

VIRGIN, BRIDE AND LOVER: A STUDY OF THE  
RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SEXUALITY AND  
SPIRITUALITY IN ANCHORITIC LITERATURE

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CATHERINE A. INNES PARKER







VIRGIN, BRIDE AND LOVER:  
A STUDY OF THE RELATIONSHIP  
BETWEEN SEXUALITY AND SPIRITUALITY  
IN ANCHORITIC LITERATURE

BY

CATHERINE A. INNES PARKER

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## ABSTRACT

The spirituality portrayed in *Ancren Wisse* and the texts associated with it is rooted in the anchoress' own situation; a female solitary enclosed within the four walls of her anchorhouse. The images used to express that spirituality are tied to her experience of enclosure and to her gender. These two elements come together in the matrix of anchorhouse/body/heart, in which the anchoress' female body becomes identified with the anchorhouse in which it is enclosed. The spirituality of these texts is thus deeply grounded in the anchoress' sexuality and her perception of her own body.

The images of enclosure and female sexuality which dominate these texts are expressed in terms of the paradox of the virgin who is at the same time the lover and bride of Christ. The female body enclosed within the anchorhouse is sealed by physical chastity, just as the anchoress is sealed within her anchorhouse. Physical purity is itself an image or symbol of the purity of heart and soul which is an essential prerequisite for the anchoress' goal of union with God. It is for this, and this alone, that she has turned from the world and enclosed her body and heart in the confines of her anchorhouse.

The union with God which the anchoress seeks is also described in images which are governed by both her enclosure and her gender. The spiritual quest of the anchoress is unequivocally the search of a *female* devotee for a *male* God, who approaches her in very human terms. The enclosed chamber of her heart which she

prepares for his coming is the arbour or bower in which she greets her beloved, and the nest or womb in which she nurtures her God. Her union with God is described in terms both sensual and sensuous, combining erotic imagery with imagery of motherhood and fertility. The erotic union with Christ available to the anchoress in her enclosure transforms and redeems, as the body which is vulnerable to lust (her own and others') becomes the vessel which bears Christ through imitation and union.

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For Kim

*þi deboneirschipe mai make þe eihwer luued  
. 7 for þi is riht þ i luue þe . 7 leaue alle  
oðre for þe*

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## ABBREVIATIONS

- AW                    *Ancrene Wisse*: J.R.R. Tolkien (ed.), *The English Text of the Ancrene Riwe: Ancrene Wisse, MS Corpus Christi College Cambridge 402*. EETS 249 (1962).
- Cleopatra            E.J. Dobson (ed.), *The English Text of the Ancrene Riwe, B.M. Cotton MS Cleopatra C.VI*. EETS 267 (1972).
- HM                    *Hali Meiðhad*: in Bella Millett and Jocelyn Wogan-Browne (eds.), *Medieval English Prose for Women: Selections from the Katherine Group and Ancrene Wisse*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990.
- LLe                   *On Lofsong of ure Lefdi*: in W. Meredith Thompson (ed.), *þe Wohunge of Ure Lawerd*. EETS 241 (1958).
- LLo                   *On Lofsong of ure Louerde*: in W. Meredith Thompson (ed.), *þe Wohunge of Ure Lauerd*. EETS 241 (1958).
- M/W-B, Millett and Wogan-Browne: Bella Millett and Jocelyn Wogan-Brown (eds.), *Medieval English Prose for Women: Selections from the Katherine Group and Ancrene Wisse*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990.
- Nero                   Mabel Day (ed.), *The English Text of the Ancrene Riwe, Cotton Nero A.XIV*. EETS 225 (1952).
- RR                    Aelred of Rievaulx, "A Rule of Life for a Recluse," tran. Mary Paul Macpherson, in *Teatises; The Pastoral Prayer*. Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1971.
- S/W, Savage and Watson: Anne Savage and Nicholas Watson (ed. and tran.), *Anchoritic Spirituality: Ancrene Wisse and Associated Works*. New York: Paulist Press, 1991.
- SJ                    *Seinte Iulienne*: d'Ardenne, S.T.R.O. (ed.), *þe Liflade ant te Passiun of Seinte Iulienne*. EETS 248 (1962). (or. publ. 1936).
- SK                    *Seinte Katerine*: d'Ardenne, S.R.T.O. and Dobson, E.J. (eds.), *Seinte Katerine*. EETS, Supp. ser. 7 (1981).

