reproached the blasphemy of the other thief, "You do not fear God because you are already damned, and we certainly justly, for we receive what befits our deeds. This one, however, did nothing wrong." He turned toward the Lord, and perceiving the majesty in which he had appeared to him as a child, not forgetful of their pact, he said, "Remember me when you come into your kingdom." And so to stir up love, I consider it not at all useless to accept this belief, while setting aside any rashness in affirming it.]

In recounting this apocryphal tale of Christ's kidnapping by a partially virtuous thief, Aelred assumes a liberal attitude toward the appropriation of non-Scriptural

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<sup>34</sup> Aelred, p. 664.

narrative.<sup>35</sup> Amidst canonical biblical scenes from the life of Christ including the Annunciation, the Visitation, the Nativity, the miracles performed during Jesus' ministry such as the healing of the paralytic or the raising of Lazarus, and the Crucifixion, the English Cistercian unflinchingly and unapologetically includes non-biblical material and offers an important distinction between that which is beneficial for the exciting of spiritual love and that which should be understood as strictly true. Aelred of Rievaulx anticipates, then, the pragmatism of his probably unwitting pedagogical successors like the author of *Dives and Pauper* who recognized the propensity of images "to steryn mannys affeccoun and his herte to deuocioun,"—compare Aelred's "ad incentivum amoris"—and Nicholas Love who, following St. Augustine, noted that, for example, "[o]f oure lordes body apperynge after his Resurrexion alle þinges bene not writen, for his conuersacion with hem [the Blessed Virgin Mary, his disciples, and Mary Magdalene] with hem was oft sipes."<sup>36</sup> In fact, in his imagining of the life of Christ, Love, following his Latin source, never insists on the meditative soul's strict reliance on Scriptural authority. In the meditation on the risen Christ's appearance to his disciples, for example, Love repeats the conventional wisdom of his time, which held that Christ appeared to his followers fourteen times, but he then observes that "neuerles þe gospel specifieþ not bot onely of tenne. For how he apperede to his modere it is not writen in any place, bot we resonably & deuoutly trowe it as it is seide before. Also of opere þre apperynges, þat is to sey, to Joseph, to James & to moo þan fyue hundreþ breþerne is specifiende before where þei bene writen, bot not in þe gospel."<sup>37</sup> And yet Love does not content himself with

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<sup>35</sup> Aelred of Rievaulx, *Treatises*, p. 82, n. 15, cites the *Arabic Infancy Gospels* as the source for this story.

<sup>36</sup> Sargent, p. 211.

<sup>37</sup> Sargent, p. 211.

contemplating these four other attested albeit unelaborated appearances. He continues:

Also we mowe wele suppose of many moo. For it is likely þat he þe moste benigne lorde oft siþes visitede boþe his modere & hees disciples & Maudeleyn, his speciale belouede, confortyng & gladyng hem specily þat were in his passion moost dredeful & sorye, & þat semeþ þat seynt Austyn felt, where he seiþ þus, Of oure lordes body apperynge after his Resurrexion alle þinges bene not writen, for his conversacion with hem was oft siþes.<sup>38</sup>

Love, then, following Johannes de Caulibus, and Aelred of Rievaulx before him, sanctions meditation on a life of Christ not fully authorized by the Bible. Their shared indifference toward accurate reproduction of Scriptural narrative would have likely failed to find friendly support from the Lollard iconoclasts and exegetes with their insistence on verisimilitude in imaginative biblical re-creation and on *ad litteram* hermeneutics.

Aelred, moreover, assures the anchoress that imagining extra-Scriptural details in the course of her meditations is not inherently problematic, provided the purpose of such imaginings is the igniting of love without assenting to the authority of such ideas. Aelred holds up the apostle John as the model contemplative: “Si ad potiora non potes, dimitte Ioanni pectus, ubi eum uinum laetitiae in diuinitatis cognitione inebriet, tu currens ad ubera humanitatis, lac exprime quo nutriaris”<sup>39</sup> [If you cannot drink stronger things, leave John’s breast, where one may become drunk on the wine of gladness in the knowledge of the Godhead, and run instead to feed on the milk which flows from the breast of humanity], an echo of the pedagogical, Scripturally derived *topos* of milk as nourishment for the *imperfecti*, here figured not as lay people but rather as spiritual novices. As with Walter Hilton and, as we will see in the next two chapters, Margery Kempe, the weaker contemplative is encouraged to prefer the

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<sup>38</sup> Sargent, p. 211.

<sup>39</sup> Aelred, p. 668.

humanity of Christ to the divinity; the distinction between John and Aelred's anchoress parallels that between the learned and the lewd, between the reader of the *Cloud of Unknowing* and that of Love's *Mirror*. For Aelred as for his successors two centuries and more later, contemplation of Christ's humanity leads to experience of the Godhead, and it is the Passion in which the humanity is made most accessible.

Another illuminating example of a Christocentric mysticism of the historical moment directed at the professional religious of England comes from the pen of one of the greatest proponents of reform of the thirteenth century, John Pecham, Paris-trained theologian, Franciscan friar, and eventual Archbishop of Canterbury. Many and varied writings flowed from Pecham's pen, including, but not limited to, numerous exegetical tracts; a commentary on the *Sentences* of Peter Lombard, the standard textbook for students of theology at the University of Paris in the thirteenth century; a series of quodlibetal and disputed questions; sermons and sermon materials; a *Summa de esse et essentia*; scientific writings, including one on perspective; and a defense of Franciscan poverty.<sup>40</sup> His pursuit of the implementation of Fourth Lateran reforms throughout England resulted in the proliferation of a tremendous amount of pastoral writing, much of it in the vernacular.<sup>41</sup> In addition to pastoral improvements and these various writings, to Pecham is also commonly attributed a remarkable Latin poem in mono-rhymed, four-line, thirteen-syllable stanzas which survives in some thirty copies<sup>42</sup> and begins with the line "Philomena, praevia temporis amoeni."<sup>43</sup> This lyric is an extended Passion meditation occasioned by the singing of a nightingale and figured as a mystical explication of the divine hours. The reader first hears the song of

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<sup>40</sup> Douie, *Archbishop Pecham*, pp. 8, 10-12.

<sup>41</sup> Boyle, "The Fourth Lateran Council," and Shaw, "The Influence of Canonical and Episcopal Reform."

<sup>42</sup> Otto Glauning, ed., *Lydgate's Minor Poems: The Two Nightingale Poems* Early English Text Society Extra Series no. 80 (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., Limited, 1900), p. xxxix and n. 4.

<sup>43</sup> All references to line numbers in *Philomena* are to S. Bonaventura, *Opera Omnia*, 10 vols. (Quaracchi, 1882-1902), 8:669-74, and will appear parenthetically.

the nightingale as an accompaniment to its own death throes which begin at dawn and proceed until, exhausted by its own melodic efforts, the bird expires at the end of the day having shattered its own delicate body through song. The hours of the day during which the bird sings are then associated with the hours of the Divine Office, from Lauds through Vespers, and these in turn represent stages in salvation history, from the Creation through Christ's Passion and his utterance upon the cross that "consummatum est." The lyrical voice shifts between narratorial effusions colored by the language of *courtoisie* in the opening lines, in which the nightingale assumes a traditional courtly role as messenger or go-between, and the language of the friary in the concluding stanzas; between the impassioned laments of the Christian soul addressing herself to her divine beloved, Christ, and learned exegesis of the nightingale's song. Ultimately the cry of the nightingale, *oci, oci*, becomes the outburst of the plaintive soul longing for a new martyrdom in Christ, just as the nightingale's exertions result in her own death.

The addressee of the poem, identified as *carissime* (16) and later as *frater care* (345) would seem to be another Franciscan. The obvious signal of *frater* by a Minorite author is further bolstered by numerous references throughout the poem to the poverty of Christ. Thus, after meditating on the destitution of the incarnate Christ "pauperis infantuli pannis . . . amictus" [wrapped in the clothes of a poor infant] (112), the meditative soul expresses that

Sic affecta, pia mens stitit paupertatem,  
 Cibi parsimoniam, vestis vilitatem.  
 Labor ei vertitur in iucunditatem;  
 Vilem esse saeculi dicit venustatem (133-36).

[Thus moved, the devout mind thirsts for poverty,  
 For sparseness in food, for cheapness of clothing.  
 For him labor is turned into delight;  
 He says that the beauty of this world is repulsive.]

This stanza is emblematic of a recurring theme throughout the infancy segment of the poem which emphasizes not only the spiritual indignation of the divine Word assuming human flesh but also the further denigration suffered in the impoverished circumstances of the Nativity itself. Throughout these lines, the poverty of the Christ child is held up as a model for imitation and as a condition to be embraced, and the soul hails Christ as *amator pauperum*, “lover of the poor” (150). Given his own theological formation at the University of Paris during the thirteenth century, that is, at the height of the secular-mendicant controversies that arose there during the latter half of that century, and his particular role as one of many prominent apologists for the *vita apostolica* and especially its attendant commitment to poverty, the direction of the *Philomena* to one of Pecham’s spiritual brothers seems likely.<sup>44</sup>

That *Philomena* has a mystical program is acknowledged by the poem itself: the narrator identifies the nightingale with the Christian soul and observes that “Ad augmentum etenim suae sanctae spei,/Quaedam dies mystica demonstratur ei” [For the purpose of increasing her [the soul’s] holy faith,/A kind of mystical day is demonstrated for her] (49-50).<sup>45</sup> The mysticism of the poem is what Cousins would

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<sup>44</sup> Several variant manuscript readings complicate the question of the poem’s addressee. The Quaracchi edition of the poem contains three additional stanzas not appearing in all of the manuscripts or in the edition of *Philomena* printed in *Analecta Hymnica* 50, pp. 602-16 (but see pp. 615-16). Two of these stanzas address an otherwise unmentioned *soror*: “Frequentemus canticum istud, soror pia” [Let us repeat that song, devout sister] (349) and “Ergo, soror, tuum cor ita citharizet” [Therefore, sister, your heart thus plays the lyre] (353). These lines suggest that either Pecham himself or, more likely, subsequent copyists addressed this poem to multiple audiences, possibly to members of the Poor Clares, or to other spiritual sisters in the well ingrained English tradition of Aelred of Rievaulx or the author of the *Ancrene Wisse*, who themselves follow patristic models. William F. Hodapp, “Philomena’s Song: Pecham, *Translatio*, and a Fifteenth-Century English Poet-Translator,” *Publications of the Medieval Association of the Midwest* 5 (1998), p. 76, also identifies the addressee of the poem as a Franciscan, but he is working from the version of the text printed in *Analecta Hymnica*, which excludes the *soror* lines.

<sup>45</sup> William F. Hodapp, “The *Via Mystica* in John Pecham’s *Philomena*: Affective Meditation and Songs of Love,” *Mystics Quarterly* 21 (1995), 80-90, reads *Philomena* in terms of the mystical system articulated by Pecham’s great Franciscan contemporary, Bonaventure, in the latter’s *De triplici via*. Hodapp identifies in the nightingale’s melodic interpretation of the hours a progress through Bonaventure’s triple way—purgative, illuminative, and unitive. For the influence of the *De triplici via* on medieval literature generally, see Fleming, *An Introduction*, pp. 205ff.



identify as that of the historical moment.<sup>46</sup> The meditations of the soul occasioned by the song of the nightingale focus on the humanity of Christ, and particularly on the physical suffering of the Passion, in a participatory way which locates the *pia mens* in the present of Jesus' life on earth. Thus the soul longs to be present at Prime, that is, at the Nativity, and to assist in the birthing of the Savior:

O quam libens balneum ei praeparassem!  
 O quam libens humeris aquam apportassem,  
 In hoc libens Virgini semper ministrassem,  
 Pauperisque parvuli pannulos lavassem (129-32)!

[O how willingly would I have prepared a balm for him!  
 O how willingly would I have carried water to him upon my shoulders,  
 Willingly would I have always ministered to the Virgin there,  
 And washed the little clothes of the poor little boy!]

Any sense of the conditional in this passage is completely absent from the soul's meditation on the Crucifixion during Sext, in which the soul is tormented by beholding the tortures upon the cross in the present tense:

Plorans ergo respicit Agnum delicatum,  
 Agnum sine macula, spinis coronatum,  
 Lividum verberibus, clavis perforatum  
 Ac per cuncta corporis loca cruentatum.

Tunc exclamat millies: *oci* cum lamentis,  
*Oci, oci* miseram, quia meae mentis  
 Statum turbat pallidum vultus morientis  
 Et languentes oculi in cruce pendentis (193-200).

[Weeping, therefore, she [the soul] gazes upon the delicate Lamb,  
 The Lamb without spot, crowned with thorns,  
 Black and blue from wounds, pierced with nails  
 And bleeding from many places throughout his body.

Then she exclaims countless times *oci* with lamentations,  
*Oci, oci* wretched me, because the pallid face of the dying one  
 Troubles the condition of my mind,

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<sup>46</sup> Indeed, Bernard McGinn, *The Flowering of Mysticism*, p. 379, n. 21, identifies the mystical program of *Philomena* precisely as belonging to this tradition.

As do the suffering eyes of the one hanging on the Cross.] Reflection upon the immediate and present suffering, figured in gory and explicitly visual detail, stirs up affective pity and piety in the meditative soul throughout *Philomena*. Indeed the narrator declares that seeing is believing later in the poem: “Quia ibi oculos, ubi est affectus” [For wherever the eyes are, there is the feeling] (304). Thus the attention to the visual so prominent in works of vernacular theology addressed to the English-reading laity by Love and Hilton does not derive exclusively from class-based pedagogical concerns in the way that these three texts and others like them from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries might seem to suggest initially.

At various moments in the *Philomena*, Pecham calls attention to the immediate presence of the experience of the bird/soul and to its newness. If we are to read the poem as a mystical work then this feature of Pecham’s poetics is not surprising, given that the end goal of mystical endeavor is a conscious awareness of the immediate presence of God. So for example the transition from meditation on the infancy narrative associated with Prime to the recollection of Christ’s ministry and the scorn it attracted is marked as a transition in gerundive action from “infantiam Christi *retexendo*” [weaving again the infancy of Christ] (137) to “*recolendo*,/Quantum Christus passus est, homines docendo” [recalling (lit. “tilling again”) how much Christ suffered by teaching people] (139-40). Pecham’s repeatable domestic and agrarian metaphors suggest the possibility of experiencing anew Christ’s life in the present moment, as does the transition to Sext, in which hour “*passio Christi recensetur*” [the Passion of Christ is told again] (172) or to Nones “*cum consummatum est recolit clamasse . . . Dominum et sic exspirasse*” [when (the soul) recalls that the Lord cried out *it is finished* and thus breathed forth (i.e., his last breath)] (313-14, all emphases mine).

What is merely suggested in these transitional passages is explicitly announced as the ultimate goal of the meditative program undertaken by the soul in imitation of the nightingale. During the Sext meditation, the soul cries out to Christ:

[C]ur non vulnerata  
Tecum sum, dum moreris, non sum colligata?

Licet tamen miserae sit istud negatum,  
Mihi quidem eligam novum cruciatum,  
Gemitum videlicet iugemque ploratum,  
Donec mundi deseram gravem incolatum (283-88).

[Why am I not wounded  
With you, while you are dying, why am I not bound?

May the wretched one nevertheless be permitted the denial,  
Indeed let me choose for myself to be newly wracked,  
Clearly lamented and perpetually wept over,  
Until I may abandon the burdensome dwelling of the world.]

The soul seeks not only to recollect the suffering of Christ, but to participate in it and to create anew the physical suffering in the present moment, just as the nightingale performs its own death. The suffering of Christ is not merely invoked, but is re-experienced, in this case by the meditative soul. This meditative exercise turns sacramental: just as the Eucharist in the Middle Ages not only symbolically commemorated but physically reenacted the sacrifice of Jesus' flesh and blood on the Cross, especially during the *fractio panis* at the hand of the priest, so too Pecham's mystical poetics is not only recollective but also participatory. Ideally the historical Crucifixion upon Golgotha should be repeatable by the Christian soul longing for a more intimate relationship with the divine.

Pecham figures this inclination as a desire for martyrdom in the concluding stanzas of *Philomena*. The suffering of the Son's humanity stimulates "[g]emitus, suspiria, lacrymae, lamenta" [complaints, sighs, tears, laments] (305) in the soul which

nevertheless converts sorrow into joy and which seeks to be a “*nova martyr*” [new martyr] (307, emphasis mine). The narrator implores his spiritual brother:

Istam novam martyrem libens imitare,  
 Cumque talis fueris, Christum deprecare,  
 Ut nos cantus Martyrum doceat cantare (346-48).

[Imitate willingly that new martyr,  
 And when you become such a one, pray to Christ  
 That he might teach us to sing the song of the Martyrs.]

These passages describe *imitatio Christi* in the extreme. Not only must the soul suffer, it must suffer unto death, in the manner of Christ and the polyvalent nightingale. In chapter 6, we will explore how the Crucifixion is not merely commemorated but rather reenacted anew in a negative way within the context of East Anglian drama. For the present moment, however, it suffices to note that the affective program of Nicholas Love’s *Mirror of the Life of Jesus Christ* is by no means an invention of the Late Middle Ages nor do its roots lie in the vernacular or the lay.

In their emphasis on visual imagery and especially in their graphic depiction of the wounds of the suffering humanity of Christ, in their meditative and mystical tenor, and in their emphasis on present participation in the historical life of Christ and his followers, the late-medieval theological writings discussed in these chapters as well as the dramatic texts we will be examining in a coming chapter, writings aimed at lewd audiences, look back to the ideals of the monasteries and anchorholds of professional religious like the English Cistercian Aelred of Rievaulx in the twelfth century and to the imagination of the universities and the friaries of second-generation intellectual mendicants like the English Franciscan and archbishop John Pecham in the thirteenth century. Thus, our books for lewd people should perhaps not be judged by their covers. For all their avowedly vernacular and non-learned self-presentation, in their

imagery, aims, and methods, they are *translationes* more than *inventiones*, both linguistically and in the less specific terms of general cultural practice. I do not mean to suggest that by the late-fourteenth and early-fifteenth centuries all of our vernacular pedagogues were necessarily conscious of their debt to their monastic and scholastic pedagogical predecessors;<sup>47</sup> indeed I suspect that many did understand the meditative programs they put forward as belonging peculiarly to the realm of those *lewyd peple* and men and women of *symple vnderstandinge*.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> The obvious exception here is, of course, Nicholas Love, who was very consciously undertaking a translation of what he and his medieval peers took to be a work of Bonaventure, the *Meditationes vitae Christi*. Love, in fact, highlights his own awareness of his debt by marking his text with a marginal “N” to indicate his own authorial interventions into Pseudo-Bonaventure’s prose.

<sup>48</sup> Before setting aside the avian world, I should note the existence of two late-Middle English nightingale poems edited in Glauning. The ascription of the first poem printed by Glauning to John Lydgate is contested by Hodapp, “Philomena’s Song,” p. 74, though he cites no particular evidence to support his claim. The case for Lydgatian authorship presented by Glauning, *Lydgate’s Minor Poems*, pp. xxxiv-xxxvi, for either poem is less than fully compelling and depends in both instances on later evidence. The first of the two poems in Glauning’s edition, identified only as “The Nightingale” in the two extant manuscripts which contain the poem, is of some indirect interest to the present discussion. The narrator identifies a Latin source for his poem which purportedly contains a moralization of the nightingale’s song. The Middle English poem interprets the birdsong, complete with staccato exclamations of *ocy, ocy*, according to a now familiar liturgical scheme, and therefore seems to have Pecham’s *Philomena* as its model. Its interpretive program differs somewhat from Pecham’s, however, and is systematically more complex. Each hour recalls a significant moment from Old Testament history and couples it with its typological fulfillment in the New Testament; thus, the dawn-song of Lauds calls to mind the Creation and Adam’s pristine entry into the world which is nevertheless overshadowed by the betrayal to come at the hands (or more accurately the tongues) of the serpent and Eve. Likewise, Lauds reminds us of Jesus’ unsullied birth which marked the beginning of an ordained course that necessarily concluded with his betrayal at the hands of the Jews. The poet seems to be selecting his Old Testament scenes (Creation and Adam, the Flood and Noah, Abraham, etc.) according to a popular medieval conception of the ages of human history, for which see Kolve, *The Play Called Corpus Christi*, pp. 88-100; Hodapp, “Philomena’s Song,” p. 77. Each biblical pairing is further likened to the stages of individual human life from infancy to old age, as a means for the reader of reflecting on the state of his or her soul with an eye ever toward the Final Judgment. This schematization is reminiscent of Aelred’s threefold meditative system as well as Pecham’s mystical poem: meditation on the past (biblical narrative), the present (the ages of man), and the future (spiritual preparation for the Doom) is figured in terms of a progression through the varying parts of the nightingale’s song, which are in turn moralized liturgically. I do not offer this particular interpretation of the Middle English nightingale poem in order to show conclusively that the vernacular poet had *De institutione inclusarum* in mind when penning his verse, but rather simply to draw attention to a most likely coincidental convergence of a number of the themes that I have been discussing thus far in this chapter. It is, however, perhaps worth noting here as well that Aelred’s *De institutione inclusarum* was translated into English in two independent versions, one from the late-fourteenth century and the other from the mid-fifteenth. See John Ayto and Alexandra Barratt, eds., *Aelred of Rievaulx’s De Institutione Inclusarum*, Early English Text Society Original Series no. 287 (London: Oxford University Press, 1984), p. xiii. The earlier work is only a partial rendering of Aelred’s complete manual, but it does

What remains now to be seen is what happens when lewd people read the works that invite them into the worlds of theology and mysticism and how drama enables an even fuller interaction between learned and lewd interests as lay, sometimes professional actors performed clerically authored scripts for audiences spanning the range of late-medieval social divisions.

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include the passages on meditation. For a discussion of the Middle English poem as an example of medieval translation practice, see Hodapp, "Philomena's Song."

## PART II

### PIETY

#### CHAPTER FOUR

##### EMBODYING PEDAGOGY:

##### *THE BOOK OF MARGERY KEMPE*

In chapter 58 of the first book of her life, Margery Kempe expresses her dismay over the shortage of religious instruction available to a fifteenth-century lay woman from the East Anglian market town of Bishops Lynn in Norfolk, whose primary access to Christian teaching comes in the form of the weekly sermon preached at her local parish of St. Margaret's—insufficient sustenance for the soul of a woman with Margery's spiritual hunger. Margery consequently pursues the only recourse available to her for remedying the general inaccessibility of devout learning: she lodges a complaint directly with God in the form of a prayer: "Alas, Lord, as many clerkys as þu hast in þis world, þat þu ne woldyst sendyn me on of hem þat myth fulfillyn my sowle wyth þi word & wyth redyng of Holy Scriptur, for alle þe clerkys þat prechyn may not fulfillyn, for me thynkyth þat my sowle is euyr a-lych hungry."<sup>1</sup> God answers her directly, and almost immediately she encounters, and just as immediately enlists the services of, a young priest newly come to Bishops Lynn who "red to hir many a good boke of hy contempalcyon and oþer bokys, as þe Bybyl wyth doctowrys þerupon, Seynt Brydys boke, Hyltons boke, Boneventur, Stimulus Amoris, Incendium Amoris, and swech oþer."<sup>2</sup> Not only does the priest allow Margery to alleviate her hunger with a steady diet of rudimentary doctrine in the form of Scripture

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<sup>1</sup> Meech and Allen, p. 142. Elsewhere, the narrator remarks that Margery learned Scripture "in sermownys & be comownyng wyth clerkys," p. 29.

<sup>2</sup> Meech and Allen, p. 143.

study and standard biblical commentaries,<sup>1</sup> but their acquaintance also provides her an opportunity to begin cultivating what will become intimate relationships with the most popular and influential authorities of her day on the spiritual life, and on affective expressions of piety in particular, among them St. Birgitta of Sweden, Walter Hilton, and St. Bonaventure.

This passage from the *Book of Margery Kempe* offers invaluable if complex and elusively mediated evidence about the late-medieval readership of the kinds of pedagogical treatises discussed in the preceding chapters. Thus, the fifteenth-century spiritual narrative touted often as the first autobiography in English, or as its controversial protagonist's attempt at autohagiography, or as a mirror onto the world of the late Middle Ages, or as work of literary fiction—a text described in the *Book's* own terms alternately in its proem as a “schort tretys and a comfortabyl for synful wreccys, wher-in þei may haue gret solas and comfort to hem and vnderstondyn þe hy & vnspecabyl mercy of ower souereyn Sauyowr Cryst Ihesu”<sup>2</sup> and in its prologue as “[a] schort tretys of a creature sett in grett pompe & pride of þe world, which sythen was drawyn to ower Lord be gret pouerte, sekenes, schamis, & gret repreuys in many

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<sup>1</sup> The language of hunger and starvation with its implications of emptiness in this passage from the *Book* is perhaps more than arbitrarily chosen. Ralph Hanna III, “Some Norfolk Women and Their Books, ca. 1390-1440,” in *The Cultural Patronage of Medieval Women*, ed. June Hall McCash (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1996), pp. 290-92, has argued the role of women, both those who could read and those who could not, in forming textual communities not only by storing and smuggling forbidden books, as the peasant woman from Martham Margery Baxter did with the books of the Norfolk Lollard teacher William White, but also by means of “absorbing” texts aurally for subsequent reflection and even oral dissemination as was clearly the case for orthodox women like Margery. Hanna describes the desires which impelled women like Baxter, Avis Mone of Loddon, Julian of Norwich, and Margery Kempe to confront and surmount the obstacles of class, gender, and, of course, orthodoxy that hindered their participation in a textual, religious culture, and observes that “[s]uch textual efforts and desires require acts of extraordinary and inventive negotiation. They produce modes of book acquisition, of use, of appropriation, and of directed re-publication quite different from those familiar within High Art literate culture; and these modes appear the more inventive in precise proportion to the degree to which such a desire to enter literate culture encounters resistance” (p. 300). Hanna's vocabulary of desire mirrors the *Book's* language of hunger, and both reflect the agency possessed by individual members of the *lewyd* segment of society not content to be mere vessels filled and emptied, but seeking to fill and empty themselves with and of the learning that they might incorporate through this process of absorption.

<sup>2</sup> Meech and Allen, p. 1.



diuers contres & places”<sup>3</sup>—presents an opportunity to assess what happens when lay people read the books written for them and when the imagined lewd addressees of pedagogical writings respond to clerical calls. Even more remarkable, and equally pertinent to this study, is that this divinely appointed encounter between *magister* and *discipula* reveals a striking reciprocity structuring a multi-directional exchange of learning,

for he fond gret gostly comfort in hir and cawsyd hym to lokyn meche good scriptur and many a good doctowr which he wolde not a lokyd at þat tyme had sche ne be. . . . Þe forseyd preste red hir bokys þe most part of vij zer er viij zer to gret ences of hys cunningg & of hys meryte . . . . Aftywardys he wex benefysyd & had gret cur of sowle, & þan lykyd hym ful wel þat he had redde so meche be-forn.<sup>4</sup>

In reading for Margery, then, the priest also reads for himself, and it is through teaching her that he learns. Ultimately his relationship with his student results not only in her spiritual advancement but also in the priest’s ecclesiastical preferment on account of the great increase of merit that accrues to him, and that leads to his accession to an evidently important benefice and “gret cur of sowle.”

The arrival of the new priest in Lynn epitomizes in a single, brief episode the entire trajectory of this current project. First, in the its highly condensed summary of the literary education of Margery Kempe, the *Book* suggests that the laity *were* reading—or were at least having read to them—the kinds of Middle English prose texts that positioned them as *lewyd peple* inhabiting a world of images from which they might learn and bodies on which they might meditate.<sup>5</sup> In this and the next

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<sup>3</sup> Meech and Allen, pp. 5-6.

<sup>4</sup> Meech and Allen, pp. 143-144.

<sup>5</sup> Nor is this our only evidence for lay readers of these texts. Several extant manuscript compilations provide clues about their audiences’ identities. Cambridge University Library MS Additional 6686, for example, is a composite, fifteenth-century volume. Its contents include a complete copy of Nicholas Love’s *Mirror* along with his *Treatise on the Sacrament*, which accompanies the *Mirror* in the manuscript witnesses; *Contemplations of the Dread and Love of God*, known otherwise as the *Pistyl of Love* or *Fervor amoris* and misattributed in a hand other than that of that treatise’s main text to Richard Rolle; *The Five Sorrows of Our Lady*; the so-called *Short Charter of Christ*; John Lydgate’s short poem

chapter, then, I want to trace the transition from pedagogy to praxis by examining how readers of Love, Hilton, and other pedagogues incorporate these writers' meditative agenda into their individual practices, and how the politics of a conception of lewdness grounded in "bodies and bodily things" plays out within the history of late-medieval affective piety and contemporary feminist discourse alike.<sup>6</sup>

In approaching these issues I will argue that the *Book of Margery Kempe* is a kind of medieval, sacred *Bildungsroman* that rehearses its main character's spiritual education from a state of sin-stained naïveté to mature contemplative authority. For all the *Book's* claims to alinearity in its presentation of events from the life of its protagonist and despite its frequent—and conventional—claims to the ineffability of many of those experiences,<sup>7</sup> Margery's intellectual and spiritual progression can not only be documented from within the *Book's* non-chronological narrative, but is regularly acknowledged by the *Book's* narrator, despite modern scholarship's failure, or perhaps refusal, to notice it.<sup>8</sup> Given Margery's familiarity with and internalization of texts like Hilton's *Scala perfectionis* and, as we shall see, Nicholas Love's *Mirror*, we should

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on the kings of England; Book I of the *Scala perfectionis*; and the *Lay Folks' Catechism*. For a description of this manuscript, see Sargent, pp. lxxiv-lxxvi. These various treatises and poems were originally composed independently of one another, and their compilation reflects the interests of a vernacular-reading, lay audience. For ownership of similar texts among "lewd" women, see Carol M. Meale, "'... alle the bokes that I haue of latyn, englisch, and frensch': Laywomen and Their Books in Late Medieval England," in *Women and Literature in Britain, 1150-1500*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., ed. Carol M. Meale, Cambridge Studies in Medieval Literature 17 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 128-58.

<sup>6</sup> Chapter 6 below will take up the drama and examine how these techniques manifest themselves in communal practice. Note that the distinction I draw here, however, is not one between public and private, for Margery Kempe's spirituality was a performed one and, as such, routinely necessitated the presence of a witnessing audience.

<sup>7</sup> For the narrative's structure, see, e.g., Meech and Allen, pp. 5-6, 58, and 165. For the ineffability of Margery's contemplative encounters, see, e.g., Meech and Allen, pp. 3, 201-2.

<sup>8</sup> The exception is Samuel Fanous, "Measuring the Pilgrim's Progress: Internal Emphases in *The Book of Margery Kempe*," in *Writing Religious Women: Female Spiritual and Textual Practices in Late Medieval England*, ed. Denis Renevey and Christiania Whitehead (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000), pp. 157-76, who posits that the scattered appearances of specific temporal and spatial references throughout the *Book* represent the structural impositions of a clerical amanuensis familiar with the conventions of hagiography, a genre characterized by vagueness in which specific mention of time or place serves to emphasize the importance of a given passage.

not be the least surprised, furthermore, to discover that this progression leads Margery from meditation on bodies and bodily things, and primarily on the humanity of Christ to a (for the most part) verbally irreproducible contemplation of the divinity of the Godhead itself. Thus to speak of *a* Kempean “spirituality,” as scholars often do, as if it were singular and static and as if Margery herself had burst forth spiritually full-grown from the forehead of Richard Rolle or Nicholas Love or Walter Hilton or Birgitta of Sweden—the necessity of listing so many potential frontal origins already hints at the problems inherent in a homogeneous characterization of Margery’s practices—fails to recognize the intellectual and spiritual maturation that structures the seemingly amorphous narrative trajectory of the *Book* and that reveals Margery Kempe to be a very perspicacious reader of most of the items on the best-seller lists of the early-fifteenth century. And more than simply aping the practices outlined by her teachers, Margery also invents a new kind of spiritual writing, one in which participatory meditation on events from the life of Christ is heavily inflected by the experiences of the material world unique to the individual meditator. In reading the marginal glosses of the sole-surviving manuscript of *The Book of Margery Kempe*, British Library Additional MS 61823, I will then argue in chapter 5 that Margery’s encounters with books initiate a spiritual conversation with Hilton, Rolle, Birgitta, and others that in turn launches a similar interaction with her own successive readers and that allows us to observe more broadly the prevalence of the kind of clerical-lay symbiosis implied by the opening anecdote of the visiting priest who mentors Margery as well as the parallel and dynamic historical development of late medieval into early modern spirituality. Finally, in what remains of this project I turn to consider the situation on a very particular bit of ground, that of East Anglia,<sup>9</sup> for although the

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<sup>9</sup> As a geographical locator, “East Anglia” resists precise localization. I follow John C. Coldewey, “The Non-cycle Plays and the East Anglian Tradition,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval English Theatre*, ed. Richard Beadle (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 191, who reviews the

complex unfolding of discourses about images and learning that I have described can be found throughout late fourteenth- and early fifteenth-century England, this phenomenon, I want to suggest, had an extraordinary impact on Margery Kempe's spiritual interpretation of the secular world in which she dwelt, as well as on the local stages where clerical and lay desires were played out for pious English men and women to see.

"A schort tretys of a creature": Defining the Text

*The Book of Margery Kempe* is a generically mixed account of the life of a late-medieval laywoman from Bishops Lynn (now King's Lynn in Norfolk some 100 miles north of London) who lived at the end of the fourteenth and beginning of the fifteenth centuries. The Margery Kempe of the *Book*, and of contemporary historical record, was connected to several leading merchant families in a town that had become by her lifetime a prosperous center for the export of wool and grain for much of the English Midlands.<sup>10</sup> Lynn was a major port town during the later Middle Ages, and certainly occupied a more prominent place in English commerce than the casual visitor today might suspect. Margery's father, John Burnham, had been Lynn's mayor five times and her husband, John, was a well-regarded citizen and sometime chamberlain of the town.<sup>11</sup> The central narrative of *The Book* opens with Margery's marriage at about the age of twenty to John Kempe and the birth of their first of fourteen children, following which she experiences a period of what she calls

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historical causes for the shifting of this region's boundaries and suggests a reasonable mean between the most expansive and the most restrictive claims: "For the purposes of this study East Anglia is taken to include the two main counties of Norfolk and Suffolk, and parts of the two main adjoining counties as well: Cambridgeshire east of the Ouse river, and Essex north of the Blackwater. The northern and eastern boundaries of the whole region are of course formed by the North Sea."

<sup>10</sup> Clarissa W. Atkinson, *Mystic and Pilgrim: The Book and the World of Margery Kempe* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983), pp. 73-74.

<sup>11</sup> Atkinson, *Mystic and Pilgrim*, pp. 14-15; Meech and Allen, pp. 9, 109.

madness. Restored to sanity after “half 3er viij wekys, & odde days,”<sup>12</sup> Margery determines to turn things around, but initially fails to unfetter herself from pride and vanity. She experiments briefly and unsuccessfully with a brewing business and a milling operation before relinquishing her desire for worldly recognition in favor of a life devoted to Christ.

Most of what follows in the book is a detailed account of her “homely” relationship with Christ as conducted through a series of “dalliances” and “meditations” in her soul. The text as we have it today is the result of an occasionally arduous process of dictation, transcription, and transmission, which complicates our talking about the woman called Margery Kempe of Bishops Lynn. We learn in the proem to the *Book*, for instance, that following an initial delay of some twenty years from the time of her first mystical experiences, Margery engages an Englishman recently returned from Germany—quite possibly one of her sons—to record her story. She then presents this text to her confessor for approval, but this priest is unable to read a text “so euel wretyn . . . for it was neipyr good Englysch ne Dewch, ne þe lettyr was not schapyn ne formyd as oþer letters ben.”<sup>13</sup> This same priest therefore offers to rewrite the narrative, but shirks his duties as a consequence of the unfavorable talk that invariably follows in the wake of his subject. To ease his mind, the priest recommends Margery to an acquaintance familiar with the writing of her original amanuensis, but he too is confounded by the impenetrable blend of deficient English and obscure German (or perhaps even Dutch). The priest’s irrepressible conscience eventually triumphs, so he reacquires the book and tries again. We are told that he read the first scribe’s German-English version “be-forn þis creatur eury word, sche sum-tym helpyng where ony difficulte was”<sup>14</sup> in his efforts to produce as accurate a

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<sup>12</sup> Meech and Allen, p. 7.

<sup>13</sup> Meech and Allen, p. 4.

<sup>14</sup> Meech and Allen, p. 5.

portrayal of her experiences as possible. But then he is literally bedeviled so that his eyesight consistently fails him whenever he looks upon the text he transcribes, though not if he reads other books. He experiments with spectacles but ultimately regains his faculties only through Margery's prayers, upon which he completes his task and adds the proem, which details his misadventures in scribing, and a second book reporting Margery's adventures subsequent to the composition of the first book. As far as anyone knows, this original version of the *Book* no longer survives; we are left instead with a copy made by a fifteenth-century scribe who identifies himself only as "Salthouse."<sup>15</sup>

To read the *Book* as a document approximating autobiography, therefore, is to assume a great deal about a text that bedevils—less literally, of course—its modern reader too. Since the publication of Lynn Staley's *Margery Kempe's Dissenting Fictions* in 1994, it has become a commonplace and a necessity for commentators on *The Book of Margery Kempe* to establish a critical stance with respect to the authorship of the text. In her book, Staley recommends the analogy that Chaucer the poet is to Geoffrey the pilgrim as Langland the poet is to Long Will the impostor in hermit's habit as Kempe the artful author and critic is to Margery, the subject of a complex hagiographical social commentary on whatever is rotten in the state—and Church—of England.<sup>16</sup> Staley asserts: "although Kempe uses autobiographical apparatus to shape an account of Margery as a representative type, she uses those

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<sup>15</sup> At the end of the *Book*, which concludes with a prayer of "the creature," there appears in the same hand as that of the main text "Ihesu mercy quod Salthows." See Meech and Allen, p. 254. Several instances of eye-skip in the British Library manuscript attest to the fact that Salthouse was copying from an exemplar. See, e.g., Meech and Allen, p. 83.

<sup>16</sup> Lynn Staley, *Margery Kempe's Dissenting Fictions* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994), pp. 2-4. In divorcing author and subject, Staley argues against the traditional claims for the "artlessness" of *The Book*, suggesting instead that Kempe the author was well aware of the conventions of the modes in which she wrote and manipulated them accordingly as part of a strategy "to conceal or disguise [her] strongly original and, in some cases, destabilizing, insights into systems of theological or communal ordering."

details as a screen for an analysis of communal values and practices.”<sup>17</sup> Staley’s analogy has been readily adopted, and occasionally uncritically and unquestioningly assumed, by numerous critics of Margery Kempe and her occasionally inscrutable *Book*.<sup>18</sup> That the text reveals an author of not insignificant sophistication and artistry I would not dispute; I nevertheless find troubling an approach which suggests that the lived experience of a real woman named Margery Kempe could not have formed the objective basis for the spiritual experiences that constitute the heart of the *Book*, even if these experiences are ultimately mediated by multiple, and perhaps occasionally competing, voices. While Staley’s goal of wrenching the text free from criticism which, on account of the protagonist’s sex, has too often essentialized the *Book* and its subject alike, certainly warrants praise, it is nevertheless possible to go too far in the opposite direction. Geoffrey the pilgrim and Long Will are the self-acknowledged and consciously ironized alter egos of their progenitors and appear within clearly fictionalized landscapes, regardless of how accurately or even realistically fourteenth-century contexts and concerns influence, and impinge upon, Chaucer’s and Langland’s respective literary inventions.

More immediate personal and textual models for Margery Kempe’s recorded experiences abound, as the *Book* itself acknowledges: Julian of Norwich (with her *Shewings*) and Birgitta of Sweden (with her *Liber celestis*), to cite but two examples

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<sup>17</sup> Staley, *Margery Kempe’s Dissenting Fictions*, p. 39. Sidonie Smith, *A Poetics of Women’s Autobiography* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), p. 5, notes in her work on women’s autobiography that structuralist and post-structuralist theory have challenged the notions of self-referentiality and authenticity of the self, two key features of earlier definitions of autobiography which, when eliminated from consideration, result in a fictive textual construction grounded in language which exceeds the control of any author figure. Smith’s introduction to the history of thinking about autobiography as a category and the place of women’s autobiography as a sub-species of the larger set is an excellent starting point, though her essay on the particular case of Margery Kempe is ultimately less successful.

<sup>18</sup> See, e.g., Meale, “‘This is a deed bok, the tother a quick,’” *passim*. For a dissenting opinion, see Carolyn Dinshaw, *Getting Medieval: Sexualities and Communities, Pre- and Postmodern* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999), p. 159: “[Staley’s] is an appealing and productive hypothesis, but it cannot explain little gaps in the text that suggest the priest never stopped worrying about what he suspected to be Margery’s excessive devotional manner.”

and *exempla* among many, likewise provide similar accounts of their visionary experiences, and their lived models of female sanctity were certainly familiar to Margery Kempe, who consults with Julian in chapter 18 of the first part of the *Book* and who, in addition to reading “Brydys boke,” learns that she has, in fact, surpassed her saintly predecessor, when the Son informs her that his “dowtyr, Bryde, say me neuyr in þis wyse.”<sup>19</sup> What differentiates *The Book of Margery Kempe* from Julian’s *Shewings* or Birgitta’s *Liber celestis*, itself a textual product mediated by men, is the Margery’s immersion in the world—the places she inhabits and visits—and conflict with the World—one of three archetypal nemeses, along with the Flesh and the Devil, who populates the imagined landscapes of the roughly contemporary moralizing drama.

This departure from the *Book*’s authoritative predecessors and would-be models was not lost on her contemporaries nor has it been on our own. Indeed many of Margery’s readers have struggled, with greater or lesser degrees of success, to efface the worldly element from the narrative. Thus Salthouse’s (or his exemplar’s) attempts to strip the mundane from the text, most obvious in his refusal to acknowledge the name of Margery’s hometown of Lynn until chapter 16 of Book I—he substitutes N for *nomen* wherever Lynn ought to appear—backfires in the end. As of the sixteenth chapter the manuscript abandons N in favor of specifically identifying the town as Lynn.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Meech and Allen, p. 47.

<sup>20</sup> Given that the opening chapters of the *Book* are primarily centered on one community and that it is not until several chapters later that Margery first steps outside of Lynn and into other parts of England, thereby initiating a series of journeys that will lead her to Spain, France, Germany, Scandinavia, and the Holy Land, it is perhaps not surprising that N yields to Lynn. Margery’s travels to the periphery necessitate a definition of her center, and it is, in fact, upon her return to Lynn after traveling to Canterbury and London circuitously by way of Lincoln that Lynn first appears. The Salthouse manuscript first names her hometown once it becomes clear that keeping the geography anonymous in a narrative overwhelmed by travels would become unwieldy.



Prior to the rediscovery of the Salthouse manuscript in 1934, moreover, the existence of a *Book of Margery Kempe* was known only through early printed excerpts that severely occluded the social roots of the narrative. A heavily abridged version of the *Book* was first produced in or about 1501 by Wynkyn de Worde, Caxton's successor in English printing, as *A Shorte Treatyse of Contemplacyon*. The *Shorte Treatyse* consists of 28 fragments from various moments in the original *Book of Margery Kempe* that focus on Margery's relationship with Christ. Sue Ellen Holbrook's characterization of what remains of the original *Book* in the *Short Treatyse* is illuminating:

In sum, the extractor has searched for passages that commend the patient, invisible toleration of scorn and the private, inaudible, mental practice of good will in meditation rather than public or physical acts or sensory signs of communion with God and has left behind all that is radical, enthusiastic, feminist, particular, potentially heretical and historical. The search has produced a coherent set of excerpts with a pronounced slant.<sup>21</sup>

The surviving fragments appear out of their original order in the *Short Treatyse*; this deliberate reorganization into a form with a perceptible structure independent from that of its parent text leads Holbrook to conclude that the choice of what to excerpt was made by someone other than Wynkyn de Worde.<sup>22</sup> Holbrook argues that neither Caxton nor de Worde seem to have operated in their other products with the heavy editorial hand necessary for the dissection and subsequent reassembly of *The Book of Margery Kempe* into the *Short Treatyse*. Thus it appears that at least one other intermediary sought to strip the text its particularities of social detail and to silence its protagonist's unconventional voice.

Whatever the circumstances surrounding the creative abridgement of the *Book*, this significantly condensed version was then published anew in London in 1521 by

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<sup>21</sup> Sue Ellen Holbrook, "Margery Kempe and Wynkyn de Worde," in *The Medieval Mystical Tradition in England*, ed. Marion Glasscoe (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1987), p. 35.

<sup>22</sup> Holbrook, "Margery Kempe and Wynkyn de Worde," p. 40.

Henry Pepwell alongside half a dozen other short devotional pieces.<sup>23</sup> Pepwell's section on Margery Kempe is essentially a reprint of Wynkyn de Worde's *Short Treatyse* with two brief but telling additions. Where de Worde's incipit identifies the fragments as "taken out of the boke of Margerie kempe of lynn," Pepwell expands the earlier phrasing to "taken out of the boke of Margerie kempe *anresse* of lynn."<sup>24</sup> Pepwell likewise emends the colophon to read: "Here endeth a shorte treatyse of a *deuoute ances* called Margerye kempe of Lynne."<sup>25</sup> Pepwell envisions a larger work rather like the excerpts—intense, personal, solitary, devout, isolated—and therefore the work of an enclosed anchoress not unlike Margery's contemporary and advisor, Julian of Norwich. He imagines a Margery Kempe that never existed and creates a life for her of which de Worde's *Short Treatyse* was meant to be representative. The conspicuous concealment of urban life in the de Worde fragments appears to have impelled Pepwell to the conclusion that Margery Kempe lived in a cell cut off from the world around her, and it was indeed that portrait of Margery Kempe of Lynn that endured until the Salthouse manuscript resurfaced and proved otherwise. At least from Pepwell until Meech and Allen prepared the Early English Text Society edition published in 1940, the *Book of Margery Kempe* was regarded as an exemplum of personal devotion and spiritual meditation as practiced by a solitary woman severed from the world.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> See Edmund G. Gardner, ed., *The Cell of Self-Knowledge: Seven Early English Mystical Treatises Printed by Henry Pepwell in 1521* (New York: Cooper Square Publishers, Inc., 1966).

<sup>24</sup> Meech and Allen, p. 353 (emphasis mine).

<sup>25</sup> Meech and Allen, p. 357 (emphasis mine).

<sup>26</sup> Lynn Staley's authorship argument can also be read as undercutting the *Book's* enterprise. Staley contends that because of the text's unusual narrative form and especially because of its incorporation of realistic worldly details, the *Book of Margery Kempe* merely "nods" to its predecessors' accounts of spiritual revelations. She therefore identifies the "careful attention that Kempe achieves," which differentiates the *Book* from much contemporary visionary writing, with "full-blown fiction." See Staley, *Margery Kempe's Dissenting Fictions*, p. 172. Rather than acknowledging the possibility that the author of the *Book* departed from convention in relating the life of the laywoman Margery Kempe, Staley concludes that a pervasive "realism" necessarily locates the text in the company of other socially entrenched critiques, namely those of Langland and Chaucer. This association, in promoting social criticism as the *Book's* primary goal, unfortunately denies its inescapable spiritual thrust. Indeed,

The problem of textual recovery leaves us with the problem of interpretive recovery. In speaking of Margery Kempe throughout this chapter, then, I want to acknowledge that the protagonist of the narrative and the authorial voice should be recognized for the separate entities that they are while avoiding what I believe to be the pitfalls of Staley's authorship analogy to Chaucer and Langland. I am resistant to the prospect of visionary works ceasing to be records of actual lived experiences the moment that social criticism infuses those narratives, all because of prevailing generic expectations. The implications of this approach for mystical studies of any kind are potentially devastating, and at worst betray an undeserved scholarly disdain toward pre-modern religious experience borne of contemporary academic secularism. In nevertheless acknowledging the need to distinguish author from subject when analyzing the *Book of Margery Kempe*, I prefer, then, to adopt Joel Fredell's solution, namely to distinguish between Margery, the subject at the center of the narrative, and the *Book* or narrator, that is, the polyphonic authorial and authoritative voice that constructs Margery Kempe's personal history from a multiplicity of perspectives.<sup>27</sup> Finally, I would like to offer a different explanation for the preponderance of social detail in the narrative fabric of the *Book of Margery Kempe*, namely the immersion of the *Book's* subject in the predominant vernacular religious culture of her time and place and her reproduction of the spiritual models, inflected by her own unique experiences, encapsulated in treatises that addressed themselves especially to people like Margery Kempe.<sup>28</sup>

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Staley falls short of crediting Margery Kempe, who according to the *Book's* proem authorized "euery word" of the second amanuensis's rewriting of his exemplar, with inaugurating a new kind of spiritual writing characterized by its pervasive social realism.

<sup>27</sup> Joel Fredell, "Margery Kempe: Spectacle and Spiritual Governance," *Philological Quarterly* 75:2 (1996), p. 160, n. 4. I have modified Fredell's position slightly: I occasionally prefer to call his "*Book*" "the narrator" in order to avoid the somewhat jarring resultant personification of the articulate and articulating codex.

<sup>28</sup> Watson, *Richard Rolle and the Invention of Authority*, pp. 31-53, offers an instructive parallel for interpreting a spiritual life from writings that defy and manipulate medieval norms, in this case with reference to standard treatments of the eremitic life. Indeed, Watson's final assessment of Rolle's

“Thys boke is not wretyn in ordyr”: The Mystical Education of Margery Kempe

Early in the *Book*, following a tortuous period of physical, mental, and spiritual tribulations, Margery hears the voice of Christ speaking directly to her soul for the first time: “Dowtyr, why hast þow forsakyn me, and I forsoke neuyr þe?”<sup>29</sup> This divine locution initiates a series of similarly unbidden dialogues with Christ that Margery passively but persistently receives. These conversations, which originate with Christ, mark the novice phase of Margery’s career as a mystic during which Christ acts upon her receptive soul. The *Book* identifies these manifestations of Christ as ravishments. The violent connotation of ravishing is intentional, for the spiritually slumbering must be jolted awake. Christ elaborates the necessity for this disruptive, initiatory violence and its appropriateness for beginners much later in the text by means of series of protracted analogies to the brutalities of the natural world, like thunderstorms and earthquakes:

Dowtyr, þu seist how þe planetys ar buxom to my wil, þat sumtyme þer cum gret thundir-krakkys & makyn þe pepil ful sor a-feerd. And sumtyme, dowtyr, þu seest how I sende gret leuenys þat brennyn chirchys & howsys. Also sumtyme þu seest þat I sende gret wyndys þat blowyn down stepelys, howsys, & trees owt of þe erde & doth mech harm in many placys, and 3et may not þe wynd be seyn but it may wel be felt. & ryth so, dowtyr, I fare with þe myth of my Godheed; it may not be seyn with mannys eye, & 3yt it may wel be felt *in a sympil sowle* wher me likyth to werkyn grace, as I do in þi sowle. &, as sodeynly as þe leuyn comith from Heuyn, so sodeynly come I in-to thy sowle, & illumyn it with þe light of grace & of vndir-standyng, & sett it al on fyr with lofe, & make þe fyr of lofe to brenn þerin & purgyn it ful clene fro alle erdly filth. & sumtyme, dowtyr, I make erde-denys for to feryn þe pepil þat þei

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writings and the life they portray might just as fittingly be applied to Margery Kempe’s: “Rolle was no conventional saintly or devout figure. The information we have about his life does not enable us to do more than guess at most of the particularities of his day-to-day existence, or at the personal forces that motivated his actions and decisions. Yet it does seem to create a satisfactory context for some of the major elements in his works . . . . Treated on their own, Rolle’s works appear confusing and confused. However little we know of his life, an understanding of the personal tension that manifests itself in his works is essential if we are to perceive the nature of their underlying unity” (pp. 52-53).

<sup>29</sup> Meech and Allen, p. 8.

xulde dredyn me. And so, dowtyr, gostly haue I don with þe and with oþer chosyn sowlys þat xal be sauýd, for I turne þe erthe of her hertys vp-so-down & make hem sore a-feerd þat þei dredyn veniawnce xulde fallyn on hem for her synnys. & so dedist þu, dowtyr, whan þu turnedist fyrst to me, & it is needful þat zong be-gynnarys do so, but now, dowtyr, þu hast gret cawse to louyn me wel, for þe parfyte charite þat I zyf þe puttyth a-way al drede fro þe.<sup>30</sup>

A resourceful Christ employs a variety of special effects to accentuate his entrance into the lives of selected “simple souls,” whose lives he upends with the force of an earthquake or a bolt of lightning burning down a church, and whose Godhead is as ungraspable as the wind. He ultimately reveals the spectacularity of these events for what it is, but only to the spiritually mature like Margery.

And so after a time, these ravishing revelations yield to meditation, with Christ telling Margery while she prays in St. John’s Chapel in St. Margaret’s Church, Lynn, that she will eventually learn to “speke to me be thowt, & I schal ze fe to þe hey medytacyon and very contempalcyon.”<sup>31</sup> The following chapter opens with a still largely naïve Margery preparing herself for her first mandatory meditative session by laying still but “nowt knowyng what sche myght best thynke.”<sup>32</sup> Christ commands her to focus her thoughts on his mother, the source of all grace. The *Book* relates that Margery then *sees* a pregnant St. Anne, mother of the Blessed Virgin Mary, to whom Margery offers her services. The *Book* telescopes time here, as Margery assumes the role of the Virgin’s caretaker until the latter is twelve years old, busying herself with keeping her charge fed and clothed. After a time, Mary and Margery part ways and the meditation flashes forward to their post-Annunciation reunion. Margery continues in the company of Mary, escorting her and Joseph and transporting for them “a potel of pyment & spycys þerto,”<sup>33</sup> accompanying them in a meditative reenactment of the

<sup>30</sup> Meech and Allen, pp. 182-83 (emphasis mine).

<sup>31</sup> Meech and Allen, p. 17.

<sup>32</sup> Meech and Allen, p. 18.

<sup>33</sup> Meech and Allen, p. 18.

Visitation with a pregnant Elizabeth, mother of John the Baptist. The meditation proceeds through this and the following chapter with Margery seeking lodging in Bethlehem for the Holy Family, begging for the new-born Jesus' swaddling clothes and for food for mother and child; the Magi arrive bearing their gifts, following which Margery continues in her role as purveyor of lodging during the Flight into Egypt.

In the course of these narratives, it becomes clear that the account has silently expanded Margery's first meditation into a protracted series of meditations over many days. The sequence of these early meditations coincides with the scenes described by Nicholas Love as suitable for meditation on the first day of the week, though Love commences with the debate among the Four Daughters of God in Heaven represented in, for example, *The Castle of Perseverance* and the B-text of *Piers Plowman*. The meditations also prefigure typologically what is to come both in the course of salvation history generally and within the narrative of Margery's meditations more specifically: the disappearance of Mary after the age of twelve mirrors Jesus' own narrative absence from the Gospels between the ages of twelve and thirty; Margery's request that the child Mary not forsake her should the Virgin be visited with the grace of God anticipates the thief's final request of Jesus at the Crucifixion not to forget him in Paradise. Even Margery's well-known preparation of a "hot cawdel"<sup>34</sup> (discussed further below in the next chapter) for Mary following her son's death is reminiscent of her bearing of the "potel of pyment and spycys" in the Visitation scene. Nor is the significance of this meditation as Margery's first lost on one later reader of the Salthouse manuscript, who signals a shift in the narrative by inserting the word *visio* in red ink in the margin between the end of chapter 5 and the beginning of chapter 6.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Meech and Allen, p. 195.

<sup>35</sup> BL MS Addit. 61823, f. 9<sup>v</sup>.

Here then is Margery the novice meditator engaged in participatory meditation on bodies and bodily things as established by Nicholas Love. Although the *Book* never mentions Nicholas Love and his *Mirror* or, for that matter, the Bonaventuran *Meditationes*, by name, their influence on Margery Kempe's devotional activity is inescapably present throughout the narratives of her early visionary experiences. Broadly speaking, Margery's spiritual practices can be classified as belonging either to an interior devotional mode characterized by prayer, meditation, and her infamous "dalliances" with a post-Ascension, embodied second person of the Trinity and the external, effusive, and usually irrepressible manifestations of what John Pecham might have called her *affectus* in the guise of her weeping, roaring, and crying (the last of which always has vocal, and never lachrymal, associations for Margery). Despite Margery's reputation for idiosyncratic or even hysterical behavior, her interior expressions of her piety are, in fact, textbook examples of the meditative practices prescribed for lay people by late-medieval pedagogues, especially Nicholas Love. Scholars have routinely noticed the *Book's* indebtedness to the *Meditationes*-tradition especially in Margery's meditative imaginings of the Passion sequence clustered near the end of Book I, perhaps none so perceptively as Gail McMurray Gibson, who observes that "[i]t is often when Margery Kempe sounds most like her inimitable self that she is, in fact, most the Pseudo-Bonaventure."<sup>36</sup> Indeed, Margery's Passion meditations bear all the hallmarks of Love's method. They are participatory, so that Margery not only imagines a dynamic scene in her mind, she populates her imagined setting with herself, just as she did in her early meditations on the Holy Family. In her imagining of the Passion, furthermore, it is she who tries to restrain and soothe the Blessed Virgin Mary following Jesus' expiration on the Cross: "I prey 3ow, Lady, cesyth of 3owr sorwyng, for 3owr Sone is ded & owt of peyne, for me thynkyth 3e han

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<sup>36</sup> Gibson, *Theater of Devotion*, p. 49.

sorwyd a-now. &, Lady, I wil sorwe for 3ow, for 3owr sorwe is my sorwe.”<sup>37</sup>

Margery’s own presence not merely as a spectator but as an active participant in the drama unfolding before her mind’s eye is strictly in keeping with the meditative style most suited, according to late medieval pedagogues, to lewd people, people like Margery Kempe.

In further keeping with the *Meditationes*-tradition, and with monastic, meditative habits dating back at least to Aelred of Rievaulx’s *De institutione inclusarum*, Margery does not fear to incorporate extra-Scriptural material in her meditations, so that John the Beloved Disciple, whom Jesus charges to look after his mother, leads Mary home, in a scene indebted to Love’s *Mirror*, where Margery prepares a “hot cawdel,” which here probably means a meat dish but might in fact be a medieval hot toddy to calm the Virgin’s nerves.<sup>38</sup> For all the attention lavished upon her by rabid Lollard-hunters throughout the text, Margery’s liberality with the details of Scriptural narrative certainly mark her as a firm and unwavering adherent of the orthodox camp. No doubt the Lollard tractator on images and ornamental crucifixes would have eagerly stoked the flames had Salthouse’s manuscript been near to hand.

Finally, the *Book*’s scrupulous commitment to detailed representations of the sheer goriness of the Passion and Crucifixion accord with Hilton’s and Love’s teachings for the lewd. In a stunning appropriation of the poetics of affectivity, the *Book* luridly describes the scourging in a passage that merits quotation at length:

An-oþer tyme sche saw in hyr contemplacyon owr Lord Ihesu Crist bowndyn to a peler, & hys handys wer bowndyn a-bouyn hys heuyd. And þan sche sey sextene men wyth sextene scorgys, & eche scorge had viij babelys of leed on þe ende, & euery babyl was ful of scharp prekelys as it had ben þe rowelys of a spor. & þo men wyth þe scorgys madyn comenawnt þat ich of hem xulde zeuen owr Lord xl strokys. Whan sche saw þis petows syght, sche wept &

<sup>37</sup> Meech and Allen, p. 193.

<sup>38</sup> Meech and Allen, p. 195. *MED* s.v. “caudel”: (a) a hot fortified drink, esp. one containing spiced wine or ale; also, a broth; (b) a pudding, meat loaf, or the like.



cryid ryth lowde as 3yf sche xulde a brostyn for sorwe & peyne. And, whan owr Lord was al-to-betyn & scorgyd, þe Iewys losyd hym from þe peler & tokyn hym hys crosse for to beryn on hys schuldyr. . . . Sithyn sche went forth in contemplacyon þorw þe mercy of owr Lord Ihesu Crist to þe place þer he was naylyd to þe Crosse. And þan sche sey þe Iewys wyth gret violens rendyn of owr Lordys precyows body a cloth of sylke, þe which was cleuyn & hardyd so sadly & streitly to owr Lordys body wyth hys precyows blood þat it drow a-vey al þe hyde & al þe skyn of hys blissyd body & renewyd hys preciows wowndys & mad þe blod to renne doewn al a-bowytn on euery syde. Pan þat precyows body aperyd to hir syght as rawe as a thyng þat wer new flayn owt of þe skyn, ful petows & rewfyl to be-holdyn. And so had sche a newe sorwe þat sche wept & cryid ryth sor. & a-non aftyr sche beheld how þe cruel Iewys leydyn hys precyows body to þe Crosse & sithyn tokyn a long nayle, a row & a boistews, & sett to hys on hand & wyth gret violens & cruelnes þei dreuyn it thorw hys hande. Hys blisful Modyr beheldyng & þis creatur how hys precyows body schrynkyl & drow to-gedyr wyth alle senwys & veynys in þat precyows body for peyne þat it suffyrd & felt, þei sorwyd and mornyd & syhyd ful sor. Than sey sche wyth hyr gostly eye how þe Iewys festenyd ropis on þe oþer hand, for þe senwys & veynys wer so schrynkyn wyth peyne þat it myth not come to þe hole þat þei had morkyn þerfor, & drowyn þeron to makyn it mete wyth þe hole. . . . And sithyn þei drowyn hys blisful feet on þe same maner. . . . & a-non sche sey hem takyn vp þe Crosse wyth owr Lordys body hangyng þer-on & madyn gret noyse & gret crye & lyftyd it vp fro þe erthe a certeyn distawnce & sithyn letyn þe Crosse fallyn down in-to þe morteys. & þan owr Lordys body schakyd & schoderyd, & alle þe joyntys of þat blisful body brostyn & wentyn a-sundyr, & hys precyows wowndys ronnyd down wyth reuerys of blood on euery syde.<sup>39</sup>

Margery's devotional sensibilities accord generally with the habits of representing a suffering Christ—as compared to the image of Christ triumphant that dominated earlier medieval depictions of the Crucifixion—that characterized the piety of her age generally. Yet the *Book's* repeated emphasis on the act of her seeing and its effects on her—she is overcome by a bout of weeping and crying as the meditative scene before her unfolds—recalls more specifically the affective meditation prescribed for laypeople by Love and even Archbishop Pecham's dictum that *ibi oculos, ubi est affectus*.

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<sup>39</sup> Meech and Allen, pp. 191-92.

Thus the appearance of the new priest in Lynn marks a major shift in Margery's development as her initial naïveté and need for specific direction gives way to the practice of mature meditation according to the models presented to her by the priest, and through him, by a preceding generation of pedagogues. In the *Book's* account of that episode, "Brydys boke" doubtlessly refers to Birgitta's *Revelationes*, either translated for Margery from a Latin copy circulating in England, or perhaps more likely read directly from a surviving Middle English translation.<sup>40</sup> "Hyltons boke" refers to the Augustinian canon's vernacular masterpiece, the *Scala perfectionis*. Sorting out the references to Bonaventure and the *Stimulus amoris* of James of Milan is a more textually complicated affair. As with Johannes de Caulibus's *Meditationes vitae Christi*, authorship of the *Stimulus amoris* was misattributed to Bonaventure during the Middle Ages, yet the text refers to "Bone-ventur, Stimulus Amoris," as if they were two separate entities. Sanford Meech believes that the two in fact belong together, as in "Bonaventure's *Stimulus amoris*," a conclusion supported by misapplied references elsewhere in the *Book* to Bonaventure's authorship of that work and the absence of any other designations of texts by means of the author's name alone, that is, excluding commonly employed genitive locutions such as "Hyltons boke" for *Scala perfectionis* or "Brydys boke" for the *Liber celestis*.<sup>41</sup> The *Stimulus amoris* was likewise available in English within Margery Kempe's lifetime, in a translation by Hilton himself.

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<sup>40</sup> William Patterson Cumming, ed., *The Revelations of Saint Birgitta*, Early English Text Society Original Series no. 178 (London: Oxford University Press, 1929), pp. x-xiii, xvi-xix, identifies seven mostly fragmentary English translations of Birgitta's revelations, none of which, according to Cumming, pp. xix-xx, seem related to any of the others.

<sup>41</sup> Meech (and Allen), p. 320, suggests that the scribe may have inadvertently omitted the terminal flourish indicating a genitive singular form that ought to have read "Bone-venturys Stimulus Amoris." But this particular formula is nowhere else attested either. Genitive forms only appear before the generic "boke," not before specific titles, hence "Brydys boke" or "Hyltons boke," but never "Hyltons Scala Perfectionis." In fact, neither the *Scala* nor Birgitta's *Liber celestis* are ever referred to by title, whereas *Stimulus amoris* is. Given that this formulation would seem to be unique in either the emended format suggested by Meech or in its present state, it is tempting to think that the author may have actually intended two different texts, and that "Bone-ventur" refers to another work whose title was

Completing the list is the *Incendium amoris* of the hermit Richard Rolle, a figure well-known and of much authority in the early fifteenth-century, the influence of whose works—including but by no means limited to the *Incendium amoris*—on the *Book of Margery Kempe* is often discernible in their shared language, themes, and practices, and in their common preoccupation with justifying their own spiritual authority outside of traditional settings, although Rolle’s abandonment of his university studies to pursue an eremitic life is ultimately less problematic and potentially disruptive than his female successor’s inescapable immersion in the world. And as is true of the other originally Latin works listed, Rolle’s *Incendium amoris* was eventually translated into the vernacular by Richard Misyn.<sup>42</sup> Indeed, it is important to

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unknown to the writer but attributed to that author, namely the *Meditationes vitae Christi* or Nicholas Love’s translation thereof. This work is otherwise nowhere mentioned in *The Book of Margery Kempe*, despite the author’s almost indisputable familiarity with it, and the scrupulosity with which Margery’s other spiritual guides are acknowledged throughout.

<sup>42</sup> Ralph Harvey, ed., *The Fire of Love and The Mending of Life or The Rule of Living*, Early English Text Society Original Series no. 106 (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., 1896). Karma Lochrie, *Margery Kempe and Translations of the Flesh* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991), p. 116, hereafter cited as Lochrie, argues that the *Book*’s English vocabulary seems more directly imitative of the Latin *Incendium amoris* than of Richard Misyn’s Englished version, which translates the Latin more loosely and which was not completed until the mid-1430s. Lochrie sensibly leaves room for the possibility of a no longer extant Englishing of the *Incendium* by someone other than Misyn, which might account for Kempe’s word choice. Lochrie, pp. 117-18, makes a similar argument about Kempe’s approximation of the diction of the Latin in *Stimulus amoris*, arguing that the Latin might have been the immediate textual source rather than Hilton’s translation, but Lochrie’s analysis here is less than convincing. She notes that where *The Book* in quoting *Stimulus amoris* has the phrase “þe desyr of myn hert þei perceyue not,” the Latin refers to simple “desiderium” while Hilton translates “desire of Jesus burneth in my heart” [sic], the point being that some mention of Jesus ought to have made its way into *The Book* if Hilton were the source; Lochrie somehow misses the appearance of the heart in both *The Book of Margery Kempe* and Hilton’s translation but not in the Latin, which makes tracing any direct line of textual transmission a complicated matter. Furthermore, Lochrie refers twice on p. 114 and again on p. 117 to Hilton’s *Scala* as a Latin work; although it was later translated into Latin, Hilton’s text is certainly an English one. Indeed, in the last of these passages, Lochrie observes that her “brief overview suggests that Kempe draws upon the Latin writings of Richard Rolle to characterize her mystical experiences. . . . Other examples from Hilton, Pseudo-Bonaventure, Bridget’s *Liber Revelationum Celestium*, and the *Stimulus Amoris* need to be explored more seriously in Kempe’s text that they have been previously.” In the absence of any evidence to the contrary, I can see no reason why Kempe or the priest would have read *Scala perfectionis* in the sole Latin translation rather than in any of the roughly forty-two extant manuscripts of either or both of the books of the *Scala* in English, and assuming that Pseudo-Bonaventure here refers to the *Meditationes vitae Christi*, I find it very unlikely that the priest would have been reading Johannes de Caulibus’s Latin in the early-fifteenth century rather than Nicholas Love’s English translation, which under Archbishop Arundel was prescribed reading from 1410 on and which survives in numerous of fifteenth-century copies. See

note that, besides the Bible and the commentaries thereon, all of the works mentioned in this chapter of the *Book* were available in English during Margery's lifetime, a fact often missed in contemporary scholarship with interesting implications. Is it possible that Margery Kempe was reading directly the kinds of books being written and translated for *lewyd peple* during her lifetime?

The question of Margery Kempe's reading ability is a vexing one. In chapter 17 of the *Book*, Margery travels to Norwich to seek confirmation there from the vicar of St. Stephen's of her mystical experiences, which, according to the narrator, seemed to her to surpass those even of the acknowledged masters of the form: "*sche herd neuyr boke, neyþyr Hyltons boke, ne Bridis boke, ne Stimulus Amoris, ne Incendium Amoris, ne non oþer þat euyr sche herd redyn þat spak so hyly of lofe of God but þat sche felt as hyly in werkyng in hir sowle yf sche coud or ellys mygth a schewyd as sche felt.*"<sup>43</sup> In this rehearsal of her audience with the vicar, the narrator explicitly announces that Margery gained access to book learning aurally. Yet despite the *Book's* overt claims here and elsewhere, Josephine K. Tarvers has convincingly demonstrated that nowhere in the text does Margery acknowledge being illiterate; rather, according to Tarvers, Margery carefully relies on the aid of a clerical amanuensis for the composition of her narrative and the intervention of the new priest in her program of spiritual reading as a means of escaping the potentially life-threatening implications of demonstrating too much knowledge of vernacular theological writings in the wake of Arundel's *Constitutions*.<sup>44</sup> The device of the

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Hilton, pp. 6-7; Sargent, pp. lxxii-lxxxiv. It is also possible that the priest read from English versions of the *Stimulus amoris* and Birgitta's *Liber celestis*.

<sup>43</sup> Meech and Allen, p. 39 (emphasis mine).

<sup>44</sup> Josephine K. Tarvers, "The Alleged Illiteracy of Margery Kempe: A Reconsideration of the Evidence," *Medieval Perspectives* 11 (1996), pp. 113-24. Tarvers, p. 113, calls "[t]he illiterate Margery Kempe" a "creation of our own desires, not of historical fact." She primarily questions Margery's presumed inability to write, and hence her employment of amanuenses, rather than her reading capabilities, partially because she assumes that the priest read to her from Latin versions of the above-mentioned texts and that irrespective of her vernacular reading Margery was not able to read the Latin of, for example, the *Incendium amoris* or Biblical commentary, p. 117. Yet one can reasonably

priestly intercessor may be the means by which Margery shields herself from accusations of impropriety, though the texts she encounters could hardly be labeled heretical. There is no evidence to suggest that the priest was not reading and translating for his student from Latin versions of these texts, yet the very existence of translations of Birgitta, Bonaventure, and Rolle implies the simultaneous existence of an audience of potential readers equally possessed of Margery's hunger for learning. For that matter, it is certainly possible that Margery might have owned or borrowed and subsequently referred to English versions of these treatises after her initial aural exposure to them through the conduit of the priest.

In any case, the likelihood that Margery Kempe could read English seems high to me, given Margery's standing by both by birth and marriage among commercially and politically prosperous East Anglian families. In describing a taxonomy of late-medieval literacy, M. B. Parkes has argued for three groups within late-medieval literate culture: the professional reader, the cultivated reader, and the pragmatic reader.<sup>45</sup> Parkes argues that as business transactions became more complicated, dependence on written records as a means of managing those transactions, which in turn necessarily entailed the growth of pragmatic literacy, increased. He contends, moreover, that the "steady increase in literacy brought with it a steady increase in the

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extrapolate Tarvers's argument, p. 118, that the "dark side of early fifteenth-century East Anglian piety: Lollard hunting" explains the *Book's* reticence in acknowledging Margery's ability to write to account similarly for its masking of her ability to read—and perhaps own—the English translations of Rolle, Birgitta, and James of Milan that were circulating in fifteenth-century England. Thus, Tarvers, p. 119, rightly observes that "[e]ven knowledge of basic books of religious instruction in the vernacular could sometimes be suspect, and Margery takes great care whenever she discusses specific texts, such as Hilton or the works of Rolle, pseudo-Bonaventure, and others, to reaffirm that her exposure to such texts comes from authorized sources . . . ."

<sup>45</sup> M. B. Parkes, "The Literacy of the Laity," reprinted in *Scribes, Scripts and Readers: Studies in the Communication, Presentation and Dissemination of Medieval Texts* (London: The Hambledon Press, 1991), 274-97 [originally in *The Medieval World*, eds. David Daiches and Anthony Thorlby (London: Aldus Books, 1973), pp. 555-77]. Tarvers, "Alleged Illiteracy," p. 116, equates Margery Kempe's social status and concomitant access to the instruction in, and practice of, reading and writing to that of the Paston women.

number of people who wanted to read for recreation and profit,”<sup>46</sup> including spiritual profit of the kind promoted by vernacular theological treatises. That Margery Kempe was reading books for lewd people is, in the end, improvable, but certainly not impossible.

Irrespective of her own ability to read, the chapter following the priest’s first appearance opens by informing the reader that “thorw heryng of holy bokys & thorw heryng of holy sermownys, sche euyr encresyd in contemplacyon & holy meditacyon.”<sup>47</sup> The narrator also intimates that, in the end, Margery abandons the novice’s meditation on the familiar material world in favor of sublime and ineffable contemplation of divinity itself. Love unquestionably equates bodies, and *the* body of Christianity in particular, Christ’s, with lay people in introducing his system of performative mysticism. This form of meditation on images, the *Book* informs us, is precisely that which she practiced in her earliest years as a true disciple of the Son of God. The narrator uses the occasion of an early meditation that appears out of order late in the *Book* to think backward through his protagonist’s meditative education:

An-øper tyme, þe seyð creatur beyng in a chapel of owr Lady sor wepyng in þe mynde of owr Lordys Passyon & swech øper gracys & goodnes as owr Lord ministryd to hir mynde, & sodeynly, sche wist not how sone, sche was in a maner of slep. & a-non in þe syght of hir sowle sche sey owr Lord standyng ryght up ouyr hir so ner þat hir thowt sche toke hys toos in hir hand & felt hem, & to hir felyng it weryn as it had ben very flesch & bon. & þan sche thankyd God of al, for thorw þes gostly sytys hir affeccyon was al drawyn in-to þe manhod of Crist & in-to þe mynde of hys Passyon vn-to þat tyme þat it plesyd owr Lord to 3euen hir vndirstondyng of hys invndirstondabyll Godhed. As is wretyn be-forn, þes maner of visyons & felyngys sche had sone aftyr hir conuersyon, whan sche was fully set & purposyd to seruyn God wyth al hir hert in-to hir power, & had fully left þe worlde . . . . But aftyrwardys . . . owr Lord of hys hy mercy drow hir affeccyon in-to hys Godhed, & þat was mor feruent in lofe & desyr & mor sotyl in vndirstondyng þan was þe Manhod. And neuyr-þe-lesse þe fyr of loue encresyd in hir, & hir vndirstandnyng was mor illumynynd & hir deuocyon mor feruent þan it was be-for whyl sche had hir

<sup>46</sup> Parkes, “Literacy of the Laity,” p. 288.

<sup>47</sup> Meech and Allen, p. 144.

meditacyon & hir contemplacyon only in hys manhod, 3et had sche not þat maner of werkyng in crying as sche had be-for, but it was mor sotyl & mor softe & mor esy to hir spiryt to beryn & plentyuows in teerys as euyr it was be-forn.<sup>48</sup>

To my knowledge, scholars have largely ignored this passage despite its crucial importance to our understanding of Margery's maturation as a mystic. The narrator of the *Book* here acknowledges in what is probably the most participatory meditation in the text—the feel of the toes is nearly palpable for even the modern reader—that meditation on bodies and bodily things should be, for the persistent and practiced mystic, only a means to an end, the first steps on a spiritual path that leads to sublime and ultimately ineffable contemplation of the pure divinity of the Godhead. We learn in this passage that this vision and others like it occurred in the early years of her “conversion” away from the worldly preoccupations that so ensnared her according to the early chapters of the *Book*, and toward a more authentic pursuit of Christ. After a period of initiation, however, these participatory and visually oriented meditations on the humanity of Christ yield to more “fervent”—and the echoes here of Richard Rolle's mystical experience of “fervor,” articulated throughout many of his Latin writings but sustained most consistently in *Incendium amoris*, are inescapable—and more sophisticated experience of the divinity. Thus, Margery begins with meditation on the Son's human body and expresses her ecstasy through her own bodily cries before ascending to the subtler experiences attendant upon divine contemplation. In so doing, she fully embodies the pedagogy of Walter Hilton and Nicholas Love with a remarkable and exacting precision, but as we shall see in greater detail in the next chapter, she simultaneously carves out a unique and authoritative identity in her melding of spiritual meditation with the concerns of daily life in and about an English merchants' town.

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<sup>48</sup> Meech and Allen, pp. 208-9.

For all the *Book's* self-conscious and occasionally disingenuous claims of structural incoherence and narrative alinearity, and of the ineffability and consequent irreproducibility of its protagonist's experiences, the careful reader can nevertheless reconstruct the spiritual education of "this creature" commencing with the blunt naïveté of the clueless penitent of chapter 5 commanded to meditate on bodily things for the first time, proceeding through her exposure to books supposedly read to her by the new priest in chapter 58, and finally resting in the confidence of the mature mystic at the conclusion of Book I who has cast off her reliance on bodies in favor of loftier pursuits. This Margery is a far cry from the Margery of chapter 35 of the *Book*, whom an alienatingly divine God the Father renders speechless:

Dowtyr, I am wel plesyd wyth þe in-as-meche as þu beleuyst in alle þe Sacramentys of Holy Chirche & in al feyth þat longith þerto, & specialy for þat þu beleuyst in manhode of my Sone & for þe gret compassyon þat þu hast of hys bittyr Passyon. . . . Dowtyr, I wil han þe weddyd to my Godhede, for I schal schewyn þe my preuyteys & my cownselys, for þu xalt wonyn wyth me wyth-owtyn ende.<sup>49</sup>

The Father's proposal, in the very matrimonial sense of that word, stuns Margery into silence, for "sche cowde no skylle of þe dalyawns of þe Godhede, for al hir lofe & al hir affeccyon was set in þe manhode of Crist" and thus she remains reticent, even once the "Secunde Persone" repeats the question to Margery, who wishes only "to haue stille hym-selfe & in no wyse to be departyd from hym."<sup>50</sup> The Son intervenes with the Father, excusing Margery "for sche is 3et but 3ong & *not fully lernyd* how sche xulde answeyn."<sup>51</sup> The Son recognizes where his Father fails to see that Margery's formation is not yet perfected, that she is still too heavily enmeshed in bodies, the Son's in particular, and has not yet relinquished them in favor of the Father's

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<sup>49</sup> Meech and Allen, p. 86.

<sup>50</sup> Meech and Allen, pp. 86, 87.

<sup>51</sup> Meech and Allen, p. 87 (emphasis mine).



unadulterated divinity.<sup>52</sup> This visionary parable of mystical learning masks a warning to the *Book's* reader reminiscent of similar admonishments issued by St. Bonaventure and the author of the *Cloud of Unknowing* to those ill-prepared for the work of reading and mystical pursuits: the novice lay meditator longing for increased contact with God should beware of premature and uninformed attempts to contemplate his divinity directly. The path to true union with the divine must begin in the accessible, material world; physical intimacy with the man Jesus leads to spiritual familiarity with his Father.

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<sup>52</sup> Not so easily daunted, that Father nevertheless takes his new bride in a ceremony attended and witnessed by the heavenly host. Margery's unyielding silence before the Godhead prevents her consent, which seems little more than a trifling formality to the Father. This is only one of many examples of the "ravishing" evidently necessary to jumpstart Margery's spiritual engines in the early period of her conversion. And although she is denied her voice here, she grows ever more confident in employing its authority as she grows in her meditations.

CHAPTER FIVE  
PERFORMING PEDAGOGY:  
*THE BOOK OF MARGERY KEMPE*

Margery Kempe's scrupulous reading of instructional treatises and her subsequent reproduction of their discourses within her own bodily oriented practices risks our misrecognizing her voice by reducing it to a mere echo and distillation of a variety of current devotional discourses familiar to her through reading (and hearing). Inherent in this reductive perspective is an indictment of the general practice of women's reading in the Middle Ages, an indictment not lost on contemporary scholars who are rightly invested in preserving female agency within a pedagogical framework that negotiated identity as it facilitated the transmission of knowledge between clerical and lay parties.<sup>1</sup> In seeking to unravel the seemingly paradoxical appeal of antifeminist religious writing to female audiences, for example, Anne Clark Bartlett has investigated the politics of women's reading in the Middle Ages. Influenced by the work of Louis Althusser, Bartlett has emphasized the interpellative intentions of men writing devotional treatises for audiences primarily or exclusively comprised of women.<sup>2</sup> She argues about a corpus of male-authored writings for women that these treatises "reflect, transmit, and perpetuate ideologies already in circulation: codes of gender, conduct, and class, along with their religious instruction"<sup>3</sup> but that Margery Kempe represents a particular class of women who were able to resist these

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<sup>1</sup> Sarah Beckwith, "A Very Material Mysticism: The Medieval Mysticism of Margery Kempe," in *Gender and Text in the Later Middle Ages*, ed. Jane Chance (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1996), p. 207, argues in this vein against Luce Irigaray's conception of female mysticism as the "only place in Western history where woman speaks and acts in such a public way," maintains that women mystics could not speak in their own voice; rather they acted as mere conduits of God's voice.

<sup>2</sup> Anne Clark Bartlett, *Male Authors, Female Readers: Representation in Middle English Devotional Literature* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995), pp. 1-2, 19, hereafter cited as Bartlett.

<sup>3</sup> Bartlett, p. 19.

interpellative encroachments by turning the politics of gender and class upside down through claims of what she calls “strategic ignorance.” By consciously and willingly identifying herself as “unlearned,” by responding to the hailing of male authors and consequently assuming the subject position foisted upon her by them, Margery could deliberately “misread” the texts that attempted to circumscribe her identity:

Kempe is able to challenge the biblical and ecclesiastical constraints on her religious and social activities, *because* she is apparently unable to assimilate them fully. This incomplete literacy thwarts the transmission of a textual tradition that sought to silence and subdue women, garbles the message, and robs it of its authoritative status.<sup>1</sup>

Bartlett observes, furthermore, the existence of currents of what she calls “counterdiscourses” that run throughout these texts and offer female readers additional avenues for resisting a pervasive primary strain of misogynist discourse. Bartlett resolves this apparent conflict between antifeminism and the counterdiscourses of feminine courtesy, spiritual friendship, and nuptial and Passion contemplation by insisting on a naturalized heteroglossia that structures Middle English devotional literature. She concludes that “virtually all medieval texts reproduce this discursive hybridity internally,” an argument that sees the interpellating misogyny of the male author as yielding its force the moment a woman reads his text: the emergence of the reader, for Bartlett, necessitates the death of the author and his intentions.<sup>2</sup>

While I believe that Bartlett’s observations about the number of discursive currents running through much devotional writing of the late Middle Ages are supported by the surviving texts, which certainly mingle pedagogical voices, nevertheless prevailing medieval conceptions of *auctor* and *auctoritas* appear to refute her conclusions about the death of the author.<sup>3</sup> In an era when possessing books

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<sup>1</sup> Bartlett, p. 23 (emphasis original).

<sup>2</sup> Bartlett, pp. 144, 147.

<sup>3</sup> See A. J. Minnis, *Medieval Theory of Authorship: Scholastic Literary Attitudes in the Later Middle Ages* (London: Scolar Press, 1984).

tainted in any way by the name of Wyclif could result, in theory at least, in burning at the stake; when anonymous works possessed of tremendous spiritual authority are routinely attributed to St. Bonaventure; when the narrator of the *Book of Margery Kempe* refers exclusively to “Brydys boke” and “Hyltons boke” and when the *Book*’s reference to “þe fyre of loue brennyng in her brest” solicits from a subsequent reader of the Salthouse manuscript the approbatory gloss “so s. R. hampall,”<sup>4</sup> the death of the author and, with him, of misogynistic discourse cannot satisfactorily explain the popularity of devotional texts among women readers.

How, then, should we read Margery’s response to the authorities she reads (or has read to her)? Given Margery’s unabashed and thorough appropriation of the techniques described by Love, Hilton, Rolle, and others, it is easy to view the protagonist of the *Book of Margery Kempe* as a narrative reiteration of late-medieval *auctoritates*. The solution, I want to suggest, lies in the very social realism that has troubled so many subsequent readers of the *Book of Margery Kempe* and led to its classification as generically non-conformist or, as I prefer, innovative. It is Margery’s refraction of late-medieval pedagogy through the prism of her lived and embodied experiences that uniquely colors her *vita*. This is a crucial and, within the convention-bound tradition of visionary accounts, ground-breaking feature of her narrative. In a parallel treatment of social realism in the drama, Jacob Bennett has considered the intrusions of daily life into the fifteenth-century Digby play of *Mary Magdalene* in constructing an argument that the text originated in Bishops Lynn, Margery’s hometown. He bases his theory in part on what he calls the play’s “native lustiness” as evidenced by its “salty” character and by “the sound and smell of the sea” that pervade the text.<sup>5</sup> And although saltiness may at first seem too impressionistic a

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<sup>4</sup> BL MS Addit. 61823, f. 43<sup>v</sup>; Meech and Allen, p. 88. The reference is, of course, to Richard Rolle and his *Incendium amoris*.

<sup>5</sup> Jacob Bennett, “The *Mary Magdalene* of Bishop’s Lynn,” *Studies in Philology* 17 (1978), pp. 5, 6.

criterion for discerning a unique voice within Margery's polyphonic text, it is nevertheless to the "bodies and bodily things" of Bishops Lynn that Margery Kempe turns in her appropriation of Nicholas Love's meditative method and through which she elevates her unique voice above the discursive din. In a meditation on the Blessed Virgin Mary's apocryphal return home with the Apostle John following the Crucifixion, for example, Margery not only comforts the Virgin as instructed by Love, but prepares for her a "cawdel": "Than þe creatur thowt, whan ovr Lady was comyn hom & was leyd down on a bed, þan sche mad for ovr Lady a good cawdel and browt it hir to comfortyn hir, and þan ovr Lady seyde onto hir, "Do it away, dowtyr. 3eve me no mete but myn owyn childe."<sup>6</sup> Margery here introduces the quotidian into a meditation on transcendent mysteries. The "homeliness" of this image has occasioned much speculation about some difficult to read scribblings that appear on an otherwise blank leaf at the end of the Salthouse manuscript in the form of a recipe containing, among other ingredients, sugar and cinnamon.<sup>7</sup> In any event, the *cawdel* is the *Book's* own invention.

Nor is the intrusion of the materiality of Bishops Lynn into Margery's text limited to this single instance. In an earlier episode, the *Book* narrates one of Margery's pre-conversion tribulations: a man propositions her sexually in order to test her virtue and, within the overall narrative arch, to demonstrate the early moral failings of a spiritually rudderless woman. Following a protracted description of Margery's internal hemming and hawing, the narrator reports her acquiescence and

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<sup>6</sup> Meech and Allen, p. 195.

<sup>7</sup> BL MS Addit. 61823, f. 124<sup>v</sup>; Meech and Allen, p. xlv. This is probably mostly wishful thinking. There is a recipe for an enema at the end of the copy of Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* preserved in Corpus Christi College Cambridge MS 61, which as far as I know has yet to be connected convincingly to the "double sorwe of Troilus." See Geoffrey Chaucer, *Troilus and Criseyde: A Facsimile of Corpus Christi College Cambridge MS 61*, introduced by M. B. Parkes and Elizabeth Salter (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, Ltd., 1978), p. 1 and f. 151<sup>f</sup>.

signals her neighbor's concomitant horror at her unchaste lapse by means of a strikingly domestic image:

At þe last thorw inoportunyte of temptacyon & lakkyng of dyscrecyon sche was ouyr-comyn, & consentyd in hir mend, & went to þe man to wetyn yf he wold þan consentyn to hire. And he seyde he ne wold for al þe good in þis world; *he had leuar ben hewyn as smal as flesch to þe pott*. Sche went a-way al schamyd & confusyd in hir-self, seyng hys stabylnes & hir owyn vnstabylnes.<sup>8</sup>

Christ himself echoes this imagery in an affirmative context when he commends his spiritual bride for her devotion to the cause of general salvation for her fellow Christians: “Forþermor, dowtyr, I thanke þe for þe general charite þat þu hast to alle þo þat arn for to come in-to þis worldys ende, *þat þu woldist ben hakkyd as smal as flesche to þe potte for her lofe* so þat I wolde be þi deth sauyn hem alle fro dampnacyon 3f it plesyd me . . .”<sup>9</sup> These last two examples demonstrate in particular that Margery not only incorporates the mundane into her imagining of the sublime; in her reiteration of the metaphor of chopped meat she imbues a literally and figuratively carnal symbol, previously linked by the *Book* to concupiscence, with spiritual significance in a masterful stroke of hermeneutic reinterpretation. In reading the images of the social “book” that surrounds and continually threatens her, Margery reveals the extent to which orthodox iconology as a vehicle for lay hermeneutics seems to have triumphed over Wycliffite ultrarealism.

Nor is Margery's deployment of kitchen imagery limited to meat; there is plenty of fish to be had as well. For example, the *Book* relates that on a Friday before Christmas while she was in the chapel of St. John in St. Margaret's parish church, Christ ravished her soul and assured her that although she would “ben etyn & knawen of þe pepul of the world as any raton knawyth þe stokfysch,” she should nevertheless

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<sup>8</sup> Meech and Allen, p. 15 (emphasis mine).

<sup>9</sup> Meech and Allen, p. 204 (emphasis mine).

fear not, for she would “haue þe vycory of al [her] enmys.”<sup>10</sup> Reinvoking this piscine image in a later moment of spiritual intimacy, Christ praises her for her obedience:

Dowtyr, for þu art so buxom to my wille & cleuyt as sore on-to me as þe skyn of stokfysche cleuyth to a mannys handys what it is sothyn, & wilt not forsake me for no schame þat any man can don to þe . . . þefore I sey to þe, derworthy dowtyr, it is vnpossybyl þat any swech sowle schuld be dampnyd or departyd fro me which hath so gret meknes & charite to me.<sup>11</sup>

Margery’s choice of objective correlative for the spiritual intimacy shared between her soul and Christ—the clinginess of boiled fish skin—is not surprising. In her work on the varieties of commercial enterprises in Lynn and Boston during the Late Middle Ages, Eleanora Carus-Wilson has demonstrated the importance of stockfish, that is, cod preserved by drying or salting, to the Lynn fish trade.<sup>12</sup> Carus-Wilson notes that the importance of stockfish in the late medieval English diet was responsible for the appearance of so-called “stockfish rows” in Lynn.<sup>13</sup> By the early years of the fifteenth century, German Hanse merchants had come to dominate trade in northern Europe such that stockfish previously obtained from Iceland and Norway could by then *only* be purchased through Bergen alone, which the German merchants all but controlled.<sup>14</sup> Lynn’s need for importing fish and exporting wool resulted in some of her tradesmen, along with those of other port towns, sailing directly to Iceland throughout the first quarter of the fifteenth century until such trade was officially banned by English authorities in response to German pressure.<sup>15</sup> Clearly the stockfish was a more than familiar staple to Margery Kempe and her fellow citizens and consequently a ready source for metaphorical appropriation.

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<sup>10</sup> Meech and Allen, p. 17.

<sup>11</sup> Meech and Allen, p. 91.

<sup>12</sup> Eleanora Carus-Wilson, “The Medieval Trade of the Ports of the Wash,” *Medieval Archaeology* 6-7 (1962-1963), pp. 190ff, hereafter cited as Carus-Wilson. See also Atkinson, *Mystic and Pilgrim*, pp. 73-74.

<sup>13</sup> Carus-Wilson, p. 192.

<sup>14</sup> Carus-Wilson, p. 196.

<sup>15</sup> Carus-Wilson, pp. 199-200.

Similarly, in her need to express her revulsion at the thought of sexual intercourse with her husband, John Kempe, with whom she wishes to live chastely, Margery can only remark that “þe dette of matrimony was so abhominabyll to hir þat sche had leuar, hir thowt, etyn or drynkyn þe wose, þe mukke in þe chanel, þan to consentyn to any fleschly comonwyng saf only for obedyens.”<sup>16</sup> The ooze [<ME *wose*] in the gutter running along the streets of Lynn is evidently the most repulsive substance within the metaphorical toolkit of this *sponsa Christi*. But in yet another act of “reading,” Margery allegorically transforms this basest of material creations into a figure for the inferiority of creaturely love compared to the Creator’s.

During her pilgrimage to the Holy Land in chapter 29, Mount Calvary provides Margery the perfect setting for her meditative re-creations. The site of the historical Crucifixion transports Margery to the past and inspires her imagined participation in the central events of salvation history. Overwhelmed by the scene before her—indeed it is upon Calvary that she experiences her very first bout of uncontrollable crying, an affective response that will become a regular feature of her devotions and that will earn her much scorn, but also much praise from the more generous of spirit<sup>17</sup>—Margery can describe the extent of her otherwise ineffable horror at Jesus’ wounded figure only by comparing that most sublime of all bodily things to a dovecote, the likes of which dotted the medieval English landscape:

Sche had so very contemplacyon in þe sygth of hir sowle as yf Crist had hangyn befor hir bodily eye in hys manhode. & . . . thorw dispensacyon of þe hy mercy of owyr Souereyn Savyowr Crist Ihesu it was grawntyd þis creatur to beholdyn so verily hys precyows tendyr body, alto-rent and toryn wyth scorgys, mor ful of wowndys þan euyr was duffehows of holys hangyng vp-on þe cros wyth þe corown of thorn up-on hys heuyd, hys blysfyl handys, hys tendyr fete nayled to þe hard tre, þe reuerys of blood flowyng owt

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<sup>16</sup> Meech and Allen, pp. 11-12.

<sup>17</sup> Meech and Allen, p. 68.



plentevowsly of euery membre, þe gresly & grevows wownde in hys precyows syde schedyng owt blood & watyr for hir lofe & hir saluacyon . . . .<sup>18</sup>

The depth of feeling evoked within Margery by this experience is matched only by the near absurdity of the *Book*'s choice of comparative vehicle. Yet this meditation is equally remarkable in that it reveals the extent to which Margery has internalized and replicated the fundamental pedagogical premise of Nicholas Love's *Mirror*, namely that the lewd, Margery Kempe among them, learn best through bodies and bodily things, and that intense focus on the tortured flesh of the human Jesus leads the meditative soul to understanding of the depth of the divine Creator's love for his creatures.

A textual analogue for this startling comparison of Jesus' bedraggled body to a dovecote with its many compartments likewise hints at the history of Margery's consumption and reproduction of spiritual texts. In a vernacular prose meditation on the Passion, Richard Rolle, in a rapid-fire series of similes suitable to the prayer-like nature of the form, addresses Jesus by likening his wound-ridden flesh to the firmament dotted with stars, a fishing net patterned with holes, a honeycomb composed of countless cells, a book inscribed with red ink, a verdant meadow lush with flowers and herbs, and, most interestingly for us, to a dovecote:

[P]y body is like to a dufhouse, for a dufhouse is ful of holys, so is þy body ful of woundes. And as a dove pursued of an hauk, yf she mow cache an hool of hir hous she is siker ynowe, so, swete Ihesu, in temptacioun þy woundes ben best refuyt to vs. Now, swet Ihesu, I beseche þe, in euche temptacioun graunt me grace of some hoole of þy woundes, and lykyng to abide in mynd of þy passioun.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Meech and Allen, p. 70.

<sup>19</sup> S. J. Ogilvie-Thomson, ed., *Richard Rolle: Prose and Verse*, Early English Text Society Original Series no. 293 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 74. Hope Emily Allen cites the parallel in her note to the corresponding passage in the *Book*; see Meech and Allen, pp. 291-92. *Meditation B*, as it is commonly known, survives in two versions in five manuscripts. Rolle's authorship of the text is disputed despite, and indeed partially because of, manuscript attributions of the work to "Richard Rolle, heremyt of Hampolle." See Ogilvie-Thomson, p. 69 for the attribution to Rolle in Bodley e Museo 232, the base manuscript for this edition, and also pp. xcii, xciv, 213 for Ogilvie-Thomson's case against Rolle's authorship. Most recently, Watson, *Richard Rolle and the Invention of Authority*, p. 329, n. 9,

The *Book* routinely acknowledges Margery's familiarity with the actual (and supposed) originally Latin writings of Richard Rolle, particularly *Incendium amoris* (and, in the supposed category, James of Milan's *Stimulus amoris*), but, in light of this allusion to *Meditation B*, it seems quite likely that she borrowed meditative material from Rolle's English prose as well, although the *Book* never mentions her priestly mentor's reading Rolle's meditations to Margery. Carol M. Meale has identified a copy of Rolle's Passion meditations (now Cambridge University Library Additional MS 3042) among the books possessed by Joan Beaufort, the Lady Westmorland whom, Meale notes, Margery visits one Easter and who, as the *Book* relates, was "wel plesyd wyth [Margery] & lykyd wel [her] wordys."<sup>20</sup> Is it possible that Lady Westmorland's book was the source for Margery's image of the dovecote, or, to paraphrase Gail McMurray Gibson, that when Margery seems her most inimitable self, she is really Richard Rolle?<sup>21</sup> And if so, could Margery have read the *Meditation* herself? Although it is likely impossible to prove whether or not Jane Beaufort, moved by the sanctity of her guest, offered an at least pragmatically literate Margery an opportunity on this or another occasion to study the contents of her library, the possibility of Margery's unmediated reading is certainly a tantalizing one and neatly accords with Josephine K. Tarvers's theory that Margery's illiteracy represents more a politic screen for this precocious laywoman to deflect the already numerous

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has concluded albeit tentatively that "it seems . . . we have to continue to regard at least the longer version of *Meditation B* as probably authentic."

<sup>20</sup> Meale, ". . . alle the bokes," pp. 144-45. Meale does not note the dovecote parallel and cites Joan Beaufort's connection with Margery only as an attestation of the former's piety. Beckwith, *Christ's Body*, p. 62, cites the passage from Rolle's Passion meditation as "one of the most baroquely elaborate ornamentations of the wounds of Christ" but nevertheless "exemplary for the extravagantly fertile imagery provoked by the contemplation of Christ's body . . ."

<sup>21</sup> The authenticity of the work is ultimately irrelevant here; there is no reason to suspect that Margery would have questioned CUL Addit. 3042's attribution of *Meditation B* to Rolle. The identity of the author bears on the possibility of the text's influence on Margery only in that Margery might have been more inclined to plagiarize a meditation whose composer held authoritative status for Margery. For Rolle's authority for Margery, see Fredell, "Margery Kempe: Spectacle and Spiritual Governance," p. 148.

accusations of Lollardy hurled at her by her detractors than any underlying reality. Indeed the relatively sparse manuscript survival rate of *Meditation B*, both of whose versions are extant in only five copies, supports the case for Margery's reading the text directly or perhaps with the assistance of Jane Beaufort.<sup>22</sup>

### Margery's Piety: Postmodern Readers and the History of Women's Spirituality

For late-medieval affective piety, Nicholas Love's "bodies and bodily things" are the starting point for a mysticism of ascension in which the mundane, material trappings of medieval Lynn, like stockfish and dovecotes, render accessible to Margery *the* medieval body that is Christ's body upon the Cross. Through this body, then, the mystic strives to approach the divinity of the Godhead. Not coincidentally, this ascending movement mirrors that which propels the hermeneutic enterprise propagated by Love in which lay readers move beyond the literal meaning of sacred texts—and in Margery's case, the literal meaning of mundane images—toward "ghostly understanding. Feminist scholarship has stressed the importance of the role of bodies within the mystical discourse the *Book of Margery Kempe*. A recent article by Carol M. Meale summarizes the trajectory of much of this criticism and is worth quoting at some length, for it reveals how these contemporary commentators have

<sup>22</sup> The simile of Christ's body as a dove-cote, however, was sufficiently popular enough to have wended its way into Wisdom's final reflection, schematized according to the suffering of each of his five wits individually, on his own sacrifice for the sake of Anima in the East Anglian morality play, *Wisdom*:

By towchyng I felte peyns smerte.  
 My handys sprede a brode to halse þe swyre;  
 My fete naylyde to a byde wyth þe, swet herte;  
 My hert clowyn for þi loue moste dere;  
 Myn hede bowhede down to kys þe here;  
 My body full of holys, as a dove hows.  
 In thys ye be reformyde, Soule, my plesere,  
 Ande now ye be þe very temple of Jhesus (1101-08).

All references to *Wisdom* are to Mark Eccles, ed., *The Macro Plays*, Early English Text Society Original Series no. 262 (London: Oxford University Press, 1969), pp. 113-52, and appear parenthetically. Eccles, pp. 215-16, cites the occurrence of the image in the *Soliloquium* of Bonaventure, who attributes it to St. Bernard, in Henry Suso's *Orologium sapientiae*, and in the vernacular in the *Ayenbite of Inwyte*.

theorized the relationship between Margery and the bodies, including her own, that inhabit her visions:

The specifically gendered nature of ‘participatory’ visions—that is, those in which the subject becomes actively involved with the protagonists of biblical history—has been stressed in recent studies, and a subtle, yet clear, differentiation drawn between these and superficially similar accounts of ecstatic meditation given by male mystics. Thus, crucially, a female lineage for Kempe’s particular manifestation of affective piety has been painstakingly, and convincingly, established.<sup>23</sup>

I want to trouble the presumed scholarly consensus about a so-called gendered “lineage . . . of affective piety” that now infuses much of the criticism on Margery Kempe specifically, female mysticism more broadly, and late medieval piety generally.<sup>24</sup> Rather than as a strong trunk with sturdy branches, this lineage is perhaps

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<sup>23</sup> Carol M. Meale, “‘This is a deed bok, the tother a quick’: Theatre and the Drama of Salvation in the *Book of Margery Kempe*,” in *Medieval Women: Texts and Contexts in Late Medieval Britain, Essays for Felicity Riddy*, ed. Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, et al. (Turnhout: Brepols, 2000), pp. 49-50. For participatory meditation on the Passion as performative, see also Denis Renevey, “Margery’s Performing Body: The Translation of Late Medieval Discursive Religious Practices,” in *Writing Religious Women: Female Spiritual and Textual Practices in Late Medieval England*, eds. Denis Renevey and Christiania Whitehead (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000), pp. 197-216. Indeed, the bibliography on the materiality of Margery Kempe’s mysticism generally is sizable. David Aers, *Community, Gender, and Individual Identity: English Writing 1360-1430* (London: Routledge, 1988), pp. 75-83, describes the contrast evident in the juxtaposition of the prominent influence of market discourse on Margery Kempe’s religious consciousness with God’s rejection of mercantile practices throughout the *Book*. Roger A. Ladd, “Margery Kempe and Her Mercantile Mysticism,” *Fifteenth-Century Studies* 26 (2000), 121-41, argues that, despite Margery’s familial associations with the mercantile class, the *Book* internalizes clerical anti-mercantile discourse. Deborah S. Ellis, “Margery Kempe and the Virgin’s Hot Caudle,” *Essays in Arts and Sciences* 14 (1985), 1-11, demonstrates the ambiguity and tension inherent in images of domesticity deployed throughout Margery’s narrative. Perhaps the best-known contribution to this discussion is Beckwith, “A Very Material Mysticism,” pp. 195-215. Beckwith associates “feminine mysticism” with “positive mysticism” or kataphasis and concludes, p. 212, that “Margery Kempe’s positive mysticism embarrasses the myth of God’s neutral transcendence” and this “embarrassing foregrounding of the insistently physical emphasizes the contradictions rather than the miraculous resolution of flesh and spirit in the Passion.” For Beckwith the Passion serves as the point of mediation that accommodates the unadulterated divinity of God to postlapsarian human capacities, but in a way that both manifests the alienation of the mystic’s soul from God and consequently offers an impetus for misrecognizing its mystical union with God (p. 203).

<sup>24</sup> Fredell, “Margery Kempe: Spectacle and Spiritual Governance,” p. 96, notes that “Margery’s experiences do not represent a gender-specific mysticism, but the entwined iconography of governance and spiritual attainment performed by a body for whom gender is only one of the boundaries of identity.” For Fredell, that performance includes not only Margery Kempe’s performative visions but also her public acts of crying, weeping, and roaring. And yet he later claims that the “*Book*’s representation of Margery . . . builds upon a highly original conflation of the two traditions of female

best represented as the result of spiritual grafting, in which numerous devotional stalks grow up together to produce a hybrid species whose gendered implications are often less than precisely articulable. Nevertheless, I do not mean to suggest that gender is not an important and contested category in Margery Kempe's *Book*: many of her tribulations undoubtedly arise from the fact that she is a woman transgressing not a few of the cultural taboos assigned to her sex—striving for the episcopally granted privilege of wearing white, for example, to indicate spiritual virginity despite her bearing fourteen children. As a wife and a mother and a laywoman, her frank speech about the Gospel regardless of St. Paul's injunctions against women preaching and her travelling alone or in the company of men without her husband result in no shortage of problems for Margery. Yet the critical appropriation of the discourse of performativity into feminist studies of medieval women in the wake of Judith Butler's *Bodies that Matter* has resulted in the assumption of a connection between performance, bodies and gender, a connection not always sustained by medieval texts.<sup>25</sup> Consequently I want to suggest that medieval spiritual performances are not always clearly gendered, and that medieval mystical bodies sometimes matter as much for social as for gender identity politics in the Late Middle Ages, particularly as these play out within the arena of pedagogical discourses that drive the construction of lewd identity. The *Book of Margery Kempe* does, of course, lend itself to feminist analyses, but we ought to be wary of assuming that the performing, performed, or performative body is exclusively or even primarily a gendered one in the Middle Ages, for to do so

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mysticism," namely the reception of visions for which Birgitta of Sweden is Kempe's exemplar and what Fredell calls "contemplative martyr[dom]" as modeled for Kempe by Marie d'Oignies, in which uncontrollable fits of public weeping and screaming mirror the physical tortures of those women (and men) who endured martyrdom through physically fatal torture; this conflation of feminine mystical traditions, however, occurs within the realm of what Fredell identifies as the masculine discourse of late-medieval debates concerning the varieties of spiritual governance, that is, the forms and merits of the active, contemplative, and so-called mixed lives.

<sup>25</sup> Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"*, (New York: Routledge, 1993). For the specific application of the term "performance" to the *Book of Margery Kempe*, see Fredell, "Margery Kempe: Spectacle and Spiritual Governance," pp. 138, 160-61, n. 7.

is to engage in an act of misrecognition of our own. It is the laity, Nicholas Love's people of "simple understanding," who must imagine—and perform through meditation—a relationship with Christ's manhood because it is they, those marked by a lack of education, who "cannot think but of bodies or bodily things."

In considering Margery's performing body, moreover, we cannot ignore the alternative and better known component of Margery Kempe's devotional habits, namely, her external bodily practices of roaring, crying, and weeping that made her infamous in her time and continue to do so in our own. Current scholarship routinely associates all three of these modes of devotional expression with female practitioners of *imitatio Christi* in the Middle Ages because of their dependence on the mystic's body as the site of their performance. As Karma Lochrie has observed, these forms of bodily excess draw criticism from Margery's detractors who cite, for example, the absence of comparable behavior by the Virgin Mary in the Gospel narratives.<sup>26</sup> Yet Lochrie counters that Margery locates her authority not in sacred texts but in direct and unmediated experience of the divine which in its transmission to her unique soul necessarily excludes other witnesses, thereby establishing Margery as the sole arbiter of her own spiritual authority:

Kempe's bodily movings and boisterous tears, then, are not only imitations or assumptions of the Virgin's sorrow: they are proclamations of her own privileged reading of Christ's body. . . . In Christ's crucified body is inscribed the secret which Kempe reads and reinscribes in her own bodily revelations. . . . The unspeakable love itself authorizes Kempe's access to divine secrets and separates her access from that of the Church and its clerics.<sup>27</sup>

But despite Lochrie's argument, for Margery Kempe to be taken seriously at all, she could not claim a purely unique authorizing experience expressed by, in, and through her body alone and impervious to external verification or even scrutiny. Margery and

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<sup>26</sup> Lochrie, p. 193.

<sup>27</sup> Lochrie, p. 194.

her contemporary commentators locate her physically devotional gestures within a tradition of such experiences as practiced by other late-medieval bodies whose lives of holiness can be confirmed. The key proof-text often cited for Margery's tears in contemporary scholarship, for example, is Jacques de Vitry's life of Marie d'Oignies. The priest-scribe of *The Book of Margery Kempe* informs his reader that uncertain of the authenticity of his subject's display of tears, he read the life of Marie and was comforted. But Marie is not the priest's sole authority, only the one most readily acknowledged in feminist scholarship.<sup>28</sup> The *Book* also goes on to cite three further examples of holy weeping and crying, two of them men: the subject of the *Prykke of Lofe* attributed to Bonaventure; Richard Rolle as channeled through the autobiographical persona of the *Incendium amoris*; and Elizabeth of Hungary as related by her *vita*. Indeed, the *Book* here quotes the *Prykke* directly and at the greatest length. It would seem, then, that Margery's version of affective piety is the offspring of spiritual mothers *and* fathers.

### Marginal Piety: Early Modern Readers and the History of Women's (and Men's) Spirituality

That we as readers ought to decouple bouts of weeping and roaring from women's bodies is further suggested by one of Margery Kempe's much earlier readers, most recently labeled the "Red Ink Annotator" on account of the numerous glosses and emendations that he left behind in the Salthouse manuscript in, of course, red ink.<sup>29</sup> In an episode in which the narrator describes a fit of weeping so forceful

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<sup>28</sup> See, e.g., Lochrie, pp. 118-19.

<sup>29</sup> Kelly Parsons, "The Red Ink Annotator of *The Book of Margery Kempe* and His Lay Audience," in *The Medieval Professional Reader at Work: Evidence from Manuscripts of Chaucer, Langland, Kempe, and Gower*, ed. Kathryn Kerby-Fulton and Maidie Hilmo (Victoria: University of Victoria, 2001), pp. 143-216. In three appendixes spanning pp. 166-216, Parsons comprehensively and usefully charts the Red Ink Annotator's annotations, corrections, and rubrications.

that Margery's ability to endure it is presented as nearly miraculous, the Red Ink Annotator has scrawled in the margin "R. Medlay v[icar] was wont so to say."<sup>30</sup> "R. Medlay" is Richard Methley, a prominent Carthusian and spiritual author in his own right who spent his days until his death in 1528 at Mount Grace Priory, the same house that Nicholas Love presided over. The Carthusians at Mount Grace, moreover, were the first documented owners of the Salthouse manuscript. A rubric on f. 1<sup>r</sup> of BL MS Addit. 61823 reads "Liber Montis Gracie. This boke is of Mountegrace." Nor is this the only time we hear of Methley, for in a subsequent passage on Margery's first bout of boisterous roaring during meditations on the Passion atop Mount Calvary, the Red Ink Annotator informs his reader that "so fa[ther] R[ichard] M[ethley] and f[ather John] Norton of wakeness & of þe passyon."<sup>31</sup> The annotator likens Margery's bodily weakness occasioned by reflection on the Passion to that not only of Father Methley again but also to Father John Norton, a sixteenth-century prior of Mount Grace. Norton appears alongside another scene of roaring, one in which the *Book* reports that Margery turns blue as lead. Here the gloss reads: "So dyd prior Norton in hys excesse."<sup>32</sup> And on a Holy Thursday when Margery is reported to have fallen to the ground crying and roaring, the annotator remarks that "Father M[ethley] was want so to doo" as well.<sup>33</sup>

These glosses suggest that the Red Ink Annotator was familiar with the devotional habits of Methley and Norton, both of whom he speaks about exclusively in the past tense, implying a probable dating of these glosses to the mid-sixteenth

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<sup>30</sup> BL MS Addit. 61823, f. 14<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>31</sup> BL MS Addit. 61823, f. 33<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>32</sup> BL MS Addit. 61823, f. 51<sup>v</sup>; See *MED* s.v. "excess": (4) Violent or extravagant emotion (such as love, joy, anger, despair); esp., ecstasy, rapture, elation.

<sup>33</sup> BL MS Addit. 61823, f. 85<sup>f</sup>. In a slightly puzzling gloss on a passage about a woman "out of her wit" whom Margery visits and who displays violent bodily behaviors not unlike those of the *Book's* subject, the Red Ink Annotator notes that "d. R. fow dyd so." The d. R. has been interpreted as dan Richard, that is, Richard Rolle, though the meaning of "fow" has not been satisfactorily explained. Parsons, "Red Ink Annotator," p. 182, conjectures a possible interpretation of "sometimes."



century. The roaring, crying, and weeping which have so routinely been characterized as markers of female ecstatic behavior in the Middle Ages within contemporary scholarship were thus not always thought of as exclusively female performances. Whether, for the Red Ink Annotator, Margery's bodily experiences authorize those of Methley and Norton or the Carthusians' external devotions serve to affirm the life preserved in the Salthouse manuscript remains unclear, but their legitimacy as forms of pious expression seems secure and, more importantly, gender inclusive.

The Red Ink Annotator's glosses on the practices of the Mount Grace Carthusians bring us full circle. The previous chapter opened with an anecdote from the first part of the *Book of Margery Kempe* which reveals that the benefits of cooperative clerical-lay interaction within a pedagogical framework redounded to both parties. Margery Kempe, probably pragmatically literate in M. B. Parkes's terms and identifying with the imagined lewd addressee of the vernacular theological literature to which she was exposed, internalized pedagogical discourses that defined her according to a precise conception of lewdness. Yet by means of this exposure, she cultivated a mature form of mysticism with learned, Latinate, monastic precedents and acceded to a position of considerable spiritual authority. She reproduced these discourses within an innovative medium—socially-inflected and alinear narrative—instead of adopting the traditional modes of *reportage*-type delivery popularized by her female predecessors including Birgitta of Sweden and Julian of Norwich.<sup>34</sup> In doing so she asserted her own subjectivity derived in no trivial part from her lived experience as a socially prominent laywoman with important ties to dominant political families and commercial enterprises in the community of Bishops Lynn. Margery's hunger for

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<sup>34</sup> Fredell, "Margery Kempe: Spectacle and Spiritual Governance," p. 140, concludes with regard to the *Book's* relationship to accounts of the revelations of Birgitta and Julian: "Overall, Margery's *Book* differs from these two predecessors in its translation of mystic status to the body politic, where Kempe was neither an avowed anchoritic virgin nor an established visionary in residence, but a lay wife and mother struggling all her life for redefinition."

learning, moreover, likewise exposed her priest to books thitherto unfamiliar to him and facilitated his performance of pastoral duties leading to ecclesiastical promotion. Not merely the passive recipient of the priest's teaching, then, Margery becomes the *de facto* godmother to future generations of "lewd" people under the priest's care as the result of the seven- or eight-year-long period of her education. She likewise becomes a potential *exemplum* for imitation by a community of male Carthusians in the following century and at the very least a witness for them to a history of pious devotion.

In considering the Red Ink Annotator's references to Methley and Norton, Karma Lochrie has eloquently and convincingly promoted the status of the *Book of Margery Kempe* as not the culmination of contemporary spiritual movements but rather as a work that stimulated new trends.<sup>35</sup> Lochrie appropriately refuses of a history of late-medieval affective piety with the *Book of Margery Kempe* as its latter terminus. What has gone unobserved, however, is the *Book's*, and in particular several of its neglected glosses and cancellations', long view of that very history. These editorializing intrusions reveal that early readers of the *Book* criticized Margery's orthodox material meditations rather than her bodily outbursts. Pedagogues like Nicholas Love sanctioned the inclusion of biblically unattested details in their descriptions of meditative scenarios for lay readers, a practice eagerly adopted by Margery who introduced the saltiness and the smell of the sea of Bishops Lynn into her meditations. It is exactly this kind of extra-Scriptural detail that seems to have attracted the ire of at least one other reader of the *Book of Margery Kempe*. Part of the text of the passage recounting Margery's preparation of the hot caudle for the Virgin Mary is cancelled in the Salthouse manuscript in black ink:

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<sup>35</sup> Lochrie, pp. 203-235. Lochrie rightly, I think, argues against a model of influence which links the mystic's importance to his or her success in inspiring imitators.

Than þe creatur thowt, whan ovr Lady was comyn hom & was leyd down on a bed, þan sche mad for ovr Lady a good cawdel and browt it hir to comfortyn hir, and þan ovr Lady seyde unto hir, “Do it away, dowtyr. Zeve me no mete but myn owyn childe.” Þe creatur seyde a-zen, “A, blissyd Lady, ze must nedys comfortyn zowr-self & cesyn of zowr sorwyng.”<sup>36</sup>

This cancellation scrupulously preserves the syntactical integrity of the remaining clauses while nevertheless excising details with their authoritative origins in Margery’s own fertile imagination rather than sacred Scripture. A later commentator similarly deletes part of a passage from the *Book* reporting Christ’s speech to Margery in which he thanks her for her devotion to his mother and him during his youth:

Þan ovr Lord mad a maner of thankyng to hir, for-as-meche as sche in contemplacyon & in meditacyon had ben hys Modyrs maydyn & helpyn to kepyn hym in hys childhood & so forth in to þe tyme of hys deth & seyde vn-to hir, “Dowtyr, þow xalt han as gret mede & as gret reward wyth me in Heuyn for þi good seruyse & þe good dedys þat þu hast don þo same dedys wyth thy bodily wittys wyth-owtyn-forth.”<sup>37</sup>

This passage is repeatedly crossed out in red ink and a red “d,” presumably an abbreviation for “deleatur,” appears in the margin alongside these lines. This annotator apparently objects to the idea that Margery Kempe would have been Jesus’ escort during his Scripturally unattested childhood. Finally, there is the *Book*’s account of a vision that transpired once upon a time in the choir of St. Margaret’s in Bishops Lynn, during which Margery witnesses the desecration of the erotically imagined body of the Savior:

Than, as sche lay stille in þe qwer, wepyng & morning for hir synnys, sodeynly sche was in a maner of slep. & a-non sche saw with hir gostly eye ovr Lordys body lying be-forn hir, & hys heuyd, as hir thowt, fast be hir with hys blissyd face vpward, þe seemliest man þat euyr myth be seen er thowt. And þan cam on with a baselard knyfe to hir sight & kytt þat precyows body al on long in þe brest. And a-non sche wept wondyr sor, hauyng more mynde, pite, & compassyon of þe Passyon of ovr Lord Ihesu Crist þan sche had be-forn.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>36</sup> BL MS Addit. 61823, f. 95<sup>r</sup>; Meech and Allen, p. 195.

<sup>37</sup> BL MS Addit. 61823, f. 98<sup>v</sup>; Meech and Allen, p. 203.

<sup>38</sup> BL MS Addit. 61823, f. 100<sup>v</sup>; Meech and Allen, p. 208.

The baselard is a type of fifteenth-century dagger, and not one that the annotator believes should appear in a story about Christ. The immediate cause for Margery's sorrow, the violence visited upon the sacred body, is subsumed into a general sentimental pity occasioned by the evocation of the Passion further along in the passage.

These details for which there is no Scriptural authority have been excised in black ink in the first instance and in red in the second two. Whether we are dealing with more early readers than we have previously noticed is unclear.<sup>39</sup> But I would like to speculate briefly about the motivations underlying these cancellations and the politics they adumbrate. The excision of the caudle incident is executed in a very dark ink, which resembles that of the original scribe, Salthouse, but is also consistent with the third of the four annotators traditionally identified on the authority of Meech. Meech notes that this late-fifteenth-century annotator's intrusions into the manuscript are by and large localizable to range spanning ff. 11<sup>r</sup>-36<sup>v</sup>, with two exceptions, the second of which occurs shortly *after* the caudle passage.<sup>40</sup> It should also be noted that there is currently no evidence to disprove the possibility of yet another hand besides that of Salthouse and Meech's third annotator responsible only for the cancellation and not for any of the actual glosses. The Red Ink Annotator is generally thought to be the latest of Meech's four commentators, but there is again no compelling reason to assign to him the two red cancellations, a possibility which Meech himself acknowledged in 1940.<sup>41</sup> In short, definitively dating these cancellations, given the current state of knowledge about the inks and hands involved, is an impossible task.

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<sup>39</sup> Joel Fredell has shared with me his belief that there, in fact, more annotators than the four traditionally cited by scholars following Sanford Meech's initial identification, for which see Meech and Allen, p. xxxvii.

<sup>40</sup> Meech (and Allen), pp. xliii; 21, n. 2; 207, n. 1.

<sup>41</sup> Meech (and Allen), p. xxxviii.

In order to ascertain a likely cause for the cancellations, however, I would like to situate these passages alongside two other neglected excisions. The first appears in Book II's account of Margery's tribulations in securing amenable traveling companions on her return journey to England from Aachen, where she has just venerated a collection of relics including the Blessed Virgin Mary's smock. Two London-bound men eventually invite Margery to join their party, provided she is willing and able to keep pace with them, and the narrator relates that "sche folwyd aftyr hem wyth gret labowr tyl þei comyn at a good town wher þei mettyn pilgrimys of Ingland wer comyn fro þe cowrt of Rome & xulde gon hom a-geyn in-to Ingland."<sup>42</sup> Seized by an apparent animosity toward ecclesiastical bureaucracy, however, one reader has cancelled the phrase "þe cowrt" in red ink, thereby reassigning Rome's significance to its status as a holy pilgrimage destination and downplaying any association with what the commentator evidently considered a corrupt institutional hierarchy.<sup>43</sup> A similar anti-hierarchical, corrective bent surfaces in the prayer attributed to Margery that concludes the Salthouse manuscript, which, among other petitions, calls down the blessings of God on the clerical ranks in descending order:

Now, good Lord Crist Ihesu, I crye 3ow mercy for alle þe statys þat ben in Holy Chirche, for þe Pope & alle hys cardinalys, for alle erchebischopys & bischopys, & for al þe ordir of presthoode, for alle men & women of religyon, & specially for hem þat arn besy to sauyn & defendyn þe feith of Holy Chirch.<sup>44</sup>

Here someone has crossed out "Pope" in red without the regard for preserving the sentence's syntax characteristic of the related cancellations.<sup>45</sup>

Taken together, the disapproval of biblically unauthorized intrusions into the *Book's* narration of the life of Christ and the contempt for the pope and papal

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<sup>42</sup> Meech and Allen, p. 238.

<sup>43</sup> BL MS Addit. 61823, f. 115<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>44</sup> Meech and Allen, p. 250.

<sup>45</sup> BL MS Addit. 61823, f. 121<sup>r</sup>.

bureaucracy reflect equally the religious politics of both a Lollard and a Reforming mentality.<sup>46</sup> In the absence of corroborating evidence confirming a date for these cancellations, it is impossible to conjecture whether the *Book's* elaborated presentation of the life of Christ and allegiance to the institutional Church hierarchy attracted the anger, and the ink, of a fifteenth-century Lollard or a sixteenth-century Reformer. This kind of literal and minimalist cancellation of papal references is consistent, however, with the indisputably post-Reformation excision of a reference to the pope in the Towneley *Magnus Herodes*,<sup>47</sup> and a history of post-Reformation spirituality that witnesses a decline in the popularity of affective meditation offers an interesting point of comparison with the eventual displacement of the modes and means of medieval East Anglian theater in favor of early modern London theater, as we shall see in the next chapter. What is clear is that at least one of Margery's early readers objected to the orthodox meditative program described as suitable for the laity by the likes of Nicholas Love and Walter Hilton while possibly another endorsed the bodily outbursts authorized by Marie d'Oignies and Elizabeth of Hungary, but also by Richard Rolle and a pair of English Carthusians from Mount Grace, Richard Methley and John Norton.

The question arises, then, of whether we can speak of roaring, crying, and weeping as ungendered performances, or whether Methley and Norton's practices should be understood as transgressive or even feminizing. Karma Lochrie has noted these parallels between Methley and Margery, and concluded only open-endedly that "these similarities help us to understand a context for reading Kempe's book, but they

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<sup>46</sup> The marginal "d" for "deleatur" alongside the passage on f. 98<sup>v</sup> does not appear to me to be in the same hand as that of the Red Ink Annotator.

<sup>47</sup> A. C. Cawley and Martin Stevens, eds., *The Towneley Cycle: A Facsimile of Huntington MS HM 1, Medieval Drama Facsimiles II* (Leeds: The University of Leeds, 1976), f. 57<sup>v</sup>.

do not suggest that the experiences and writings of these two people amounted to the same thing.” She continues:

Gender intervenes. In a culture which defines and makes taboo women and the flesh, the excesses of men and women in their spiritual practices are simply not equivalent. It means something quite different for Methley to fall to the ground, scream out, and weep during Mass or in private prayer than it does for Kempe to do the same in church or on Mount Calvary.<sup>48</sup>

The implication of this statement, I want to suggest, and which Lochrie fails to recognize, is social. Lochrie contrasts Methley’s private devotions with Margery’s public ones, revivifying in the process the specter of a Canterbury monk who wished, like Wynkyn de Worde and Henry Pepwell, that Margery were “closyd in an hows of ston þat þer schuld no man speke wyth” her.<sup>49</sup> In the right social contexts roaring is acceptable, just as Methley might have been regarded differently had he not been a Carthusian in a Carthusian house. Indeed the bodily behaviors of one of the greatest influences on Margery Kempe, the hermit Richard Rolle, were often questioned by subsequent writers on affective piety such as Walter Hilton, the author of *The Cloud of Unknowing*, and the anonymous translator of Jan van Ruusbroec’s works under the title *The Chastising of God’s Children*. Rolle’s insistence on the divine presence in mystical *calor*, *dulcor*, and *canor*, that is, heat, sweetness, and song, was a frequent target of criticism for the self-proclaimed hermit who, according to later medieval legend, abandoned studies at Oxford to live a life outside of recognized religious orders in a garment pieced together from clothing lent him by his sister.<sup>50</sup> As a solitary outside of clerical jurisdiction, Rolle and his teachings were inherently suspect, and it is perhaps his very real social transgression that resulted in the subsequent gender transgression assigned to him by the *Officium et Miracula*. And so

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<sup>48</sup> Lochrie, p. 228.

<sup>49</sup> Meech and Allen, p. 27.

<sup>50</sup> Reginald Maxwell Woolley, ed., *The Officium and Miracula of Richard Rolle of Hampole* (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1919), pp. 23-24.

the same may be true for Margery Kempe: many of the troubles described in her *Book* are no doubt the consequence of her being a woman, but they are often the consequence of her being a lay woman without access to the traditional authorities of Latin (a refuge for Birgitta of Sweden) and enclosed religious life (a source of authority for Julian of Norwich). It should not surprise us, then, to find the Mayor of Leicester conflating sexual, theological, and social violations in a string of accusations leveled against Margery after she identifies herself by means of her kin and insisting that Margery's subversive tendencies might only be controlled through incarceration: "A, seyð þe Mayr, "Seynt Kateryn telde what kynred sche cam of & zet ar ze not lyche, for þu art a fals strumpet, a fals loller, & a fals deceyuer of þe pepyl, & þerfor I xal haue þe in preson."<sup>51</sup> To speak, finally, of a "female lineage" of Margery's affective piety is to essentialize a set of practices and their practitioners in a way that is borne out neither by the *Book of Margery Kempe* nor its earliest readers, who dwelt in a world of spiritual devotion much richer and more complicated than we have perhaps acknowledged.

The repeated scholarly appropriations of Margery Kempe's life for a history of so-called female or women's mysticism, a system of discursive and bodily practices viewed alternately as an instrument of antifeminist or even anti-lay repression and as the site for potential disruption of institutional control and interests, diminishes Margery's status within the history of lay spirituality. Her narrative offers an invaluable example of the lay response to the pedagogical address performed by vernacular theology that inscribed lay identity within a discourse of affective imagery. The early Carthusian readers and commentators on the *Book* attest to Margery Kempe's central position in that history: at either end of her personal story stand the

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<sup>51</sup> Meech and Allen, pp. 111-12.



clergy and the professional religious. Margery learns how to meditate on bodies and bodily things from a priest newly arrived in Lynn, who in turn earns a benefice because of the increase in his own knowledge occasioned by their relationship. The reception of her *Book*, for its part, testifies to the decline among sixteenth-century Carthusians in the popularity of an affective form of meditation that ironically began in the anchorholds and the friaries before wending its way to the marketplaces of East Anglia, and yet Margery's life nevertheless served simultaneously to legitimate and to be legitimated by the residents of Mount Grace. Throughout her remarkable narrative, Margery Kempe illustrates that by answering the call of late-medieval pedagogy, the laity gained access to previously restricted modes of reading, interpreting, and meditating, and that the benefits of this increased access to the divine redounded equally to the clergy.

In the next chapter, we will see how the clergy in East Anglia turned to theater as a vehicle for the mass delivery of their pedagogical message, and how the drama stages the play of intersecting discourses at the end of the Middle Ages.

PART III  
PERFORMANCE  
  
CHAPTER SIX  
STAGING PEDAGOGY

This study commenced with a pedagogical maxim enshrined in tradition and the authority of its source, Gregory the Great: the unlearned can read in images what the learned read in books. Thus began a long history within the medieval Church of lettered clerics instructing flocks living in a visual world where what you see is how you know. I traced the spread of this dictum and its appropriation by orthodox proponents of images and their Lollard detractors alike within late fourteenth- and early fifteenth-century debates over the proper role of images within Christian worship. As an unwitting participant in an iconological and ideological contest, Gregory ironically became the champion of opposed camps, representing a centuries-old, unbroken line of practice while concurrently (and posthumously) championing an ancient commandment willfully disregarded by an allegedly ignorant clergy. For all of the misinterpretations and misappropriations of Gregorian pedagogy occasioned by this polemic, one ideological point remained constant, namely that Gregory's *illitterati*, or more precisely their successors, the English *lewyd peple*, could readily be identified because they encountered God in images, not words.

This identification of the English laity with imagery persisted as the very boundaries that separated late medieval literate culture from its amorphous opposite became increasingly blurred. Even after the traditionally unlearned had acquired enough of what Parkes labels “pragmatic literacy” to consume insatiably the seemingly countless vernacular theological texts written, translated, copied, and

circulated during the decades on either side of the turn of the fifteenth century, the authors and translators continued to cling to the notion that reading was properly a learned pursuit. The intellectual limitations of vernacular readers ought not to be overestimated and didactic material intended for lay consumption should in the end be heavily imagistic for people of simple understanding unequipped for serious theology. Meditative, and therefore imaginative, mysticism naturally lent itself to the cognitive capacities of these unlearned readers who already dwelt in a realm of images or, in a congruent formulation, a world replete with bodies and bodily things. In the course of some 800 years, the memory of Pope Gregory's precise formulation about what he called *picturae*, probably the massive wall paintings so prominently a feature of the interior decoration of early medieval churches, faded as *imagines* and *ymagerye* came to encompass a multitude of categories, from physical artistic re-creations of the Crucifix to mental envisionings of the life of Christ, from anthropomorphizing representations of the Trinity to the bodies and bodily things of the material world, all in the name of educating, and constructing a unifying identity for, the laity.

In adapting meditative mysticism to the vernacular, late medieval English pedagogues engaged, furthermore, in a translation of learned, monastic discourse into an immensely popular form of affective devotion. The prevalence of the identification of imagery with a lack of learning resulted in the transmission of meditative practices out of the historically Latin-dominated spaces of the monastery, friary, anchorhold, and university and into the vernacular realms of the marketplace and the home. Thus, the repeated imagining of *lewyd peple* within vernacular theological writings in discursive terms that at first glance appear to isolate them further from clerical and monastic culture in fact masks the absolutely learned contexts from which popular affective modes of piety directly borrowed.

This continuously iterated insistence on the perceived suitability of images and bodies for the unlearned within a mystical setting also had significant consequences for lay Christology. Texts like Nicholas Love's *Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ* routinely emphasized a chain of ascent that ran from the familiar bodies of the everyday material world in which people of simple understanding were immersed through the humanity shared by Christ with his earthly followers to the ineffable divinity of the Trinity in the mystical *oonyng* of the human soul and God. Within this Christological framework, the human nature of Christ was located nearly exclusively in the very physical body of Jesus—in the gaping wounds and shattered bones and attenuated sinews and in the ceaseless, irresistible flow of blood from thorn-, nail-, and spear-riven flesh—a body awash in salvific gore. Imagery's potential to stir (in Pauper's and others' terms) affective response and to incite imitation was available to all faithful Christians, from the most learned theologian to the lowliest of the imagined and imagining lewd. For the first category, we need look no further than to Saints Bernard of Clairvaux and Bonaventure. For the second, we may consider as in some measure representative Margery Kempe of Lynn, whose spiritual journeys are remarkable for an originality that is nevertheless securely grounded in what quickly became a major religious tradition.

These explorations lead us out of the marketplaces of Lynn and into the stages of Norfolk and Suffolk. In his introduction to *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval English Theatre*, William Tydeman writes of the mystery cycles and the morality plays:

In the broadest sense, these powerful didactic genres took their rise as one element in a systematic campaign on the part of the church to instruct the laity,

in their own language rather than the Latin of the clergy or the Anglo-Norman French of the nobility, as to the essential features of their faith.<sup>1</sup>

He further elaborates this catechetical context for the drama elsewhere in his essay:

By far the great majority of plays in the existing medieval repertoire are devoted to religious purposes and primarily brought into being to render the salient truths of the Christian faith graphic and compelling for those unable to read the scriptures for themselves, even if the better-educated were not excluded from attending.<sup>2</sup>

In the nature of an introduction, Tydeman presents these observations about the didactic purpose and function of early English drama as part of a non-controversial, axiomatic context from which all subsequent investigation can then spring, and indeed probably few if any scholars currently researching in the field of early drama studies would disagree with his assessment of the didactic role of medieval English theater. Religious drama was one tool of instruction among many available to those clergy charged with the spiritual guardianship of their less-learned brothers and sisters.

In his assessment of medieval English theater, William Tydeman is absolutely correct. The foremost intention of the majority of the fifteenth-century English playwrights whose works survive was undoubtedly mass catechesis by means of a vehicle that was simultaneously appealing in its recreational aspect and practical in its ability to reach sizable audiences.<sup>3</sup> Indeed didacticism's natural inherence in the very forms of the religious drama of the Middle Ages should not make the nature and mechanisms of that didacticism any less important a matter for critical discussion. Thus, I want to suggest that a reconsideration of early English drama's didacticism, despite modern scholarly reticence to scrutinize didacticism as a category, can be a

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<sup>1</sup> William Tydeman, "An Introduction to Medieval English Theatre," in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval English Theatre*, ed. Richard Beadle (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 2.

<sup>2</sup> Tydeman, "An Introduction to Medieval English Theatre," pp. 17-18.

<sup>3</sup> For an analysis of the recreational aspect of medieval theatre, though one that gives relatively little attention to explicitly religious drama, see Glynne Wickham, *The Medieval Theatre*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), pp. 125-75.

fruitful enterprise, especially given the intensive pedagogical debates that raged about imagery as vernacular drama in England approached its zenith.<sup>4</sup>

A reevaluation of didacticism, moreover, has further benefits for recent developments in drama history. Within the field of early English drama studies, the emergence of an identifiable and classifiable subset of plays called “East Anglian drama” stands as a relatively recent development. The first generations of modern historians of medieval English drama focused their critical attention primarily on the large-scale cycles of biblical plays that have ever since been traditionally and misleadingly associated with urban centers of production and usually with the summer Feast of Corpus Christi, and, to a lesser extent, on the morality plays, especially *Everyman*.<sup>5</sup> The methods of this period of scholarly work were derived in part from the scientific modes of inquiry dominant at the end of the nineteenth century. The first generation of scholars were unmistakably influenced by Darwinism in their pursuit of the rediscovery of a neglected and forgotten literary, dramatic tradition in England, a tradition which prepared the way for, and contained the dormant seed of what evolved into, the works of Marlowe, Shakespeare and their contemporaries of the London theater. Within this framework, *Doctor Faustus* bears vestigial traces of its primal origins in, for example, the “medieval” battle between good and evil characteristic of the moralities while the biblical cycles make sense of Hamlet’s out-Heroding Herod.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> See, e.g., Lawrence M. Clopper, “*Mankind* and Its Audience,” in *Drama in the Middle Ages: Comparative and Critical Essays, Second Series*, ed. Clifford Davidson and John H. Stroupe (New York: AMS Press, Inc., 1991), p.247, who concludes his reevaluation of *Mankind*’s assumed “popular” appeal by noting in part that “*Mankind*, in my view, is not a play which inartistically allows comedy to overwhelm its boring didactic message; instead, it is a witty social satire integrated with a moving moral statement” (emphasis mine). Clopper obviously sets up boringness as a straw man for his larger argument, but in doing so reveals something of the inherent distaste for religious didacticism that tinges many assessments of the medieval drama as theater.

<sup>5</sup> For comments on the history of twentieth-century criticism on the drama and its impact, see Scherb, *Staging Faith*, pp. 12-13; Peter Happé, “A Guide to Criticism of Medieval English Theatre,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval English Theatre*, ed. Richard Beadle (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 312-23.

<sup>6</sup> Conversely, scholars of Elizabethan drama preferred to recognize the medieval dramatic tradition as a lateral evolutionary mutation for a critique of which, see David M. Bevington, *From Mankind to*

As a consequence of the foundational critical drive to classify and analyze, much of what we now commonly refer to as East Anglian drama, with the exception of the morality tradition, was marginalized and passed over for serious consideration by and large on account of its diversity of genres.<sup>7</sup> Among the surviving scripts, the counties of East Anglia were responsible for the production of a sizable assemblage of biblical dramas—though not a civic cycle like York per se—as well as several independent (that is, non-cyclical) biblical plays; England’s only extant miracle play, the so-called

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*Marlowe: Growth of Structure in the Popular Drama of Tudor England* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962), p. 1. One of the classic evolutionary introductions to the early English drama, with its debts to Darwinism and Sir James Frazer’s *The Golden Bough* is, of course, E. K. Chambers, *The Mediaeval Stage*, 2 vols. (London: Oxford University Press, 1903; repr. Mineola: Dover Publications, Inc., 1996). For Chambers’s assessment of the East Anglian plays, see Coldewey, “The Non-cycle Plays,” pp. 189-90 and 208, where he notes with gross understatement that Chambers “projected upon his scattered evidence a chronological frame that was itself a dim reflection and distant echo of Darwin’s *Origin of Species* and Frazer’s *Golden Bough* . . .” O. B. Hardison, Jr., *Christian Rite and Christian Drama in the Middle Ages: Essays in the Origins and Early History of Modern Drama* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1965), famously refuted the evolutionary approach to study of the early drama established by Chambers and Karl Young, *The Drama of the Medieval Church*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962). John Wasson, “The Morality Play: Ancestor of Elizabethan Drama?,” in *The Drama in the Middle Ages: Comparative and Critical Essays*, ed. Clifford Davidson, C. J. Gianakaris, and John H. Stroupe (New York: AMS Press, Inc., 1982), pp. 316-27, presents a case for the non-surviving folk and miracle plays as the most probable source for the standard genres of Elizabethan drama and argues that the purported linkage between the moralities and subsequent early modern plays is ultimately based on, and biased by, the nature of the surviving texts from which to argue.

<sup>7</sup> Nor was the non-moralizing East Anglian corpus the only victim of this early critical agenda. The East Anglian moralities, especially *Mankind*, suffered from scholarly neglect. Indeed, late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century editors and critics denied that *Mankind* was in any way representative of an English dramatic tradition. Anne Brannen, “A Century of *Mankind*: How a Very Bad Play Became Good,” *Medieval Perspectives* 15 (2000), 11-20, irreverently and brilliantly rehearses a litany of these earlier scholars’ condemnations of one of the few extant moralities before neatly, and with tongue in cheek, concluding: “[*Mankind*] was uniformly despised. It was clear as glass to the scholars of the early 1900’s that *Mankind* was not only a badly written play, but a wicked play in and of itself. The problems stemmed from its humor, which seemed . . . inappropriate, both for structural reasons, being improper in a religious play, and for essential reasons, being scatological and bawdy” (p. 12). The source of these early scholars’ consternation is the play’s method of demonstrating the essential morality plot elements of temptation and fall to the audience. The very language of the play-text itself provoked early anthologists into excising such “offensive” material prior to publication. Joseph Quincy Adams, ed., *Chief Pre-Shakespearean Dramas* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1924), pp. 307, simply declines to print the material from *Mankind* to which he objects. He truncates “because of obscenity” Nowadays’s mockery of Mercy’s aureate diction and writes tersely concerning the play’s scatological “Christmas” carol: “The song is unprintable” (p. 311). Even as late as 1955, Hardin Craig, *English Religious Drama of the Middle Ages* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1955), p. 351, would denounce *Mankind* as “ignorant, corrupt, probably degenerate, and vulgar to the point of obscenity” (cited by Brannen).

Croxton *Play of the Sacrament*; the only two surviving English saints' plays; most of the extant early moralities; and several identifiably dramatic fragments. The sheer breadth of variety among these plays in addition to their apparent lack of relation to one another and often to anything that preceded or succeeded them in the English dramatic canon, rendered these plays less susceptible to systematic study. Thus one of the most immediately recognizable characteristics of the East Anglian plays is the generic variety that troubled the first species-minded generations of early drama critics.

The work of Gail McMurray Gibson in the 1980s helped give definition to what is more and more frequently becoming recognized as "East Anglian drama." Gibson undertook to explore the social, religious, and economic influences functioning from within and exerting pressure on all of these plays, regardless of their generic dissimilarities to one another and to extant dramatic texts from other regions of England. By analyzing wills, Church iconography, and the dramatic texts themselves, Gibson created her own backdrop against which these elusive and uncontainable plays, resistant as they are to neat, scholarly compartmentalizing, suddenly became mutual participants in their own "theater of devotion." Gibson strives in her pioneering work to describe the mentality of fifteenth-century East Anglians and to explain her "conviction that to understand the medieval audience it is necessary to assume—as fifteenth-century men and women did themselves—an extended definition of the devotional theater of their lives."<sup>8</sup> Gibson maintains that the day to day preoccupations, whether spiritual or material—and the difference is often difficult to discern—of middle class merchants is essential in assessing the variety of concerns addressed by didactic plays directed toward such audiences. For Gibson, then, what defines East Anglian drama is the common audience, and the

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<sup>8</sup> Gibson, *Theater of Devotion*, p. 67.



social, religious, and economic forces which shaped the individual members of that audience in common. Gibson successfully established “East Anglian drama” as a category worthy of study on its own merits and inaugurated a revisionist coup in early drama studies.

Subsequent analyses of the plays themselves have been few and, consequently, little has been said about what makes these plays “East Anglian” beyond the provenance of their manuscripts and the role that they in turn play within Gibson’s “theater of devotion.”<sup>9</sup> John C. Coldewey, summarizing the unpublished dissertations of Richard Beadle and Jean D. Pfleiderer, notes commonalties of dialect, orthography, and style across plays, and observes that “[t]he language of East Anglian medieval plays, rooted as it is in vernacular speech, offers a means not only to identify the plays, but to bundle them together as a body of dramatic texts with common features and concerns.”<sup>10</sup> He then offers his own additional criteria for identifying a particular corpus of East Anglian drama: first, in distinguishing the objective of dramatic production in these counties and in contradistinction to that of other regions, he asserts that “[b]y all accounts the non-cycle plays were performed for *profit* rather than as a display of power and wealth or as a means of pious education for the unlettered.”<sup>11</sup> In other words, Coldewey disentangles these plays from civic, religious, and festival performance contexts—an important step, although I disagree with his implication that performances for profit necessarily preclude the possible influence of a concurrent didactic agenda. His argument, however, is especially well taken in the case of the N-Town biblical plays preserved in British Library MS Cotton Vespasian D.8, which all too often remains undistinguished in scale from its sister manuscripts, like British

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<sup>9</sup> Here I refer not to studies of individual plays, of which there have certainly been many, but of “East Anglian drama” generally.

<sup>10</sup> Coldewey, “The Non-cycle plays,” p. 200.

<sup>11</sup> Coldewey, “The Non-cycle Plays,” p. 202 (emphasis original).

Library MS Additional 35290, the York Register. Whereas the Register was clearly, albeit complicatedly, involved in the annual performances that ran for some 200 years in York on and around the Feast of Corpus Christi and under the sponsorship of the participating local guilds, the N-Town plays in their current form, as Martin Stevens has pointed out, likely do not represent any actual medieval performance but rather an act of literary revision and compilation intended for reading rather than staging.<sup>12</sup> Second, Coldewey argues even more strongly that all of the East Anglian plays “rely upon spectacle to a much greater degree than do the civic cycle plays.”<sup>13</sup> He pursues this argument in a highly condensed fashion over a span of only three pages in his *Cambridge Companion to Medieval English Theatre* article, but his insistence on these plays’ reliance on spectacle ultimately rests on the prior claim about their performance for profit: in short, he concludes that, as professional productions, these plays needed primarily to entertain and that “as modern entertainment has demonstrated beyond doubt, nothing pleases so well as spectacle.”<sup>14</sup>

In his desire to identify unifying dramaturgical features amidst the disparity of genre that characterizes medieval East Anglian drama, and particularly in his emphasis on the visually spectacular, Coldewey anticipates in his extremely compressed analysis my own thinking about these plays. But before turning to my own reading, I should first mention the only book-length study that considers East Anglian drama as such, Victor I. Scherb’s *Staging Faith: East Anglian Drama in the Later Middle Ages* from 2001. In the second chapter of this book, Scherb explores East Anglian stagecraft in terms of the dramatic imagery’s mnemonic properties. For Scherb, “[r]eligious imagery . . . attempts to recreate and thus recall a sacred object, event,

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<sup>12</sup> Martin Stevens, *Four Middle English Mystery Cycles: Textual, Contextual, and Critical Interpretations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), pp. 181-257.

<sup>13</sup> Coldewey, “The Non-cycle Plays,” p. 206.

<sup>14</sup> Coldewey, “The Non-cycle Plays,” p. 206.

person, or narrative sequence.”<sup>15</sup> He elaborates medieval psychological theories, articulated by St. Augustine and suggests that for medieval Christians, drama, because of its appeal to multiple senses, created stronger impressions on the mind than other exclusively visual media. Thus, dramatic images could be recalled more easily for the purpose of devout contemplation at a time subsequent to the performance of the play itself.<sup>16</sup> Having established the mnemonic character of dramatic, devotional imagery, Scherb contends throughout the remaining chapters of his book that different modes of spatial presentation in the plays focus the audience’s attention on different aspects of this devotional program: place-and-scaffold plays highlight specific devotional images through juxtaposition; an unmarked *platea* encourages debate and facilitates the incorporation of the audience within that debate; and large-scale plays with numerous *loca* are conducive to multiple presentations of time and place, thereby reminding the audience of the universality of the themes on display and of God’s unique, eternal perspective on them.

While I unreservedly concur with Scherb’s emphasis on the didactic power of dramatic imagery within the East Anglian corpus, and with his sense, shared with John C. Coldewey, that imagery plays a greater role in these plays than even in those of Yorkshire, Chester, and other regions of England, I nevertheless believe that his focus on memory obscures the East Anglian drama’s peculiar debt to the pedagogical tradition I have explored in the preceding chapters, and in particular to a system of meditation purportedly steeped in “lewdness” and insistent less on its practitioners’ recollection of the past than on their immediate participation, and even total immersion, in a present that nevertheless transcends temporal distinctions. In short, what I will argue in the remainder of this dissertation is that what makes plays like the

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<sup>15</sup> Scherb, *Staging Faith*, p. 46.

<sup>16</sup> Scherb, *Staging Faith*, pp. 49-50.

N-Town biblical pageants, the Croxton *Play of the Sacrament*, and the morality play *Wisdom* “East Anglian” despite their generic differences<sup>17</sup> is their refraction of popular pedagogies, their discursive imagining of their audiences in terms of their “lewdness,” and their function as what I will call in the three later divisions of this chapter contemplative, participatory, and imaginative dramas.

But in order for these dramatists to build their plays around pedagogical discourses, they would need first to have been exposed to them and second to have recognized in them a means of successfully addressing their imagined audiences. As I have already mentioned, the pedagogy of images-for-the-unlearned traditionally descended from Gregory the Great’s letters to Serenus was influential throughout medieval Christendom, and even its refraction through Nicholas Love’s *Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ* had widespread influence within England and was by no means limited to any particular region. There is, however, significant evidence that these ideas circulated within the counties of East Anglia, among both the allegedly unlearned laity—to whom works like the *Mirror*, Walter Hilton’s *Scala perfectionis*, and the drama itself were addressed—and the clergy, who, I will suggest, were also learning from these books for *lewyd peple* and who penned the play-texts.

The evidence for lay readership derives from a variety of sources. We have, of course, the testimony of Margery Kempe from Bishops Lynn in Norfolk, whose *Book* relates explicitly that she was familiar with the writings of Hilton, St. Birgitta, Richard Rolle, and Pseudo-Bonaventure, among others, and implies that she also knew a host of unacknowledged works in a similar affective vein, not least of which was the *Meditationes vitae Christi*, presumably in Love’s translation. In the absence of an abundance of accounts of lay reading from East Anglia like that of Margery’s *Book*,

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<sup>17</sup> And despite his articulating a common mnemonics of imagery, Scherb nevertheless subdivides the plays comprising the East Anglian corpus by kind in exploring his three categories of place-and-scaffold, unmarked *platea*, and large-scale with multiple *loca* plays.

we can turn to surviving manuscripts which provide a wealth of suggestive evidence. Of the forty-nine surviving complete or nearly complete manuscripts of Love's *Mirror* he has identified and surveyed, Michael G. Sargent locates the dialect of eight within Essex (Cambridge Corpus Christi College MS 143; Foyle MS, Beeleigh Abbey; Glasgow University, Hunterian Library MS 77; British Library MS Arundel 364; British Library MS Royal 18.c.x; Manchester, Chetham's Library MS 6690; Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Hatton 31; Oxford, University College MS 123); one within Essex or Suffolk (British Library MS Additional 21006); three within the collective region of East Anglia (British Library MS Arundel 112; Yale University, Beinecke Library MS 535; Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Bodley 207); and three more within the Southeast Midlands generally (Leeds, Diocesan Archives MS; British Library MS Additional 11565; Manchester, John Rylands Library MS Eng. 413).<sup>18</sup> A note in one of Sargent's two primary manuscripts, Cambridge University Library MS Additional 6578, also suggests that differences of dialect did not necessarily prevent would-be readers from navigating Love's text. Sargent identifies the place of origin of CUL MS Addit. 6578, from the early fifteenth century, as "extreme southern Northamptonshire, near modern Craughton/Aynhoe Park."<sup>19</sup> But a note in a second hand contemporary to that of the main text at the foot of f. 2<sup>v</sup> of this manuscript reads clearly: "cave de istis verbis" and advises a future reader or copyist to read the manuscript's "gude" as the familiar form "gode" and to read "hir pro heere."<sup>20</sup> The variations mentioned here are, of course, few and limited in their value for locating this subsequent reader of Addit. 6578, but the *Linguistic Atlas of Late Medieval English* reveals that "heere" for the third person plural appears more frequently in manuscripts from Norfolk than from

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<sup>18</sup> Sargent, pp. lxxii-lxxxiv.

<sup>19</sup> Sargent, p. xxii.

<sup>20</sup> "[C]ave de istis verbis gude pro gode / Item hir pro heere in plurali"; See CUL MS Addit. 6578 f. 2<sup>v</sup>; Sargent, pp. cxliv, plate 1; 243.

any other county and that five of the six manuscript witnesses to the abbreviated form “heere” are from Norfolk and Suffolk.<sup>21</sup> Furthermore, only in Lincolnshire, Nottinghamshire, and the West Riding of Yorkshire is there a greater number of manuscript witnesses for the form “gode” than in Norfolk, for which the *Linguistic Atlas* notes no occurrences of the form “gude.”<sup>22</sup> This is mere speculation, of course, but it is interesting to conjecture the possibility that this copy of Love’s *Mirror* traveled east from southern Northamptonshire, eventually finding its way into the hands of a Norfolk reader unaccustomed to the original scribe’s forms. In any event, what this gloss suggests is that books traveled during the Late Middle Ages and that manuscript provenance in no significant way determines the geographical boundaries of readership.

We need only to return to the Mount Grace Carthusians and their reading of the *Book of Margery Kempe* for a further illustration of this point. Not only did Salthouses’s East Anglian book manage to wend its way northward and along the coast to a priory in Yorkshire, but a series of glosses attributed to the Red Ink Annotator illustrates a subsequent generation’s attempts to make the text accessible to a new readership beyond that initially imagined by the *Book*’s priest-copyist-author. Thus, in a passage that speaks of Margery’s joy whenever she was “repreuyd, skornyd, or japyd,” the Red Ink Annotator has inserted a caret above *japyd* and substituted the, for him, more familiar *mokyd*.<sup>23</sup> We can only guess at his motivations, but it is worth noting that in its use in this passage in this sense, *japen* appears commonly enough among East Anglian texts according to the *Middle English Dictionary*, including, for example, the *Promptorium parvulorum*, the Paston family’s letters, the N-Town plays,

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<sup>21</sup> Angus McIntosh, M. L. Samuels, and Michael Benskin, *A Linguistic Atlas of Late Mediaeval English*, 4 vols., (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1986), 4:14.

<sup>22</sup> McIntosh, et al., *A Linguistic Atlas*, 4: 186-87.

<sup>23</sup> BL MS Addit. 61823 f. 7<sup>r</sup>; Meech and Allen, p. 13.

and John Lydgate's *Churl and the Bird*, in addition to the *Book of Margery Kempe*.<sup>24</sup> On the other hand, *japen* is used transitively in quite a different sense in the York Glovers' play of Cain and Abel, when an irascible Cain, in response to his virtuous brother's suggestion that they go for a walk, suggests to Abel: "Goo, jape þe, robard jangillande."<sup>25</sup> The *MED* cites this passage in illustration of its exceedingly polite definition 3(a) for *japen*: "To have sexual intercourse with (sb.); ?also refl[exive]." Perhaps our Carthusian annotator was a native Yorkshireman eager to avoid gratuitous insinuations of impropriety on Margery's part. More likely the word was simply less familiar, for later in the *Book* the narrator repeats himself during Margery's meditation on the Presentation of the Lord by Mary to Symeon that was inspired by Margery's presence in church on Candlemas Day as reported by the narrator: "Hir mende was al drawyn fro þe erdly thowtys & erdly syghtys & sett al to-gedyr in gostly syghtys, wech wer so delectabyl & so deuowt þat sche myth not in þe tyme of feruowr wythstondyn hir wepyng, hir sobbyn, ne hir crying, & þerfor suffyrd sche ful mech wonderyng, many a jape & many a scorne."<sup>26</sup> The Annotator again cancels *jape* and inserts above it *mok* with a caret.<sup>27</sup> The same substitution appears a third time near the end of Book I, when Christ praises Margery for praying on behalf of "alle þin enmys þat euyr dede þe schame er repref eyþyr scornyd þe er japyd þe for þe grace þat I werke in þe . . . ."<sup>28</sup>

The Red Ink Annotator similarly emends the *Book's* account of Margery's return to England from her pilgrimage to Rome. Having reached Middelburg in the Low Countries, her company determines to sail on a given Sunday for England, but

<sup>24</sup> *MED* s.v. "japen" 1(a).

<sup>25</sup> Richard Beadle, ed., *The York Plays* (London: Edward Arnold, 1982), p. 75.

<sup>26</sup> Meech and Allen, p. 198.

<sup>27</sup> BL MS Addit. 61823, f. 96<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>28</sup> Meech and Allen, p. 212; BL MS Addit. 61823, f. 103<sup>f</sup>. The Red Ink Annotator inserts *mokyd* above *japyd*, which he cancels.

God wills Margery to stay put for another week. The narrator then recounts that “[o]n þe Fryday aftyr . . . þis creatur went to sportyn hir in þe felde & men of hir owyn nacyon wyth hir.”<sup>29</sup> The Annotator here has cancelled *sportyn* and substituted *refresse* in the outer margin.<sup>30</sup> (Perhaps he was disturbed by the kind of recreation to be found in the fields of Zealand.) Elsewhere in the *Book*, Margery defiantly defends her speaking of the matter of God before the Archbishop of York, at one point echoing the woman in Luke 11:27-28 who said to Jesus: “Blyssed be þe wombe þat þe bar & þe tetys þat ʒaf þe sowkyn.”<sup>31</sup> Here the Annotator inserts a caret before *tetys* and indicates its replacement, *pappys*, in the margin. These alterations of Salthouse’s—or more accurately his exemplar’s—diction correspond to numerous instances throughout the manuscript of minor “corrections.” The Annotator restores what to him are missing prefixes, most commonly turning *gan* into *began* and *leuyn* into *beleuyn*. He reveals his own orthographic and phonological preferences (*knawyn* becomes *gnawyn*), and he substitutes *lete* and *made* for forms of *dedyn* in the phrases “dede hir etyn” and “dedyn hir sweryn.”<sup>32</sup>

Richard Beadle has similarly explored what he calls “literary geography” by mapping the composition of Middle English texts in hands identifiable with dialectal and scribal habits of Norfolk copyists.<sup>33</sup> He has, for example, shown how a northern manuscript traveled south, the reverse itinerary of the *Book of Margery Kempe*. A note in Cambridge University Library MS Ii. 4. 9. appended to a copy of Richard Rolle’s *Form of Living* by the scribe Thomas Bareyle, comments that Rolle’s work was “translat out of Northarn tunge into Sutherne that it schulde be the bettir

<sup>29</sup> Meech and Allen, p. 101.

<sup>30</sup> BL MS Addit. 61823, f. 49<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>31</sup> Meech and Allen, p. 126.

<sup>32</sup> Meech and Allen, pp. 112 and 115; BL MS Addit. 61823, ff. 54<sup>v</sup> and 55<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>33</sup> Richard Beadle, “Prolegomena to a Literary Geography of Later Medieval Norfolk,” in *Regionalism in Late Medieval Manuscripts and Texts: Essays Celebrating the Publication of A Linguistic Atlas of Late Mediaeval English*, ed. Felicity Riddy (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1991), pp. 89-108.



understandyn of men that be of the selve countre.”<sup>34</sup> Rolle was a Yorkshire native whose text necessitated “translation” for a “southern” audience resident in Norfolk. Beadle’s prolegomena concludes with a “handlist of later Middle English manuscripts copied by Norfolk scribes.”<sup>35</sup> Several items on Beadle’s list are notable for this study. Items 50, 58, 64, 80 are Norfolk copies of *Dives and Pauper*.<sup>36</sup> Item 57, British Library MS Cotton Julius F. 2, is a copy of the Middle English *Liber celestis* of St. Birgitta of Sweden. Finally, Beadle lists no fewer than eight manuscripts that contain the works, singly or in various combinations, of Nicholas Love, Richard Rolle, and Walter Hilton (items 38, 40, 42, 45, 49, 59, 61, 62).<sup>37</sup> The anonymous fifteenth-century gloss on the opening of Love’s *Mirror* in CUL MS Addit. 6578 and the Red Ink Annotator’s “correcting” of the Salthouse copy of the *Book of Margery Kempe* indicates that differences in dialect and scribal habits were not sufficient obstacles to the reading of late-medieval devotional writings in English; Richard Beadle’s study of the literary geography of fifteenth-century Norfolk reveals a vibrant and prodigious scribal culture that further made available vernacular theological texts originally written in other parts of the realm to East Anglians. Clearly, Margery Kempe and her priest were not the only readers of vernacular theology in Norfolk.

But who were these other readers? Again, our evidence is surely not as complete as we would like for it to be. Nevertheless, we can say with some certainty that a variety of kinds of readers had their hands on these texts, even if most of their names will forever remain unknown. We of course know that, on the lay side,

<sup>34</sup> CUL MS Ii. 4. 9., f. 197<sup>v</sup>; quoted in Beadle, “Prolegomena,” p. 93.

<sup>35</sup> Beadle, “Prolegomena,” pp. 102-08.

<sup>36</sup> Barnum, 1:xi-xv, classifies these three manuscripts, Glasgow, University Library, Hunterian MS 270 and British Library MSS Harley 149, Royal 17. C. xxi., and Douce 295, as the bulk of her A group (Barnum’s sigla G, H, R, and D, respectively). Barnum notes the existence of four additional copies of *Dives and Pauper* plus four more fragments and three printed versions by Richard Pynson, Wynkyn de Worde, and Thomas Berthelet. Barnum uses G for the base-text of her Early English Text Society edition of *Dives and Pauper*.

<sup>37</sup> Beadle, “Prolegomena,” p. 100, also notes as potentially suggestive the number of manuscripts circulating within Norfolk that contain Book I alone of Hilton’s *Scala perfectionis*.

Margery Kempe was an avid reader, or perhaps more appropriately an avid auditor, of the works of Love, Rolle, Hilton, various Pseudo-Bonaventures, and Birgitta of Sweden. Carol M. Meale and Felicity Riddy have established the socially wide-ranging readership among women of many of the books and treatises in question, several of them from East Anglia; Riddy especially notes the fluidity of the book exchange between nuns and lay, gentry-class women.<sup>38</sup> Norman Tanner cites the example of a “bourgeois” Norwich widow, Margaret Purdans, whose will dates from 1481. Tanner summarizes her bequests as follows:

She left an “English psalter” to a priest and her “small psalter” to her son. To the Franciscan nuns of Bruisyard in Suffolk she left “Le Doctrine of the Herte” which was presumably a translation of *De doctrina cordis*, the treatise addressed to a woman on how to lead a devout life which was usually ascribed to Bishop Grosseteste of Lincoln. She left her “English book of Satin Bridget” to the Benedictine nuns of Thetford; and to a certain Alice Barly she left “a book called Hylton” which was presumably a work by Walter Hilton, the fourteenth-century English mystic.<sup>39</sup>

Margery Kempe, then, was not alone among Norwich laywomen reading Birgitta and Hilton, and, also like Margery, Margaret’s reading reciprocally enabled the reading of professional religious, here the Benedictine nuns of Thetford who inherited her copy of what Margery would probably have called “Brydys boke.”<sup>40</sup>

The surviving manuscripts of Love’s *Mirror* offer interesting testimony to the wide readership for this book supposedly written for people of simple understanding. The gloss on f. 2<sup>v</sup> of the Cambridge University Library MS 6578 copy of the *Mirror*, “caue de istis libris,” etc., is certainly the work of a learned reader who had familiarized himself with the text sufficiently to comment on its linguistic stumbling blocks. A set of fixed, learned Latin glosses accompany many of the surviving

<sup>38</sup> Meale, “. . . alle the bokes;” Riddy, ““Women talking,”” pp. 107-110 and 119, n. 14.

<sup>39</sup> Norman P. Tanner, *The Church in Late Medieval Norwich, 1370-1532*, Studies and Texts 66 (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1984), p. 112.

<sup>40</sup> For the religious education of the laity, see Tanner, *The Church in Late Medieval Norwich*, pp. 110-112; Pantin, *The English Church in the Fourteenth Century*, pp. 253-62.

manuscripts, including CUL MS 6578.<sup>41</sup> East Anglia, then, presents us with a region of England in which books for lewd people were in serious demand and plentiful supply, were copied by native scribes in native dialects, and were circulated and read by and among clerical and lay, learned and unlearned audiences alike. The evidence for these mixed audiences will help explain away, as I will suggest in the following sections, some of the traditional cruxes of East Anglian drama scholarship. And it is against this backdrop that we set the stage for a discussion of East Anglian drama.

### I. “Of Holy Wrytte þis game xal bene”: Contemplative Drama (the N-Town Plays)

British Library MS Cotton Vespasian D. 8 contains a collection of dramatic presentations of biblical material now most commonly known as the “N-Town Plays” in accord with the Third Vexillator’s pronouncement at the conclusion of the text’s proclamation play that

A Sunday next, yf þat we may,  
At vj of þe belle we gynne oure play  
In N-town . . . (Pr.525-27)<sup>42</sup>

<sup>41</sup> Others that I have examined include CUL MS Addit. 6686, Sargent’s second base manuscript for his edition of the *Mirror*; CUL MS Ll. 4. 3, an opulent and highly ornate manuscript whose Latin glosses even commence with decorative initials in blue and red inks; CUL MS Mm. 5. 15; Cambridge, Trinity College MS B. 15. 16; Cambridge, Trinity College MS B. 15. 32; British Library MS Addit. 21006, a messy copy clearly intended for use rather than presentation that nevertheless preserves the glosses; BL Royal 18. c. x; BL Arundel 364; BL Arundel 112; BL MS Addit. 30031; BL MS Addit. 19901, which also includes additional glosses in a later hand; and BL MS Addit. 11565. The extent to which the standard Latin marginal glosses survive varies from manuscript to manuscript, but it is worth noting that all of these manuscripts preserve some trace of the Latin commentary.

<sup>42</sup> Stephen Spector, ed., *The N-Town Play: Cotton MS Vespasian D. 8*, 2 vols., Early English Text Society Supplemental Series nos. 11-12 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 1:21. Hereafter all references to the N-Town Plays will be to this edition and will appear parenthetically in the text citing the play number followed by the line numbers according to Spector’s numeration. Spector identifies the proclamation play separately and begins with “The Creation of Heaven; The Fall of Lucifer” as Play I. “N-Town” has generally superseded previous designations including “the Hegge plays,” after the manuscript’s first documented owner and on the model of the Towneley plays, and the infamous *Ludus Coventriae*, derived from a note by Richard James, librarian of Sir Robert Bruce Cotton, on the flyleaf of Cotton Vespasian D. 8, which reads in part “Contenta novi testamenti scenice expressa et actitat olim per monachos sive Fratres mendicantes vulgo dicitur hic liber Ludus Coventriae sive ludus corporis Christi scribitur metris Anglicanis.” See Spector, *The N-Town Play*, 1:5. James, notoriously, has almost all of his facts wrong: there is no evidence associating the plays with player-monks or – mendicants, with the Feast of Corpus Christi, and least of all with Coventry. For a summary of the

The manuscript contains some forty-two plays recounting salvation history from the Creation to Judgment Day—this last play is unfortunately incomplete—including a proclamation play, also known as the banns, announcing the impending performance.<sup>43</sup>

Unlike its sister biblical cycles, there is no evidence linking the production of the individual pageants to guilds, and indeed it is likely that the apparent sense of unity inherent in the plays' preservation in a single manuscript conceals a complex process

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arguments made for attributions to Coventry, Lincoln, Norwich, and East Anglia generally, see Alan J. Fletcher, "The N-Town Plays," in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval English Theatre*, ed. Richard Beadle (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 164-65. More recently, Gail McMurray Gibson, "Bury St. Edmunds, Lydgate, and the *N-Town Cycle*," *Speculum* 56 (1981), 56-90, has made the case for Bury St. Edmunds in Suffolk while suggesting the influence of the Bury monk and prolific literary heir to Chaucer and composer of mummings, John Lydgate, as "[a]t the very least . . . a literary influence on the composition of the *N-Town Cycle*" (p. 90). Fletcher, "The N-Town Plays," pp. 166-67, has posited another East Anglian site, Thetford in southern Norfolk, largely based on the presence of a Cluniac priory there known to have financially supported the production of plays in the surrounding community and whose residents, Fletcher argues, would have been more likely to have noted on f. 74<sup>v</sup> the Feast of the Translation of St. Mary Magdalene given their continental connections and the general rarity of the feast's celebration within the English Church.

Throughout my discussion of the biblical dramas contained in Cotton Vespasian D. 8, I will prefer the plural appellation "N-Town plays," emphasizing, unlike Spector's title though not his scholarship, the composite nature of the manuscript. For the archaeology of the manuscript, see Fletcher, "The N-Town Plays," pp. 167-72, who in the course of describing the process of the manuscript's composition also reviews scholarly opinion favoring either a unifying approach to the individual plays and sequences of plays or an emphasis on the individuality of the Creation-to-Doom cycle's parts. Fletcher's solution to these opposing approaches is to seek the middle ground occupied by a medieval *compilator* who, while never penning a verse of his own, nevertheless sometimes artfully and sometimes artlessly assembled preexisting plays by moving parts around, altering stage directions, and recombining material into new plays perhaps never performed by any medieval troupe. Fletcher, pp. 177 and 178, concludes, however, that the compiler's tendency toward expansion of his materials and inclusiveness "implies no concomitant obligation for users of the *compilatio* to engage with all its compiled material; on the contrary, it facilitates their scope for *choice*" with the sloppily reworked "Proclamation Play" as a kind of *accessus* to what followed. Fletcher states that "[t]o view N-Town as a *compilatio* is to expose the modernity of the ideologies underpinning both these modern approaches; it is also to remind us that the past is a country where people do things differently." For discussions of the manuscript's various textual strata based on prosody see the various contributions of Stephen Spector: *The Genesis of the N-town Cycle* (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1988) [essentially the published version of Spector's dissertation]; "The Composition and Development of an Eclectic Manuscript: Cotton Vespasian D VIII," *Leeds Studies in English* 9 (1977), 62-83; and *The N-Town Play*, 2:537-43. Stevens, *Four Middle English Mystery Cycles*, pp. 182-84, questions the validity of what he calls "the stanzaic stratification theory," on the grounds that it unjustifiably proscribes artistic capabilities of a literary author, a conclusion with which I firmly agree.

<sup>43</sup> Similar banns appear in the manuscripts of the *Castle of Perseverance* and the *Croxton Play of the Sacrament*, attesting to the probably originally professional performance contexts of much surviving East Anglian dramatic literature. Spector, *The N-Town Play*, numbers his plays from 1-42 exclusive of the proclamation play. Cotton Vespasian D. 8, however, omits a play 17, so Spector's edition, in fact, contains only forty-two plays *including* the unnumbered proclamation play. For the missing play 17, see Spector, *The N-Town Play*, 2:473.

of compilation by a single *compiler*. What is unlikely is that the forty-two extant plays were ever performed continuously as a single dramatic enactment of the Creation-to-Doom cycle, as was the case with the annual production for the Feast of Corpus Christi at York. Recent scholarship has tended to view Cotton Vespasian D. 8 as a literary manuscript for reading rather than as a dramatic prompt book or as an official register of plays for consultation by civic playmasters, as was the case also at York, where the single surviving manuscript of the Corpus Christi pageants, British Library Manuscript Additional 35290, was used to confirm that individual guilds adhered to pre-approved scripts.<sup>44</sup>

The excavation of the manuscript, the conditions of historical performance, the identity and intentions of the compiler—this is ground that has been amply treaded in the scholarship, generating many worthwhile questions, if rarely any indisputable answers. My own interest in the N-Town plays, however, lies elsewhere. Irrespective of whether a single compiler reorganized pre-existing scripts into a single, literary manuscript bearing traces of one kind or another of his own genius—a proposition I find convincing—I want to suggest that several of the component parts of the larger

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<sup>44</sup> For the York Register and its function, see Richard Beadle and Peter Meredith with Richard Rastall, eds., *The York Play: A Facsimile of British Library MS Additional 35290*, Medieval Drama Facsimiles VII (Leeds: The University of Leeds School of English, 1983), pp. ix-x. An entry from the York City Chamberlains' books dated 1538 suggests the original purpose behind the compilation of the York Register in the fifteenth century. The record concerns lease payments for viewing posts along the processional route of the pageants: "In primis the ffyrst place at Trenytie yaites where as the Comon Clerke kepys the Registre wherefore that place goith free nihil." See Alexandra F. Johnston and Margaret Rogerson, eds., *Records of Early English Drama: York*, 2 vols. (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1979), 1:263. For additional records which suggest that MS Addit. 35290 is indeed the Register mentioned in the City Chamberlains' book, see Stevens, *Four Middle English Mystery Cycles*, pp. 36-37. As these documents, along with the Register itself, make clear, this dramatic spectacle took the shape of some fifty pageants representing biblical and extra-biblical events tracing the course of salvation history from the Creation to the Final Judgment. Each pageant was produced by a local religious, merchant, or craft guild, or by several guilds in concert, and processed along a variable route. Several of the individual pageants employed large wagons to transport their materials and cast, and to function as what we might call scenery. The plays stopped at multiple sites along the route where the performers began their scene anew, until all of the individual productions had progressed through each of the playing locations, a process which could last upwards of eighteen hours. This dramatic procession was performed annually on the Feast of Corpus Christi.

cycle evince, despite their disparate origins, a common source of inspiration. These plays spring from the prevalence of texts influenced by Gregorian pedagogies of lay instruction. Linguistic and codicological evidence suggests that the meditative system promulgated by Nicholas Love and Walter Hilton was particularly valued within East Anglia and that we are therefore not remiss in identifying links among the various pieces of a so-called “N-Town cycle” that unite disparate plays with common regional and devotional roots.

That N-Town owes a debt perhaps unique in its extent among the four major cycles of biblical drama—which include, in addition to N-Town, York, Towneley or Wakefield, and Chester—to Nicholas Love’s *Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ* is hardly an original observation. The incorporation of scenes peculiar to Love’s rendering of salvation history in the plays as well as the two texts’ shared thematic emphases has long been recognized.<sup>45</sup> The *Mirror* as a source or analogue for N-Town’s dramatic presentation is most evident in the plays that recount the pre-Nativity life of the Blessed Virgin Mary—Spector’s Plays 7-14—culminating in “The Trial of Mary and Joseph,” and in the two Passion sequences (Plays 16-28 and 29ff.<sup>46</sup>). The manuscript history here is complicated and suggests something of the process of compilation and interpolation that produced Cotton Vespasian D. 8 in its present form. An analysis of the pageants listed individually within the proclamation play reveals, for example, the addition of three Marian scenes (the plays of Joachim and Anna, Mary’s parents; Mary’s presentation in the Temple; and the Visitation) into the cycle not accounted for by the banns. Scholars have advanced the idea that the final scribe-

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<sup>45</sup> For a brief summary of N-Town’s debt to Love, see Spector, *The N-Town Play*, 1:xliv-xlv; Spector’s commentary on individual plays, e.g., 2:451-60 (Play 11, “The Parliament of Heaven; The Salutation and Conception”), 462-67 (Play 13, “The Visit to Elizabeth”), 475-76 (Play 19, “The Purification”), 519-22 (Play 35, “The Harrowing of Hell [Part II]; Christ’s Appearance to Mary; Pilate and the Soldiers”); and Spector’s Appendix I, esp. 2:539-40.

<sup>46</sup> The end of Passion Play II is unclear in Cotton Vespasian D. 8.

compiler of N-Town here combined elements from an initial exemplar that included the proclamation play and a series of pageants that followed the order announced in those banns with an originally independent Mary play: the resulting composite text follows the original exemplar through Play 7 (“Jesse Root”) before copying the next two pageants (Play 8, “Joachim and Anna,” and Play 9, “The Presentation of Mary in the Temple”) from the separate Mary play. Play 10, “The Marriage of Mary and Joseph,” is itself a composite pageant derived from both the original exemplar and the Mary play. For Play 11, “The Parliament of Heaven; The Salutation and Conception,” the compiler disregarded the original exemplar’s version of the Annunciation in favor of the Mary play. The compiler returned the original pageants for Play 12, “Joseph’s Doubt,” but borrowed from the Mary play one final time for the episode of the Visitation, absent from the exemplar, in Play 13, and with Play 14, “The Trial of Mary and Joseph,” he resumed copying the exemplar.<sup>47</sup> The two Passion sequences likewise represent interpolations of separately existing plays into the proclamation-exemplar.<sup>48</sup>

The verbal and structural parallels with not only the Pseudo-Bonaventurean *Meditationes vitae Christi* generally but Nicholas Love’s Englishing of the *Meditationes* specifically have been noted.<sup>49</sup> Spector’s commentary on the individual pageants faithfully records these debts, and it is not my intention to rehearse here a case for a source has already been convincingly made by others, especially since I have no new parallels to add. That the pageants most heavily derivative of the *Meditationes* tradition cluster around the narratives of Mary’s early life and the

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<sup>47</sup> This account of the amalgamation of the proclamation-exemplar and the independent Mary play is derived from Fletcher, “The N-Town Plays,” pp. 168-70. Peter Meredith, ed., *The Mary Play from the N. Town Manuscript*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1997), attempts to reconstruct, to the extent possible, the original Mary play from which the N-Town compiler so heavily borrowed.

<sup>48</sup> Fletcher, “The N-Town Plays,” pp. 170-76; Stevens, *Four Middle English Mystery Cycles*, pp. 202-08. Passion Play II eventually blends back into the proclamation-exemplar, though Stevens argues for a palpable shift in action with the conclusion of Play 37, “The Appearance to Mary Magdalene.”

<sup>49</sup> Sargent, pp. lxvi-lxix.

Passion also comes as no surprise. Given the popularity of Love's *Mirror* within East Anglia, it would be a much more difficult task to have to prove that the playwrights responsible for the dramatic *vitae* of Mary and Jesus were *not* influenced by Love. Thus it comes as no surprise that N-Town's depiction of the Deposition offers the only staging of the *pietà* motif in an English biblical cycle, as Spector has observed, but that a similar dramatic appropriation of that theme can also be found in other East Anglian, non-biblical plays, including the Digby *Mary Magdalene*, and, of course, in Love's *Mirror*.<sup>50</sup> In that regard, these dramatists are rather like their contemporary Margery Kempe, whose dramatic meditative reenactments of the Gospels rely equally heavily on Love's *Mirror* for their Marian and Passion content.

Recently, Richard Beadle has begun to look beyond these verbal, motivic, and structural parallels between the N-Town plays and the *Mirror* in order to arrive at a more nuanced appreciation for the plays' relationship to Love's meditative theory. Beadle remarks, for instance, on "the performative element in the narrative of the *Mirror*" and on its "dramatic quality."<sup>51</sup> Conversely, he has also commented on the not coincidental introduction of an expositor-persona in both the Marian pageants derived from the independent play and Passion Play II, a figure notably called "Contemplacio." Beadle observes further:

As it happens, quite a number of the manuscripts and early printed editions of Love's *Mirror* have the word 'Contemplacio' inserted as a marginal notation against various passages where the reader or listener is encouraged to exercise what Love characteristically calls 'devout imagination'; that is, to imagine themselves as physically present at the biblical episode which is being described, such as the Nativity, or the Crucifixion, or . . . the angelic Salutation. Given the use made by the N-Town dramatist of Love's *Mirror* as a direct source, it is not surprising that it has been suggested that he also adopted the marginal 'Contemplacio' from a manuscript, adopting it as the

<sup>50</sup> Spector, *The N-Town Play*, 2:518. The relevant N-Town stage direction reads: "Here Joseph and Nychodeumus takyn Cryst of þe cros, on on o ledyr and þe tother on another leddy. And quan [he] is had down, Joseph leyth hym in oure Ladys lappe . . ." (34.121+ s.d.).

<sup>51</sup> Beadle, "'Devoute ymaginacioun,'" p. 7.



name for the expository figure who temporarily takes on a full dramatic identity to participate in the action. . . .<sup>52</sup>

I want to propose, moreover, that the points of contact between the *Mirror* and the N-Town plays are more numerous than Beadle's already suggestive observations imply and that the consequences for a dramatic method derived directly from Love's meditative theory are far-reaching. I therefore want to push the discussion of the influence of Love on these plays beyond the realm of verbal or formal parallels by citing what I believe can hardly be a coincidental conjunction of features of this dramatization of Scripture—this "game of Holy Writ" (Pr.520)—that allow us to think of the performances hinted at in Cotton Vespasian D. 8 as contemplative drama.

Beginning at the beginning, the banners already hint at the affective power of drama, reminding us of Archbishop Pecham's maxim that *ibi oculos, ubi est affectus*, and of the continuous assault on the visual sense in the writings of Walter Hilton, Nicholas Love, Margery Kempe, and others. In a suggestive echo of Julian of Norwich's diction in describing her own visionary experiences, the three expositors of the proclamation play repeatedly emphasize the actors' intention to *show* salvation history to the audience, as in the First Vexillator's representative initiatory pronouncement:

We xal 3ou *shewe* as þat we kan  
 How þat þis werd fyrst began,  
 And how God made bothe molde and man,  
 Iff þat 3e wyl abyde (Pr.10-13; emphasis mine).

Their "game" will culminate, they promise, in a visually spectacular presentation of the Final Judgment intended to accomplish the plays' twin goals of entertainment and conversion by means of their affective potential:

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<sup>52</sup> Beadle, "'Devoute ymaginacioun,'" p. 5. Beadle refers to the suggestion made by Rosemary Woolf, *The English Mystery Plays* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972), p. 382, n. 21, that the N-Town expositor is a derivation of the *Mirror*'s marginal glosses. For useful, though occasionally outdated, study of *Contemplacio*, see Sister M. Patricia Forrest, O.S.F., "The Role of the Expositor *Contemplacio* in the St. Anne's Day Plays of the Hegge Cycle," *Mediaeval Studies* 28 (1966), 60-76.

The xl<sup>ti</sup> pagent xal be þe last,<sup>53</sup>  
 And Domysday þat pagent xal hyth.  
*Who se þat pagent may be agast*  
 To grevyn his Lord God eyther day or nyth.  
 The erth xal qwake, bothe breke and brest,  
 Beryelys and gravys xul ope ful tyth;  
 Ded men xul rysyn, and þat þer in hast,  
 And fast to here ansuere þei xul hem dyth  
 Beffore Godys face.  
*But prente wyl þis in zoure mende:*  
 Whoso to God hath be vnkende,  
 Frenchep þer xal he non fynde,  
 Ne þer get he no grace (Pr.503-15; emphasis mine).

Open graves yawning forth their newly animated inhabitants invoke terror—not terror occasioned by the theatrical artifice of quaking earth, but rather the fear of finding oneself on the wrong hand of Christ at the Judgment. No doubt the players hoped to get a rise out of their audience by means of captivating pyrotechnics, but equally important is the message to be “imprinted on the mind,” namely to fear God in this life or suffer in the next. The banns prepare the audience for a series of visually stimulating performances in which success is bound up in the spectators’ affective response.

Yet this is true of all theater. We need to offer a more compelling case for the East Anglian situation. In a series of articles and in a book, Denise L. Despres has persuasively demonstrated that participatory meditation prepared the meditator for penance, a conclusion that has, I believe, implications for a more positive view of the theater that that commonly held by the Fathers, especially Augustine and Tertullian. Despres argues that affective meditation of the kind endorsed by Nicholas Love and embodied by Margery Kempe was not simply one mode of pious expression among many available to the late-medieval laity nor that its primary function was chiefly

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<sup>53</sup> Because of the interpolation of the Marian and Passion matter into the proclamation-exemplar, the numbering of the plays is off in the proclamation play, despite the compiler’s frustrated attempts to synchronize the banns with what follows.

mnemonic, that is, practiced for the sake only of recalling seminal events from salvation history. Rather, according to Despres, meditation enabled the layperson to prepare his or her soul for penance.<sup>54</sup> She argues for a Franciscan tradition of penitential meditation in which the imagined progress of Christ's life results in a mindfulness on the part of the meditating penitent of his or her own moral progress. Narrative form, moreover, is not merely accidental in the Franciscan tradition; rather narrative "becomes a vehicle for the development" of a relationship between the meditator and Christ.<sup>55</sup> This focus on narrative's role as a meditative and even a mystical, rather than a purely recollective, practice consequently justifies these texts sanctioning of imaginative departures from the literal text of Scripture. Despres remarks that for Franciscan meditation, "[t]he issue is not whether such occurrences actually happened, but whether they are morally 'true' and thus fulfil the primary function of meditation: to teach us how to live."<sup>56</sup>

It is this sort of preparation for penitential conversion that *Contemplacio* seems to have in mind in his introduction to *Passion Play II* when he implores his spectators to "kepe þe Passyon in 3oure mende, þat xal be shewyd here" (29.8) and "to take good hede þeratte" (29.20). In its staging of the Crucifixion, the N-Town compiler confronts his audience with a scene straight out of the *Mirror* (or the *Scala perfectionis* or the *Book of Margery Kempe*). This penitential, dramatic narrative begins on the road to Calvary and follows Jesus on the *via crucis* to Golgotha in a "processe" of mounting pathos. The staging of the nailing of Jesus to the cross

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<sup>54</sup> See, e.g., Denise L. Despres, "Memory and Image: The Dissemination of a Franciscan Meditative Text," *Mystics Quarterly* 16 (1990), pp. 133-34, 141; "The Meditative Art of Scriptural Interpolation in *The Book of Margery Kempe*," *The Downside Review* 106 (1988), p. 253; *Ghostly Sights: Visual Meditation in Late-Medieval Literature* (Norman: Pilgrim Books, 1989), pp. 25-26; "Franciscan Spirituality: Margery Kempe and Visual Meditation," *Fourteenth-Century English Mystics Newsletter* 11 (1985), p. 14.

<sup>55</sup> Despres, "Meditative Art," p. 255.

<sup>56</sup> Despres, "Meditative Art," p. 255.

includes the Jews' realization that the pre-bored holes in the cross do not align with Jesus' palms. This same discovery is made by the four *milites* in the York version of the Crucifixion, where it is played to great comic effect by four incompetent torturers who are routinely overcome by the cross itself. The humorous effect was undoubtedly heightened in performance since this pageant was the work of the York pinners' guild, local producers of nails. The situation in N-Town, however, is markedly different, especially following Contemplacio's preparatory, penitential prologue. Thus the exchange among the play's four *Judei* promotes sobriety over levity:

Quartus Judeus:	Pis mete, take good hede, Pulle out þat arm to þe sore.
Primus Judeus:	Pis short—þe deuyl hym sped!— Be a large fote and more.
Secundus Judeus:	Fest on a rop and pulle hym long, And I xal drawe þe ageyn. Spare we not þese ropys strong, Pow we brest both flesch and veyn.
Tercius Judeus:	Dryve in þe nayl anon, lete se, And loke and þe flesch and senues well last.
Quartus Judeus:	Pat I graunt, so mote I the! Lo, þis nayl is dreve ryth wel and fast.
Primus Judeus:	Fest a rop þan to his feet, And drawe hym down long anow.
Secundus Judeus:	Here is a nayl for both, good and greet; I xal dryve it thorwe, I make avow (32.61-76).

Prompted by Contemplacio to ruminate on Jesus' suffering as preparation for penitence, the play progresses toward an act of interior conversion through an accumulation of suffering.

The Contemplacio plays, and the Marian pageants in particular, also remind us of Nicholas Love's insistence that whenever it is said "þat þus dide or þus spakeoure lorde Jesus or oper þat bene spoken of, & it mowe not be preuet by holi writ or

grondet in expresse seyinges of holy doctours, it sal be taken none oþerwyes þan as a devuoute meditacion, þat it miȝt be so spoken or done.”<sup>57</sup> Many of the scenes of Mary’s early life, including her presentation at the Temple or her trial with Joseph for fornication, are apocryphal. The Noah play also includes an interpolated episode in which the blind archer Lamech is misguided by his boy into shooting and killing Cain, thereby calling down upon himself the seven-fold vengeance threatened by God in Genesis 4:15 against anyone who might slay Abel’s murderer.<sup>58</sup>

Lamech’s (and Cain’s) misfortunes in the N-Town Noah play find artistic expression elsewhere in East Anglia as one of the more than a thousand extraordinary roof bosses appearing in Norwich Cathedral. Like the N-Town plays, these decorative stone ornaments, some as large as two feet across, narrate the major stories of the Bible beginning with Creation in the nave and concluding with a separate apocalyptic sequence of some one hundred bosses in the south and west walks of the attached cloisters, the only major surviving part of what was once a thriving Benedictine monastery.<sup>59</sup> The oldest extant bosses are in the cloister walks and date from the early fourteenth century. The nave bosses, which act as keystones at the junction of the vaulting’s ribs, date from the time of the roof’s reconstruction after the previous roof’s destruction in a 1463 fire. They span a series of fourteen bays from the choir to the main portal at the west end of the nave. The golden face of God signals the beginning of the narrative sequence in the easternmost of the bays, with the first bay ending in Lamech’s inadvertent slaying of Cain. This final boss of the Creation sequence—the

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<sup>57</sup> Sargent, p. 11.

<sup>58</sup> In Genesis, Lamech appears as one of the descendents of Cain. Lamech laments to his two wives that he has killed a man, and that if Cain was avenged sevenfold, he will be avenged seventy-sevenfold. See Genesis 4:17-24.

<sup>59</sup> Martial Rose and Julia Hedgecoe, *Stories in Stone: The Medieval Roof Carvings of Norwich Cathedral* (London: Herbert Press, 1997); Martial Rose with Ken Harvey, *The Norwich Apocalypse: The Cycle of Vault Carvings in the Cloisters of Norwich Cathedral* (Norwich: University of East Anglia Centre of East Anglian Studies, 1999).

second bay contains the Noah story—depicts Lamech, decked in red and holding his bow, and his servant facing the figure of Cain who stands opposite and below Lamech. An arrow pierces Cain’s chest and a generous stream of blood stains his clothes.<sup>60</sup> There is no direct connection between the roughly contemporaneous N-Town and Norwich Cathedral depictions of the Lamech episode. As Martial Rose notes, the N-Town Lamech scene is unusual in its interruption for dramatic purposes of the Noah story. Nor can we attributed a didactic rather than a decorative function to the boss, which, at a height of some eighty feet off the ground, could not have been intended as a book for the lewd people below who would be hard-pressed, especially without the aid of artificial lighting, to see it. But its presence in these two forms of artistic production reflect a common, specifically East Anglian approach to imaginative re-creation of Scripture influenced by orthodox attitudes toward imaginative biblical interpolation. Indeed, the kinds of “realistic” intrusions made by Margery Kempe’s “caudle” and “baselard knife,” so strenuously opposed by her literal-minded, Reforming readers, accord with the spirit of the Cathedral’s sculptors: for example, in a scene depicting Abraham’s hospitality toward the angels sent him by God to deliver news of Sarah’s impending motherhood, one of the heavenly messengers is seated before a table set with a hunk of bread, what Martial Rose identifies as “a covered dish of salt,” a plate of cooked fowl, half a wheel of cheese, and a very conspicuous knife.<sup>61</sup>

Another hallmark of Nicholas Love’s *Mirror* is, of course, its propounding of “ghostly” biblical hermeneutics to be practiced by lewd readers of his Gospel paraphrase. Recent approaches to the N-Town plays have stressed Cotton Vespasian D. 8’s form as a *compilatio* for devout reading rather than performance. As a

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<sup>60</sup> This boss is visible on the back cover of Rose and Hedgecoe, *Stories in Stone*, and is discussed briefly on pp. 67 and 70.

<sup>61</sup> Rose, *Stories in Stone*, p. 54.

*compilatio* of biblical lore in the vernacular, these plays invite interpretation by lay readers. Thus, Alan J. Fletcher has suggested that during the Last Supper in Passion Play I, Jesus engages in a bit of mystical exegesis, what the actor playing Jesus calls “gostly interpretacyon” (27.395).<sup>62</sup> In an stunning act of self-reflexive interpretation, Jesus “reads” the literal occurrence of the Last Supper in a “ghostly” way at the very moment of its sacramental institution:

And as in þe olde lawe it was comawndyd and precepte  
 To ete þis lomb to þe dystruccyon of Pharao vnkende,  
 So to dystroy 3oure gostly enmye þis xal be kepte  
 For 3oure paschal lombe into þe werdys ende.

For þis is þe very lombe withowte spot of synne  
 Of weche Johan þe Baptyst dede prophesy  
 Whan þis prophesye he dede begynne,  
 Seyng, ‘Ecce Agnus Dey’.

And how 3e xal ete þis lombe I xal 3eve infformacyon  
 In þe same forme as þe eld lawe doth specyfye,  
 As I shewe be gostly interpretacyon;  
 Perfore to þat I xal sey, 3oure wyttys loke 3e repleye.

With no byttyr bred þis bred ete xal be:  
 Pat is to say, with no byttyrnesse of hate and envye,  
 But with þe suete bred of loue and charyté,  
 Weche fortetyet þe soule gretlye. (27.385-96)

Jesus invokes the sacrificial lamb of the Passover of Exodus and allegorically reveals himself to be the spotless lamb whose immolation effects the conquering of death. He explicitly acknowledges the necessity for interpreting the types of the Old Testament and recognizing their fulfillment in the anti-types of the New Testament.<sup>63</sup>

In the Play of Jesse, which in the N-Town manuscript occupies the traditional position assigned to Prophet plays that conventionally bridge Old and New Testament

<sup>62</sup> Fletcher, “The N-Town Plays,” p. 183.

<sup>63</sup> For the application of hermeneutical typology to the drama and a discussion of the requirements for types and anti-types, see Stevens, *Four Middle English Mystery Cycles*, pp. 221-23.

pageants, Solomon and Daniel provide a kind of final gloss on the preceding plays and hint at the importance of interpreting the narratives of the Old Law for their “ghostly” significance in what is to come. Solomon presents himself to the audience as the builder of the Temple and, like Jesus in the Passion Play, he immediately supplants his the significance of the historical Temple with its mystical meaning:

I am Salamon, þe secunde kynge,  
 And þat wurthy temple, forsothe, made I,  
 Which þat is fygure of þat mayde 3ynge  
 Pat xal be modyr of grett Messy (7.41-44; emphasis mine).

The physical Temple in Jerusalem figures Mary’s womb with the Holy of Holies displaced by the Savior. Solomon initiates a series of prophecies about the virgin conception from the descendents of Jesse and from the Prophets, including Daniel, who reports seeing a tree “[i]n fygure”: “All þe fendys of hell xall ben affrayd/Whan maydenys frute þeron þei se” (7.62-64). About Jesus’ interpretation of the Last Supper, Fletcher offers this astute observation:

Moments like this when exegesis is thoroughly enmeshed in the very narrative of the drama, when it surfaces, as it were, to be dramatised in its own right, may be a clue to what the playwrights of N-Town, consciously or unconsciously, were doing: they were making exegesis into a game, and this not only where exegesis is explicitly enacted in the drama’s narrative, as happens in Passion Play I. In a more general sense too, the polysemous play of signs mentioned earlier could be regarded as drama’s counterpart to exegesis, as an extension into dramatic terms of exegetical awareness: the *sensus litteralis* of the narrative is glossed and re-glossed into multivalence by a drama which, like exegesis itself, liberates audiences from the necessity of limiting apprehension of meaning to single possibilities.<sup>64</sup>

In Fletcher’s assessment, those N-Town playwrights sound remarkably like Nicholas Love, who invites the same non-literal reading of the events that he so dramatically presents for contemplation. Love’s and the playwrights’ shared sense of the exegesis’s “game”—the very word the *vexillatores* use to describe their entire

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<sup>64</sup> Fletcher, “The N-Town Plays,” p. 183.



dramatic enterprise in the banns—extends even to the presence of the same unwitting and disappointingly literal audience for Jesus’ pronouncements in both the *Mirror*’s account of Jesus calming the storm and the Passion Play’s re-enactment of the Last Supper: the apostles. In both instances, Jesus, master of that notoriously interpretable of forms, the parable, insists on his followers’ openness to the variety of meanings possible in all of his deeds. Both the readers (or auditors) of Love’s *Mirror* and the spectators (or readers) of the N-Town plays are invited to recognize themselves among Jesus’ inner circle, more spiritually attuned to his message than even the befuddled disciples, who always seem at least a step behind. In emphasizing Cotton Vespasian D. 8’s unity despite its many layers and its typological organization, Martin Stevens concludes that the N-Town manuscript

was designed to be read thematically and structurally as a dramatized life of Jesus within the yet larger framework of salvation history. Its playwright, no matter how he might have assembled and revised the extant text, took great care to present an artfully wrought dramatic whole. He gave us the Corpus Christi cycle in which typology is brought to its full power as a dramatic structuring device.<sup>65</sup>

In so doing, the N-Town reviser also presents a text that reflects many of the pedagogical precepts current in fifteenth-century England. Perhaps, then, it is no coincidence that in his debut in the plays, Contemplacio announces the “processe” of Mary’s life to be performed, echoing the very language used by Love to describe his meditative scenes as he promises his audience that “it xulde nat be tedyous/To lernyd nyn to lewd, nyn to no man of reson” (8.14-15).

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<sup>65</sup> Stevens, *Four Middle English Mystery Cycles*, p. 257.

II. “A new passyoun”: Participatory Drama (the Croxton *Play of the Sacrament*, *Mankind*, the Brome *Abraham*)

Another East Anglian playwright likewise turns pedagogical discourse into dramaturgy in the course of writing a professional play for lewd people. The so-called Croxton *Play of the Sacrament* dramatizes the misadventures of a hapless band of Muhammad-worshipping Jews and their leader Jonathas, residents of the city of Heraclea in Aragon, who persuade the Christian merchant Aristorius to procure for them a consecrated Communion wafer so that they might disprove the doctrine of transubstantiation. After some initial resistance and much haggling, Aristorius’s conscience yields to greed and the Christian agrees to assist Jonathas and his cohorts. He incapacitates the priest Isoder with drink, sneaks off to the church, and obtains the host. Aristorius sells the Host to the Jews, and these latter transport the wafer to a mock altar where they subject it to various tortures. They first pierce the Host with daggers in five places. Jonathas and his company are taken aback when the wafer begins to bleed, and they quickly try to toss the host into a cauldron of boiling oil. Their intentions are frustrated, however, by a recalcitrant wafer that stubbornly refuses to separate itself from Jonathas’s hand. His companions seize Jonathas and set about nailing the wafer to a post, hand and all if necessary. But the host proves indeed more cunning than the Jews, whose exclamations of bewilderment at the dismemberment of Jonathas’s hand are comically interrupted by the ill-timed entrance of the Flemish doctor Brundyche. The Jews chase away the doctor and his assistant, and a dazed Jonathas orders his men to unfasten his sometime hand from the post and hurl it and the host into the cauldron, which subsequently boils over with blood. The Jews panic and place the host into an oven, which explodes, emitting in the process an image of Christ bleeding from his five wounds. Christ reproaches the Jews, who are baptized and confess. Aristorius, who ever since selling his God to the faithless Jews been

wracked with guilt, also confesses. The cast then forms a joyous Corpus Christi procession which in turn exits the playing area to the tune of the *Te Deum laudamus*.

The text of this unusual play exists in a single manuscript, Dublin, Trinity College MS F. 4. 20. The composite manuscript was at one time the property of John Madden, a President of the Royal College of Physicians of Ireland. After Madden's death in 1703, the manuscript moved about and was ultimately delivered to Trinity College in Dublin in 1741.<sup>66</sup> Norman Davis believes that the manuscript is likely of later production than the text itself, which alludes to events that supposedly transpired in 1461, and which most scholars accept as not distant in time from the actual writing of the *Play of the Sacrament*.<sup>67</sup> The banns' announcement of a performance "at Croxston on Monday" (74) and a later reference to Babwell Mill (621) has led Davis to conclude that the play may have originated around Thetford, located near to one of several English Croxtons as well as the Franciscan priory at Babwell.<sup>68</sup> Ann Eljenholm Nichols has tentatively proposed, based on a passage appearing late in the play in which the bishop advises keeping pyxes locked and their keys tucked away in order to avoid the sort of host-stealth that motivates the play's action (924-27), that the dramatist may have been in residence at the Abbey at Bury St. Edmunds.<sup>69</sup> She cites a

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<sup>66</sup> Davis, *Non-Cycle Plays and Fragments*, p. lxx.

<sup>67</sup> As far as I can tell, no one has challenged the importance to dating the manuscript of the 1461 allusion which concludes the text of the Croxton Play of the Sacrament: "Thus endyth the Play of the Blyssyd Sacrament, whyche myracle was don in the forest of Aragon, in the famous cité Eraclea, the yere of owr Lord God M cccc. ixj, to whom be honowr, Amen." All references to the Croxton *Play of the Sacrament* are to Davis, *Non-cycle Plays and Fragments*, pp. 58-89, and will appear parenthetically. Bernard Glassman, *Anti-Semitic Stereotypes without Jews: Images of the Jews in England, 1290-1700* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1975), p. 24, in an inexplicable and unjustifiable move, claims that the *Play of the Sacrament* was presented first in 1378.

<sup>68</sup> Davis, pp. lxxxiv-lxxxv. Ann Eljenholm Nichols, "The Croxton *Play of the Sacrament*: A Re-Reading," *Comparative Drama* 22:2 (1988): 131, n. 9, is less speculative in her assertion that the Thetford Croxton twelve miles from Bury St. Edmunds is *the* Croxton. It is worth recalling here that Fletcher, "The N-Town Plays," pp. 166-67, has suggested Thetford could well be "N-Town."

<sup>69</sup> "And all yow creaturys and curatys that here be,/Off thys dede yow may take example/How that yowr pyxys lockyd ye shuld see,/And be ware of the key of Goddys temple."

London incident of 1467 in which a number of pyxes were stolen from a church for the value of the metals that they contained.<sup>70</sup> Nichols observes that

when Aristorius steals the Host, the playwright does not mention a pyx locked or unlocked, but only notes that Aristorius had access to the church key. Given the skilled composition elsewhere in the play, this anomaly is curious. It is hard not to read this special pleading as a reflection of the 1467 thefts. I am thus inclined to see this pyx passage as a hasty addition to an otherwise carefully crafted play, and therefore to date the Croxton performance shortly after 1467.<sup>71</sup>

Nichols then suggests that because of close associations between London and the Abbey at Bury St. Edmunds, news of such a theft could have traveled quickly to a clerical author at Bury writing a play that would shortly thereafter be performed several miles north at Croxton, though Nichols' argument is ultimately too speculative to be more than simply intriguing.

Even in the absence of the play's citation of Suffolk place names, we might nevertheless divine the play's provenance on the grounds of its reproduction of the pedagogical norms prevalent in East Anglia during the Late Middle Ages. The tortures perpetrated by the Jews on the illicitly procured host unmistakably reenact the pains inflicted upon Christ during the Crucifixion. The trial of the Host by the Jews appears at first to be a parodic representation of the liturgy of the Eucharist. After placing the Host on a table (which serves as an altar), Jonathas declares to his fellows:

On thes wordys ther law growndyd hath he  
That he sayd on Shere Thursday at hys soper:  
He brake the brede and sayd *Accipite*,  
And gave hys dyscyplys them for to chere:  
And more he sayd to them there,  
Whyle they were all togethere and sum,  
Sytyng at the table soo clere,  
*Comedite Corpus Meum.* (397-404)

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<sup>70</sup> Nichols, "The Croxton *Play of the Sacrament*," p. 120.

<sup>71</sup> Nichols, "The Croxton *Play of the Sacrament*," p. 132, n. 18.

But for all of its obvious parodying of the Mass, the context of this reenactment is not the Eucharist but rather the Last Supper, the Passion and Crucifixion of Christ committed by Jewish hands broadly, and the Resurrection.<sup>72</sup> The Jews' piercing of the Host in five places with daggers is symbolic of the traditional five wounds of Christ, the discarding of the wafer wrapped in cloth into the cauldron represents the burial of Christ's body in the tomb, and the destruction of the oven recalls Christ's descent into and triumphant harrowing of hell from which the resurrected Christ emerges in the flesh.<sup>73</sup>

Yet the Croxton playwright does not present this scene as a kind of anti-commemoration of the Passion; rather he repeatedly emphasizes the "newness" of the torture, its occurrence at that moment in time and in the presence of a watching audience. Thus, for example, during the proclamation of the banns with which the action of the play to follow is introduced probably against the backdrop of a dumb show, the first *vexillator* declares that the Jews "grevid our Lord gretly on grownd,/And put hym to a *new passyoun*" (37-38; emphasis mine). His companion immediately adds that "thay putt hym to a *new turmentry*,/In an hoote ovyn speryd hym fast" (45-46; emphasis mine). Nor are the *vexillatores* the only participants in the drama to observe that what is at stake here is the repetition of Calvary and Golgotha before the audience, for the image of Jesus himself, newly arisen from the oven in which the Jews attempted to destroy him, asks: "Why blaspheme yow me? Why do ye thus?/Why put yow me to a *newe tormentry*,/And I dyed for yow on the crosse?" (731-33; emphasis mine). From Jesus' perspective, Jonathas and his minions do not simply enact the Passion in a moment of theatrical commemoration, they re-execute the tortures visited upon Christ on Good Friday.

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<sup>72</sup> For a different perspective, Nichols, "The Croxton *Play of the Sacrament*," pp. 117, 124, sees the play as a manifestation of fifteenth-century Eucharistic piety *per se*.

<sup>73</sup> David Bevington, ed., *Medieval Drama* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1975), p.754.

The stage directions for this bloody reenactment also emphasize the corporeal nature of the theatrical action, with its culmination in Christ's triumphant emergence from the oven: "Here the owyn must ryve asunder and blede owt at the cranys, and an image appere owt with woundys bledyng" (s.d. 712+). There is no escaping the enormity of what has taken place as Christ takes center stage re-Crucified, reminding us of the horror of his original death in a moment of spiritual union with the audience, who become participants in the Passion. Following this spectacular miracle, Jonathas and the Jews convert to Christianity and confess their sins publicly before the bishop using language that again emphasizes the presence of the moment as they recount the appearance of the bloody Christ child in the Eucharistic bread:

The holy Sacrament, þe whyche we haue done tormentry,  
And ther we haue putt hym to a *newe passyon*,  
A chyld apperyng with wondys blody:  
A swemfull syght yt ys to looke vpon. (802-05; emphasis mine)

The bishop, the only character on stage worthy of imitation, responds: "*O Jhesu fili Dei,* How thys paynfull passyon rancheth myn hart!" (815). The "swemfull syght" of the tortured Christ prompts the Jews to conversion, and in a final plea for absolution from the bishop for their sins against the sacred body of Christ, Jonathas kneels and confesses:

For that we knele all vpon owr knees;  
For we have greuyd owr Lord on grovnd  
And put hym to a *new paynfull passioun*:  
With daggars styckyd hym with greuos wo[u]nde,  
*New naylyd* hym to a post and with pynsonys pluckyd hym down. (931-35;  
emphasis mine)

The added detail of Christ's appearance as a child in the Jews' confession resonates again with the mystical theology of Nicholas Love. In a reflection on the wonders of Eucharistic miracles occasioned by the Thursday meditations on the Last Supper, Love takes pains to warn against mistaking Christ's dimensions within the

bread for his true size upon the Cross, and in so doing, notes that the Son occasionally manifests himself as a child within the host:

For what tyme þat oure lorde Jesus appereþ in þat blessedde sacrament to strenþynge of byleue or to confort of his chosen derlynges auþer in likenes of a litel childe, as he dide to seynt Edward kyng & confessour, or elles in a quantite of flesh all blodye as it is writen in þe lif of seynt Gregour & in oþere places, soþe it is þat þat bodily likenes seene in þe quantite acordeþ not with þe verrey bodily quantite & shappe of oure lorde þat henge on þe crosse, & þat is soþely in þat sacrament hidde fro þe bodily siht.<sup>74</sup>

In a similar vein, Love recounts an apparition of Christ as a child during the elevation of the host before St. Hugh, Bishop of Lincoln and, according to Love, first monk of the Carthusian order, in the vernacular treatise *De Sacramento* that accompanies the *Mirror* in the extant manuscripts and serves as its epilogue. Love writes:

And as to oure purpose what tyme it was come to þe sacringe as þe bishope helde vp goddus body in forme of brede, þere aperede to þe siht of þe forseid clerke, bytwix þe preestes holy handes oure lord god Jesus bodily in likenes of a passyng faire litel childe. Of þe which siht, he þat sawh it inwardly compuncte as no wondre was, & hyely stired in to feruent deuocion, contynuede alle þe tyme of þat messe in swete teres & deuout praieres, til it came to þat place, where þe hooste sholde be lift vp aboue þe chalice, & be departede in þre. At þe which tyme he sawh eft in þe self liknes þe forseide Jesu goddus son of heuen, offringe him self in sacrifice to þe fadre for mannus hele & sauacion.<sup>75</sup>

We are not told whether this latter likeness is that of a child or whether Jesus is bloodied by this sacrifice, but the Croxton play certainly suggests those possibilities.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Sargent, p. 155.

<sup>75</sup> Sargent, p. 232.

<sup>76</sup> Richard L. Homan, "Two *Exempla*: Analogues to the *Play of the Sacrament* and *Dux Moraud*," in *Drama in the Middle Ages, Second Series*, ed. Clifford Davidson and John H. Stroupe (New York: AMS Press, Inc., 1991), 199-209, cites a sermon *exemplum* in Lincoln Cathedral Library MS 50 that relates the devil's attempts to disabuse a woman of her belief in transubstantiation. The *exemplum* recounts that, having succumbed to temptation, the woman cuts a piece of consecrated bread with her knife, "& withe the stroke þat sche stroke sodenly there stode up a lytyll childe as it had ben a zere of age and in every honde and foote & in his syde he had a grete wounde and over þe woman blede & þet childe lokyd as pituosly upon hyr as who seythe þou has thurt me sore. . . ." Homan prints the *exemplum* on pp. 206-08. Homan, pp. 201-02, notes that absence of an iconographical tradition of a wounded Christ child and remarks that "nowhere to my knowledge is the Child made to suffer" (except in the *exemplum* and the play, of course). Given its immense popularity, I suspect Love's *De sacramento* may have been the more immediate source.

The Jews' malicious treatment of the host does not merely constitute a kind of Eucharistic commemoration; rather, Jonathas and his cohorts offer a dramatic re-presentation of a the Crucifixion itself, and one rife with images of bodies and bodily things. *Pace* Victor I. Scherb, dramaturgically and didactically the play's repeated emphasis on the newness of the Passion works to engage the audience in the present moment of the event enacted before them, not in recollecting the circumstances of history.

Yet the *Mirror's* instructions for contemplative imagination require not only re-creation of historical events in the present moment, but also the meditator's participation in those events. East Anglian drama consequently exhibits a penchant for razing what contemporary theories of theatrical space recognize as the invisible "fourth wall" separating actor from spectator.<sup>77</sup> This effect is most commonly accomplished through direct address, a technique employed routinely by *Contemplacio*, for example, and also by the prophets of N-Town's "Jesse Root" play. Two of the most striking examples of the players' interaction with the audience comes in the East Anglian morality play *Mankind*. About a third of the way through this approximately 900-line play, the play's moral center, Mercy, leaves Mankind on stage alone and vulnerable to the temptations of the vice characters New Gyse, Nowadays, and Nought. Mankind declares his intention to defend himself from the onslaught of the three Ns, and proudly proclaims his battle cry: "Memento, homo, quid cinis es et in cinerem reuerteris" [Remember, man, that you are dust, and unto dust you shall return (321)].<sup>78</sup> A nonplussed New Gyse, however, parodically counters Mankind's defensive use of Scripture by quoting Psalm 18 back to him: "Cum sancto sanctus eris

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<sup>77</sup> Brannen, "A Century of *Mankind*," p. 17.

<sup>78</sup> All references to *Mankind* are to Eccles, *The Macro Plays*, pp. 153-84, and will appear parenthetically.



et cum peruerso peruerteris” [With the holy you will be holy, and with the perverse you will be perverted] (324). At this moment in the dramatic action, the three vices enlist the aid of the audience in wearing Mankind down. Nowadays directly addresses the spectators, bidding them to “make rom” (331) so that they may all sing a Christmas song together. Nought continues: “Now I prey all þe yemandry þat ys here/To synge wyth us wyth mery chere” (333-334). Nought then leads Nowadays and New Gyse, and it would seem the rest of the audience, in a “Christmas song” that begins innocently enough, “Yt ys wretyn wyth a cole, yt ys wretyn wyth a colle” (336). The audience becomes part of the performance, and it is precisely at this moment of reckless indulgence that Nought begins to work his viciousness with an audience that is now hopelessly caught in the trap of singing along with the remainder of this festive carol: “He that schythyth wyth hys hoyll . . . But he wyppe hys ars clen . . . On hys breche yt xall be sen” (335-42). The next speech tag in the manuscript reads “Cantant Omnes” [Let everyone sing], before the final refrain of “Hoylyke, holyke, holyke! holyke, holyke, holyke, holyke!” (343). The refrain offers a double pun dependent on the homophony of “holy” and “hole lick” in Middle English. *Cum sancto sanctus eris et cum peruerso peruerteris*, indeed. Later in the play, the vices delay the entrance of the fiend Titvillus with the excuse that he will only entertain the spectators if the price is right, and so the vices literally pass around the hat among the audience. With the clink of each coin, the audience signal their approval of the vices’ onslaught on the beleaguered Mankind.

By tricking the audience into singing the carol, compelling them to sanction the decline into sin with monetary gifts, and consequently leading them along with Mankind away from Mercy’s teachings, the playwright has primed the spectators for the play’s climax and denouement. Mercy rebukes Mankind for failing to avoid sin, despite the former’s teaching. Mankind first despairs, but then repents, and the

morality culminates in a traditional finale with the redemption of fallen man. But before the play concludes, Mercy himself takes a turn at addressing the audience. He first highlights the moral of the story: man has three familiar adversaries, namely, the Devil, the World, and the Flesh, but so long as he remembers Mercy's teaching, he will be safe. Mankind then exits, leaving on stage only Mercy, who closes with a direct admonition to the audience:

Now for hys lowe þat for vs receywyd hys humanite,  
 Serge 3our condicyons wyth dew examinacion.  
 Thynke and remembyr þe world ys but a wanite,  
 As yt ys prowyd daly by diuerse transmutacyon. (907-10)

The play, then, is not about Mankind the character at all, but about the greater assemblage of humanity gathered about the periphery of the staged action as Mercy summons the spectators to an examination of their own consciences. The playwright coerces his audience into indulging in the humor of the vices only to insist ultimately that they consider their own shortcomings and reform their lives in accord with the play's protagonist.

The *Play of the Sacrament* similarly relies on humor to induce the audience to sin through participation prior to urging repentance and conversion. That the main action of the play, the protracted torture of the host, and parodically of Jonathas, must have been spectacular is undeniable; what remains less obvious is whether a late-fifteenth-century audience would have found Jonathas's misadventures at all comical rather than horrifically or even devotionally serious.<sup>79</sup> The entrance of the scurrilous doctor Brundyche quickly resolves any ambiguity. Jonathas's lamentations for his detached hand are interrupted by the entrance of a boy named Colle, assistant to and less than convincing pitchman for the Flemish doctor Brundyche, a physician well

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<sup>79</sup> Richard L. Homan, "Devotional Themes in the Violence and Humor of the *Play of the Sacrament*," *Comparative Drama* 20 (1987), 327-40.

known for his ability to set broken bones and for the debts that he has accumulated in various local taverns. Colle and Brundyche engage in some playful banter in which it becomes almost instantaneously clear that the number of the doctor's patients who have actually benefited from his ministrations falls scandalously short of the number of "wydowes, maydese, and wyfe" on whom his "connyng" has been "nyhe spent" (595-96). As recently as 1994 the comedic potential of this scene has been described as "rather redundant" and contributive of "little to the development of the narrative," though with little evidence for this opinion, as if the play's success rested solely on the relative ingenuity of the basic plot.<sup>80</sup> Indeed, scholars have labeled this scene an interpolation, partly because of its shift in metrical form—an argument I find less than compelling, since it condescendingly denies the playwright the intelligence to control his tone intentionally by consciously alternating stanzaic forms<sup>81</sup>—and largely because of its base comedy. Indeed, one of the few critics interested in actually redeeming this scene as an integral part of the play has done so only at the cost of humor's humor. Richard L. Homan argues that the Brundyche episode was initially intended for serious reception, and does so by contextualizing the scene within the grave atmosphere of fifteenth-century devotional sensibilities.<sup>82</sup> I would argue, however, that the playwright, not unlike the author of *Mankind*, *wants* his audience to laugh. Torturing the consecrated body of Christ is no laughing matter, but it is precisely this self-indulgent behavior on the part of the audience that sets up the play's conclusion, in which the Jews convert, the corrupt Christian merchant and the lax Christian priest

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<sup>80</sup> Darryl Grantley, "Saints' Plays," in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval English Theatre*, ed. Richard Beadle (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 284, 286

<sup>81</sup> See Stevens, *Four Middle English Mystery Cycles*, pp. 182-84, for an argument against this kind of criteria in assessing compositional layers in the N-Town manuscript. Similar arguments from metrical forms have historically the major means of identification of the genius responsible for several plays in the Towneley plays and known as the "Wakefield Master." See, e.g., the George England and Alfred W. Pollard, eds., *The Towneley Plays*, Early English Text Society Extra Series no. 71 (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., 1897), p. xxi; for the counterclaim, see Martin Stevens, "Did the Wakefield Master Write a Nine-line Stanza?", *Comparative Drama* 15 (1981), 99-119.

<sup>82</sup> Homan, "Devotional Themes," pp. 332-35.

confess, and the Episcopus moralizes, like Mercy in *Mankind*, for the benefit of an audience all too eager to join in the mischief:

God Omnipotent euermore looke ye serue  
 With deuocion and prayre whyll þat ye may;  
 Dowl yt not he wyll yow preserue  
 For eche good prayer þat ye sey to hys pay;  
 And therfor in euery dew tyme loke ye nat delay  
 For to serue the Holy Trynyté,  
 And also Mary, that swete may,  
 And kepe yow in perfyte loue and charyté. (988-995)

The Episcopus calls the audience to conversion from their sinful ways as directly as he does Jonathas, the corrupt merchant Aristorius, and the other characters on the “stage.” Indeed, it can be argued that Aristorius himself is a type of the merchants and traders who likely populated the Croxton *Play*’s original East Anglian audience. The entire assembly finally join together as one Church with the communal singing of the *Te Deum laudamus* with which the play closes and through which their immediate participation in the penitential trajectory of the play is accomplished. Plays like *Mankind* and the Croxton *Play of the Sacrament* illustrate Denise Despres’s proposition that participatory meditation in the Franciscan tradition served to prepare the meditator for penance and conversion, a fact illustrated by on- and offstage confession scenes in the *Play of the Sacrament* and *Wisdom* and Mary’s exorcism, prompted by her quasi-confession, in the Digby *Mary Magdalene*.

The most striking example of an East Anglian playwright’s dramaturgical use of participatory meditation on specifically biblical events for the purpose of stimulating affective response comes from around the northern Suffolk village of Brome. The so-called Brome *Abraham* is one of six medieval English theatrical renderings of the story of Abraham’s near sacrifice of his son Isaac, the most dramatized story in the surviving early English corpus. It has been often noted that the Brome *Abraham* and the Chester version of the story are markedly similar in structure,

tone, and diction—Abraham exclaims in both that the task before him is breaking his heart in three<sup>83</sup>—although which play represents the source and which the derivative has rarely been agreed upon. Both versions of the play exploit the emotional potential inherent in Abraham’s anguish and Isaac’s response as he gradually comes to grips with his fate.<sup>84</sup> In both the Brome and Chester plays, Isaac’s mounting awareness of the situation culminates in a series of plaintive cries for his absent mother. The Brome playwright puts into Isaac’s mouth the longing prayer of a frightened child:

Now I wold to God my moder were her on þis hyll!  
 Sche woold knele for me on both hyre kneys  
 To save my lyffe.  
 And sythyn that my moder ys not here,  
 I prey 3ow, fader, schonge 3owr chere,  
 And kyll me not wyth 3owyre knyffe. (175-80)

Isaac recognizes that whereas the love of a mother is unwavering, even if she risks God’s wrath, the father’s sense of duty presents a greater obstacle. Resigned to his fate, then, Brome’s Isaac nevertheless remains solicitous for the well being of his soon-to-be grief-stricken mother and implores Abraham: “[G]ood fader, tell 3e my moder nothyng./Sey þat I am in another cuntré dwellyng” (205-6).

The dramatic potential inherent in Isaac’s repeated and, it should be noted, non-biblical invocations of his absent mother Sara, who has a unique speaking role in the surviving Northampton version of the story, have been recognized by scholars of the Brome and Chester plays. So too has the playwright’s clear intention in playing to

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<sup>83</sup> Compare, e.g., Abraham’s response to Isaac’s inquiry about the reason for his father drawing his sword in the Brome play—“A! Ysaac, swet son, pes! pes!/For iwys thow breke my harte on thre” (155-56)—to the Chester Abraham’s lamentation to God—“O my harte will breake in three!/To here thy wordes I have pittye./As thou wilte, lorde, soe muste yt bee;/to thee I will bee beane (IV.253-56). All references to line numbers in the Brome *Abraham* are to Davis, *Non-cycle Plays*, pp. 43-57, and will appear parenthetically. All references to the Chester Abraham play are to R. M. Lumiansky and David Mills, eds., *The Chester Mystery Cycle*, 2 vols., Early English Text Society Supplemental Series nos. 3 and 9 (London: Oxford University Press, 1974-1986) and will appear parenthetically.

<sup>84</sup> This same pathos is movingly evoked by the twentieth-century composer Benjamin Britten in his *Canticle II: Abraham and Isaac*, in which he adapts the Chester text for two mesmerizingly interwoven male voices.

the emotional sympathies of his audience, an intention manifested most consciously in the commentative epilogues that conclude both plays. What has not been observed, however, is Brome's identification of this play for sympathy as part of a particular discourse of reading images of the Bible by the unlettered laity. The Chester play concludes with the speech of a doctor-expositor who explains to the audience that the foregoing "deede of devotyon . . . may torne you to myche good" (IV.461, 463). He then proceeds to point out the typological significance of the story as a precursor to the great sacrifice God made in offering up his innocent and beloved son to death in order to accomplish the salvation of humanity, and that good Christians ought to mimic the obedience of Isaac to Abraham and of Jesus and Abraham to the Father. This epilogue is consistent with the Abraham sequence's general deployment of staid expositor figures who explain dispassionately the "signification" (IV.19) of the scene being played to "the unlearned standinge herebye" (IV.115).

Brome's parallel concluding remark is likewise delivered by a Doctor, but one who expounds the story in terms not of its meaning for those whose lack of learning might cause them to miss the point, but of its affective potential, for the play of Abraham and Isaac is, in the Doctor's opinion, "good lernyng to lernd and lewyd,/And þe wysest of vs all,/Wythowtyn ony berryng" (437-39). The Doctor addresses the men and the women in the audience separately and in terms of their respective human frailties. He then guides them in reading the images that have just played out before them:

Trowe 3e, sorys, and God sent an angell  
 And commawndyd 3ow 3owre chyld to slayn,  
 Be 3owre trowthe ys ther on of 3ow  
 That eyther wold groche or stryve therageyn?

How thyngke 3e now, sorys, therby?  
 I trow ther be thre ore a fowr or moo;  
 And thys women that wepe so sorowfully

Wha that hyr chyldryn dey them froo,  
 As a nater woll, and kynd;  
 Yt ys but folly, I may wyll awooe,  
 To groche azens God or to greve 3ow,  
 For 3e schall neuer se hym myschevyd, wyll I know,  
 Be lond nor watyr, haue thys in mynd (442-55).

Turning especially to the mothers in the audience familiar with the sorrow that accompanies the premature death of their sons and daughters, the Doctor, like Nicholas Love, invites these women and their male neighbors, learned or lewd, to imagine themselves as Abrahams<sup>85</sup> and, as Margery Kempe did, to bring to that situation their own quotidian, lived experiences. The Doctor pursues his moral of suppressing feeling ironically by appealing to the emotions stirred up by the successful playing of the scene. Unlike the Chester expositor, who merely explains the significance of the biblical narrative at the heart of the played action, the Brome Doctor also repeatedly draws the audience's attention to visual presentation of Abraham's model obedience, which "thys story hath now schovyd yow before" (461).<sup>86</sup> The Brome Doctor expounds a practice of reading for lewd people as much as he does the story's moral, a practice which entails the audience's imagining themselves in the "Lond of Vysyon" (63) in order to approach the will of God directly.<sup>87</sup> For, as Martin Stevens has observed about the N-Town portrayal of this same story, "[i]n this scene, we have a double exposure of obedience—for the role of Abraham allows us inferentially to understand the emotional meaning of the sacrifice

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<sup>85</sup> By implying that these women should become Abrahams, the playwright comes even closer to the gender-switching meditations of the author of the *Book to a Mother*, who, as we might recall, instructs his mother to become the archangel Gabriel at the Salutation and Annunciation.

<sup>86</sup> See also the Doctor's introductory address, ll. 435-36: "Lo! sovereyns and sorys, now haue we schewyd,/ Thys solom story to gret and smale. . . ." Davis corrects the manuscript, which actually reads here: "Lo! sovereyns and sorys, now haue we schowyd,/Thys solom story hath schowyd to gret and smale. . . ."

<sup>87</sup> David Mills, "The Doctor's Epilogue to the Brome *Abraham and Isaac*: A Possible Analogue," *Leeds Studies in English* 11 (1980), 105-10, suggests that the moral of obedience and endurance offered by the doctor possibly derives from Origen's homilies on Genesis.

made by the father as well as the son. The Passion will never allow us that private insight into God the Father.”<sup>88</sup>

### III. “Wat ys a sowll, wyll ze declare?”: Imaginative Drama (*Wisdom*)

This brief comparison of the strikingly dissimilar emphases of the Doctors’ expositions in the otherwise remarkably similar Brome and Chester depictions of Abraham’s near sacrifice of Isaac draws our attention to a final critical issue in East Anglian drama that has posed difficulty for critics of these plays: the playwrights’ imagined audiences. I therefore want to close this chapter by considering the East Anglian morality play commonly known as *Wisdom*. I suggest that we can reconstruct a profile of *Wisdom*’s first spectators, as imagined by the playwright, by way of the discursive appeals this dramatist makes to them. It would not be unfair to claim that the text of this dramatization of the temptation of the soul in its Augustinian faculties of Mind, Will, and Understanding by Lucifer has often been neglected by scholarship more interested in the mechanics and particularly the location(s) of its medieval performance. In his edition of the play for the Early English Text Society, Mark Eccles conjectured civic or guild sponsorship of the play for “a general audience.”<sup>89</sup> Milla Cozart Riggio, in her introductory essay in a collection assembled to mark the occasion of her 1984 staging of the play at Trinity College in Hartford, Connecticut, insists that “*Wisdom* is a banquet play; it is masque-like; and it was probably played before an aristocratic audience which included some religious.”<sup>90</sup> In the same volume, and basing her argument on documentary evidence, Gail McMurray Gibson suggests

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<sup>88</sup> Stevens, *Four Middle English Mystery Cycles*, p. 236. Edgar Schell, “Fulfilling the Law in the Brome *Abraham and Isaac*,” *Leeds Studies in English* 25 (1994), p. 151, notes that Stevens is really here speaking more generally of the Abraham-Isaac story’s power than of the N-Town version of it particularly.

<sup>89</sup> Eccles, *The Macro Plays*, p. xxxv.

<sup>90</sup> Milla Cozart Riggio, “The Staging of *Wisdom*,” in *The Wisdom Symposium: Papers from the Trinity College Medieval Festival*, ed. Milla Cozart Riggio (New York: AMS Press, Inc., 1986), pp. 14-15.



possible production at the Benedictine abbey of Bury St. Edmunds in Suffolk, and proposes that the play allegorizes the conflict and eventual peaceful resolution of the hostilities between the Yorkist king Edward IV and the Bury abbey, which was a center of Lancastrian support.<sup>91</sup> Alexandra F. Johnston has cautioned that the direct evidence for the performance of *Wisdom* at Bury is non-existent, and that, generally, there is virtually no specific evidence of any kind for the performance of moral drama in England at all.<sup>92</sup> Johnston nevertheless concludes her article and the volume of essays in celebration of the Trinity College performance with the observation that she, Riggio, and Gibson “are agreed that this play was intended for a learned and powerful audience of mixed secular and clerical magnates” because of its considerable theatrical demands that likely mandated performance by professionals commanding a fair price for their entertaining efforts. She continues “it is the nature of that mix and the patron of the production that is in dispute,” while offering up as possible patrons the Dukes of Norfolk in residence in the mid-fifteenth century in Suffolk or John de la Pole, Duke of Suffolk.<sup>93</sup> Donald C. Baker has, however, expressed his discomfort with such resplendent performance contexts and has maintained that despite the play’s air of learnedness—and he questions the validity of attributing to the play such an air in the first place—*Wisdom* was likely a traveling, professional production that might have played as easily and as well in a monastery as in an innyard.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> Gail McMurray Gibson, “The Play of *Wisdom* and the Abbey of St. Edmunds,” in *The Wisdom Symposium: Papers from the Trinity College Medieval Festival*, ed. Milla Cozart Riggio (New York: AMS Press, Inc., 1986), pp. 53-60.

<sup>92</sup> Alexandra F. Johnston, “*Wisdom* and the Records: Is There a Moral?,” in *The Wisdom Symposium: Papers from the Trinity College Medieval Festival*, ed. Milla Cozart Riggio (New York: AMS Press, Inc., 1986), pp. 96-97; “The Audience of the English Moral Play,” *Fifteenth-Century Studies* 13 (1988), 291-97.

<sup>93</sup> Johnston, “*Wisdom* and the Records,” pp. 100-01.

<sup>94</sup> Donald C. Baker, “Is *Wisdom* a ‘Professional’ Play?,” in *The Wisdom Symposium: Papers from the Trinity College Medieval Festival*, ed. Milla Cozart Riggio (New York: AMS Press, Inc., 1986), pp. 67-86.

Most recently, Victor I. Scherb has suggested that the play's message seems more suitable for lay than clerical audiences based on its reliance on sources written with lewd audiences in mind.<sup>95</sup> Scherb is, I think, on the right track, although he does not pursue his argument further. So it is to the text itself that I wish to turn in this brief consideration of *Wisdom*. It has been well known since the publication of Walter Kay Smart's *Some English and Latin Sources and Parallels for the Morality of Wisdom* in 1912 that the play owes much of its opening dialogue between the characters Anima (the human soul) and Wisdom (Christ) to the fifteenth-century treatise *The Seven Poyntes of Trewe Wisdom*, an English translation of Henry Suso's *Orologium sapientiae*, a work whose meditative approach to Passion-centered devotion closely approximates of the Pseudo-Bonaventurean *Meditationes vitae Christi*.<sup>96</sup> Smart also points to the influence of Book II of Hilton's *Scala perfectionis* on passages from near the beginning and conclusion of the play, and to Lucifer's appropriation of Hilton's *Mixed Life* in seducing Mind, Will, and Understanding away from contemplation of the world.<sup>97</sup> In addition to these sources, I have also already noted, as did Smart, Wisdom's borrowing of the dovecote image as a metaphor for describing his crucified body in our discussion of the *Book of Margery Kempe*, an image that Margery likely knew from Richard Rolle's so-called *Meditation B*, but that also makes an appearance in the *Orologium*, which may have been the *Wisdom*-playwright's source.

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<sup>95</sup> Scherb, *Staging Faith*, p. 130. Johnston, "The Audience of the English Moral Play," suggests a probable correlation between the audience and the social standing of an individual play's protagonist, though she quickly dismisses the applicability of this theory to *Wisdom*, the allegory of which, she claims, is too profound to support this sort of analysis (p. 294).

<sup>96</sup> William Kay Smart, *Some English and Latin Sources and Parallels for the Morality of Wisdom* (Menasha: George Banta Publishing Co., 1912). The English version of Suso's *Orologium* is edited in Karl Horstmann, ed., "*Orologium Sapientiae* or *The Seven Poyntes of Trewe Wisdom*, aus MS. Douce 114," *Anglia* 10 (1888), 324-89.

<sup>97</sup> For Hilton, see S. J. Ogilvie-Thomson, ed., *Walter Hilton's Mixed Life Edited from Lambeth Palace MS 472* (Salzburg: Institut für Anglistik und Amerikanistik, Universität Salzburg, 1986).

The play's unmistakable emphases on the contemplative life and on imagery as a means of instruction bear out the influence of these texts on *Wisdom's* composition. This morality opens with a notably pedagogical scene, in which Wisdom appears in the figure of Christ the King and expounds the soul's relationship to its Creator by responding to a series of questions posed by the maiden Anima:

Wat may I yeve to yowr most plesaunce? (78)

O endles Wysdom, how may I haue knowynge  
Off þi godhede incomprehensyble? (93-94)

Wat ys a sowll, wyll 3e declare? (102)

Lorde, sythe we thy sowlys yet nowt wer þer [at the time of Adam's offence],  
Wy of þe fyrst man bye we þe vyolence? (107-08)

How dothe grace þan ageyn begynne?  
Wat reformythe þe sowll to hys fyrste lyght? (119-20)

In a sowle watt thyngys be  
By wyche he hathe hys very knowynge? (133-34)

Wisdom addresses each of these questions in turn, remarking along the way in a passage reminiscent of East Anglian mystical traditions on the ineffability of God's divine, as opposed to his human, nature:

The hye worthynes of my loue  
Angell nor man can tell playnly.  
Yt may be felt in experyens from aboue  
But not spoke ne tolde as yt ys veryly (61-64).

In addressing Anima's questions, Wisdom reveals the playwright's interest in imagery as a didactic tool. Indeed, the opening of *Wisdom* while not directly dependent on *Dives and Pauper* is nevertheless reminiscent of its method. Throughout *Wisdom*, the playwright presents the audience a concatenated series of images which in their course connect the body of the actor portraying Anima to the transcendent God. Anima announces herself as "I þat represent here þe sowll of man"

(101). This self-conscious acknowledgment on the part of the actor playing Anima of the theatrical artifice of the moment heightens the audience's awareness of the "lessun" (100) about to be learned. In responding to his interlocutor's inquiry about the nature of the soul, Wisdom replies that the soul is the image and further the likeness of God (103-04), but that the soul has been disfigured by sin from Adam forward and can only be restored through the sacraments. Wisdom informs Anima that the soul obtains knowledge by two means, through "resone" and "sensualyte," the former of which is the image of God, but it is the latter that is subject to inordinate rule and which becomes "þe ymage of synne" (140). Wisdom concludes this disquisition on the nature of the soul with a visual description of the soul:

Thes tweyn do syngyfye  
 Yowr dysgysynge and yowr aray,  
 Blake and wyght, fowll and fayer vereyly,  
 Euery sowll here, þis ys no nay,  
 Blake by sterynge of synne þat cummyth all-day,  
 Wyche felynge cummythe of sensualyte,  
 and wyght be knowenge of reson veray  
 Off þe blyssyde infenyte Deyte.

Thus a sowle ys bothe fowlle and fayer:  
 Fowll as a best be felynge of synne,  
 Fayer as a angell, of hewyn þe ayer,  
 By knowynge of Gode by hys reson wythin. (149-60)

In a well known essay, David Bevington has argued that at its heart, the morality play is the visualization of a metaphor, and that the metaphor to be visualized in *Wisdom* is the image that alternates between the black and white, foul and fair of Wisdom's discourse on the nature of the soul.<sup>98</sup> The human soul, first as Anima and later as the three faculty-characters of Mind, Will, and Understanding who displace her on stage, becomes in the play the site of conflict between the inner purity of God's image and

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<sup>98</sup> David Bevington, "'Blake and wyght, fowll and fayer': Stage Picture in *Wisdom*," in *The Wisdom Symposium: Papers from the Trinity College Medieval Festival*, ed. Milla Cozart Riggio (New York: AMS Press, Inc., 1986), pp. 20-21.

the stain of sin introduced through “sensualyte,/ Whyche ys clepyde þe flechly felynge” (135-36).

The playwright borrows this pair of contestatory images, as Smart, Eccles, and Bevington have noted, from Hilton’s *Scala perfectionis*, in which the Augustinian canon, in commenting on the Bride’s speeches in the *Song of Songs*, remarks that

Fair is mannys soule, and foule is a mannys soule. Fair in as mykil as it is reformed in trouthe to the liknesse of God, but it is foule in as mykil as it is yit medelid with fleschli felynges and unskilful stirynges of this ymage of synne. Foule withouten as it were a beest, faire withinne like to an angel. Foule in felelynge of the sensualité, fair in trouthe of the resoun. Foule fro the fleschli appetite, faire for the good wil. Thus fair and thus foule is a chosen soule, seiynge Holi Writ thus: *Nigra sum, sed formosa, filie Ierusalem sicut tabernacula cedar et sicut pelles Salamonis* (Song of Songs 1:4). I am blak, but I am fair and schapli, yee doughteris of Jerusalem, as the tabernaculis of cedar and as the skynnes of Salomoun.<sup>99</sup>

Although Smart does not mention Book I of the *Scala*, I suspect the *Wisdom-*playwright may also have had in mind several of the central chapters of that book as well, especially chapters 52 and 53, where Hilton describes how the soul seeks Jesus in itself but at first finds only the blackened image of sin:

And sette thyn entent and thi purpoos as thou woldest not seke, ne fele, ne finde, but upon thi lord Jhesu oonly, the grace and the presence, the techynge and the comfort of thi Lord Jhesu Crist. This is traveilous, for veyn thoughtis wolen alwei presen to thyn herte thikke, for to drawe thi thought down to hem. But thou schalt with stable mynde of Jhesu Crist with besinesse in praieres agenstonde hem, and yif thou doo thus, thou schalt fynde sumwhat—not Jhesu whom thou sekest. What thanne? Sotheli, right nought but a merk ymage and a peynful of thyn owen soule, whiche hath neither light of knowynge ne felynge of love ne likynge. This ymage yif thou biholde it wittirly, is al bilappid with blake stynkande clothis of synne, pride evnie, ire, accidie, glotonye, and leccherie.<sup>100</sup>

Hilton demonstrates his own gift for the dramatic in this passage, as he guides the introspective soul toward what he sets the reader up to believe will be the image of

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<sup>99</sup> Hilton, p. 156.

<sup>100</sup> Hilton, p. 90.

God. Instead the soul finds only the murky image of sin. In chapter 53, Hilton explains that this black image which the soul carries with it at all times is in fact “nought,” perhaps not coincidentally one of the tempters from *Mankind*, and, as Hilton further expounds, “[t]his nought is nothyng eellis but a lackynge of love and of light, as synne is not eellis but a wantynge of God.”<sup>101</sup>

The *Wisdom*-dramatist appears to take a cue from Hilton’s costume metaphor of the image “bilappid with blake stynkande clothis” of deadly sin, for Anima likewise undergoes a series highly visible costume changes that reflect her inner moral being. Her initial appearance “as a mayde” is accomplished through “a wyght clothe of golde gysely purfyled wyth menyver” capped with a mantle of black representing the sin that always tarnishes God’s likeness in the human soul (16+ s.d.). Her “five wits” likewise make their entrance bedecked “in white kertylys and mantelys” (164+ s.d.) as do Mind, Will, and Understanding, “all thre in wyght cloth of golde” (324+ s.d.). The corruption of Anima’s three faculties by Lucifer, however, initiates a series of dances performed by various personified sins, including Will-tuned-Fornication’s famous whores’ dance. Following this final lecherous gambol, Wisdom reappears imploring Mind to remember himself. Wisdom then summons Anima to return to the stage who, according to the stage direction, “apperythe in þe myst horrybull wyse, fowlere þan a fende” (902+ s.d.). Anima has literally put on the black, stinking clothes of the sins represented by Mind, Will, and Understanding’s fellow revelers. Anima can finally rid herself of these garments only through the sacramental confession that occurs offstage to the accompaniment of “drawte notys as yt ys songyn in þe passyon wyke” (996+ s.d.).

The relationship between Wisdom’s disquisition on the nature of the blackness and whiteness of the soul with which the play opens and the consequent signaling of

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<sup>101</sup> Hilton, p. 91.

Anima's moral decline and redemption by means of structured costume changes is well known. So, too, is *Wisdom's* dependence for much of its doctrinal content on Walter Hilton. What I want to suggest, then, is that in its reliance on imagery as a vehicle for moral truth, we may find a clue about the *Wisdom*-playwright's original intended audience. *Wisdom*, like *Anima* before, acknowledges the theatricality of the moment in his black-and-white speech, signaling the applicability of his teaching to "[e]very sowl here," and the imminence of the morally charged, visually oriented "lesson"—to borrow *Anima's* word—about to be enacted. While *Wisdom* may very well have entertained traveling royalty or aristocratic monks in Suffolk, in its composition the anonymous playwright seems to me clearly to have been entrenched in a pedagogical project, one that presented itself didactically and that conceived its audience according to the parameters of an imagined identity as people of simple understanding who learn about God best through images—even images of whores played by lasciviously gyrating male actors.

The foregoing has been, of course, only a survey of the variety of dramatic productions originating in East Anglia during the course of the fifteenth century. Further research may yield more coincidences between the plays and the pedagogical discourse that I believe influenced them. This influence manifests itself in different ways: *N-Town's* extra-Scriptural interpolations and contemplative presentation of events from the lives of Mary and Jesus; the *Play of the Sacrament's* penitential deployment of bodies and bodily things leading to conversion; *Mankind* and the *Brome Abraham's* insistence on the participation of the audience; *Wisdom's* use of imagery as a teaching tool. Verbal parallels and allusions have retained their hold as our surest evidence in demonstrating direct lines of influence, yet what I have tried to suggest throughout this chapter is that in the complex interplay of clerical and lay

desires that discursively structure and permeate East Anglian drama, the development of late-medieval theories of imagery into a dramaturgical system result in a regionally unified yet generically diverse theater unlike any other in fifteenth-century England. Center stage in this theater and in the imagination of the clergy stood the iconic pious lay person who motivated an identifiable and coherent dramatic tradition at the most fully collaborative intersection of lay and clerical interests, the drama.



## EPILOGUE

This project began with a point of origin: Gregory the Great's explanation to Bishop Serenus of Marseilles, and his proclamation to the Church for centuries to come, that "those who are ignorant of letters may at least read by seeing on walls that which they are unable to read in books." Throughout the six preceding chapters, I have attempted to trace the elaboration of medieval theories of imagery, pedagogy, and the social order as these were inspired by Gregory, as well as those theories' implications for ecclesiology, theology, mysticism, literature, and drama. Originally limited in context to the didactic function of ecclesiastical wall painting, Gregory's pronouncements about orthodox Christian iconology ultimately were of less significance for the history of the production of Church art than they were for the history of the multifaceted Catholic imagination of the Middle Ages and its role in structuring the secular realm.

The Reformation ultimately and violently redirected that history by accomplishing in England what the more radical of the Lollards never did: the propagation of a theologically justifiable and dominant iconoclasm far-reaching in its influence and widespread in its destruction. Most obviously, the many literally defaced "seven sacrament fonts" found in churches throughout East Anglia stand as mute but dramatic testimony to the Reformers' success.<sup>1</sup> Yet, just as Gregory's maxim quickly exceeded the bounds of concrete artistic representation, the impact of this iconoclastic mentality was hardly limited to stone carvings. We have already witnessed the effect that a probably sixteenth-century, Reform-minded reader and his pen has on the pathos evoked when Margery Kempe imagines the Blessed Virgin

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<sup>1</sup> Ann Eljenholm Nichols, *Seeable Signs: The Iconography of the Seven Sacraments 1350-1544* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 1994).

Mary's refusal of the hot caudle and on the ambivalent combination of reverence and dread inherent in the baselard knife that cuts the flesh of the most beautiful man ever to set foot in the world. Like the East Anglian fonts, these cancelled passages in Salthouse's copy of Margery's *Book* signal not only the decline of participatory meditation on events from the life of Christ following the Reformation but also the transformation—or stifling, depending on one's perspective—of the Christian imagination. It should then come as no surprise that the playwrights of late medieval East Anglia, who relied on the power of lewd imaginations to make meaning out of Anima's befouled costume—and out of the black “nought” deep within their own souls—had also to abandon their stock techniques in favor of new methods as they commenced the slow but steady erection of the fourth wall that gradually separated their spectators from the dramas playing out before them and prepared the way for the secular theater of Shakespeare's London.

At a major turning point in Barry Unsworth's *Morality Play*, a novel about, among other things, the mechanisms of meaning production at the twilight of the Middle Ages, Nicholas Barber, the priest-turned-player-protagonist of the story, expresses his fear of making plays out of events that happen to particular, and particularized, people rather than to abstract allegorical or biblical figures in lamenting the “habit of mind of players, who think of their parts and how best to do them, and listen to the words of the master-player, but do not often think of the meaning as a whole.” Nicholas continues: “Had these done so, they would have seen what I, more accustomed to conclusions, saw and trembled at: if we make our own meanings, God will oblige us to answer our own questions, He will leave us in the void without the comfort of His Word.” Nicholas's fears of an outbreak of the early modern, or postmodern, condition in his medieval world are, for the moment at least,

assuaged by Tobias, the veteran player of their company and the actor who routinely plays the role of Mankind in their productions, who responds: “Men can give meanings to things . . . . That is no sin, because our meanings are only for the time, they can be changed.” Gradually, the remainder of the troupe come to see the wisdom of this new mode of meaning production, although the occasionally petulant Stephen proves the most reticent about playing particular people:

“It is no so much the meaning,” he said. “There is a child, a woman, a monk . . .” He paused, struggling to find words. “It is only one thing,” he said at last. “It is particular. *There are no Figures in it.*”<sup>1</sup>

For Stephen, as for the medieval iconic lay person and those who imagined him, the dawn of modernity signaled the death of figures, of signs, of images to invite interpretations and generate meanings, meanings that structured England’s unlettered lay men and women’s relationships to their neighbors, to their Church, and to their God. And in a final historical irony, it was the very intimacy between lay person and God fostered by the practice and discourse of clerically endorsed “lewd” meditation that so naturally coalesced with the new anti-Catholic iconoclasm of the sixteenth century and prepared the way for the Reformation.

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<sup>1</sup> Barry Unsworth, *Morality Play* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1995), pp. 74-75 (emphasis mine).

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