- SM                    *Seinte Margarete*: in Bella Millett and Jocelyn Wogan-Browne (eds.), *Medieval English Prose for Women: Selections from the Katherine Group and Ancrene Wisse*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990.
- SW                    *Sawles Warde*: in Bella Millett and Jocelyn Wogan-Browne (eds.), *Medieval English Prose for Women: Selections from the Katherine Group and Ancrene Wisse*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990.
- Thompson            W. Meredith Thompson (ed.), *þe Wohunge of Ure Lauerd*. EETS 241 (1958).
- UrG, *Ureisun*        *On wel swuðe God Ureisun of God Almihti*: in W. Meredith Thompson (ed.), *þe Wohunge of Ure Lauerd*. EETS 241 (1958).
- Vitellius              J.A. Herbert (ed.), *The French Text of the Ancrene Riwe*. EETS 219 (1944).
- WLd, *Wohunge*      *þe Wohunge of ure Lauerd*: in W. Meredith Thompson (ed.), *þe Wohunge of Ure Lauerd*. EETS 241 (1958).

## INTRODUCTION

In the early thirteenth century, somewhere in the English West Midlands, three young women of noble birth turned from the world and embraced the enclosed life of the anchoress. They had a confessor and spiritual advisor, a man whom they trusted and who had for them a deep understanding and abiding affection. They repeatedly begged him to write a "rule" for them, to guide them in the life which they had chosen, and after much urging he reluctantly accepted the task. Thus was born the *Ancrene Wisse*, a pearl of early middle English prose.<sup>1</sup>

Although the author originally addressed his work to his three charges alone, he clearly had a larger audience in mind.<sup>2</sup> *Ancrene Wisse* soon became popular, filling as it did the need for a vernacular guide to a life which was becoming an increasingly attractive choice for pious women. It was soon revised for a larger community and began to circulate with other texts written, if not by the same author, by men who were close to him in both dialect and thought: the texts of the *Katherine*

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<sup>1</sup> This according to the author's Introduction (AW I.5, [S/W 47], cp. AW viii.221 [S/W 207]). However, this profession of reluctance on the part of the author is a *topos*, assumed by other authors as well. See, for example, Aelred of Rievaulx, *Rule of Life for a Recluse*, in *Treatises and Pastoral Prayer*, tran. Mary Paul Macpherson, CF 2 (Kalamazoo, 1971) [hereafter RR], p. 43; and A. Savage and N. Watson, *Anchoritic Spirituality: Ancrene Wisse and Associated Works*, (New York, 1991) [hereafter S/W], p. 340, n.3. To avoid confusion in referring to the sections of *Ancrene Wisse*, references to the Author's Introduction will be abbreviated AW.I, and references to the individual parts will be abbreviated in lower case Roman numerals.

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, AW v.175 [S/W 173]).



Group.<sup>3</sup> Perhaps later, but not much later, other texts became associated with it: the texts of the *Wooing Group*.<sup>4</sup> *Ancrene Wisse* became so popular that it was translated into both French and Latin, and survives in seventeen medieval manuscripts or fragments.<sup>5</sup> The popularity of *Ancrene Wisse* and its related texts is also attested by

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<sup>3</sup> *Hali Meidhad* (HM), *Sawles Warde* (SW), *Seinte Katerine* (SK), *Seinte Margarete* (SM), and *Seinte Juliene* (SJ). Some of these texts may, in fact, antedate *Ancrene Wisse*; for example, the author of *Ancrene Wisse* refers at one point to *ower englishe boc of seinte Margarete* (AW iv.125 [S/W 137]).

<sup>4</sup> *þe Wohunge of ure Lauerd* (WLd), *On wele swuþe God Ureison of God Almihti* (UrG), *On Lofsong of ure Louerde* (LLo), and *On .lofsong of Ure Lefdi* [or *þe Creisun of Seinte Marie*] (LLe).

<sup>5</sup> R. Dahood, "Ancrene Wisse, the Katherine Group and the Wohunge Group," in A.S.G. Edwards (ed.), *Middle English Prose: A Critical Guide to Major Authors and Genres*, (New Jersey, 1984), pp. 2-5 gives a brief description of the manuscripts in which *Ancrene Wisse* is found. For a more detailed description of the major manuscripts containing the *Ancrene Wisse*, and their affiliations, see E.J. Dobson, "The Affiliations of the Manuscripts of *Ancrene Wisse*," in N. Davis and C.L. Wrenn (eds.), *English and Medieval Studies presented to J.R.R. Tolkien*, (London, 1962), pp. 128-163. A detailed description of the manuscripts can also be found in Geoffrey Shepherd, *Ancrene Wisse Parts Six and Seven*, (London, 1959, repr. 1965), pp. ix-xiv. The most important manuscripts are: Corpus Christi College, Cambridge MS 402 [Corpus], upon which the study presented here is based; British Museum Cotton MS Nero A.xiv [Nero]; BM Cotton MS Cleopatra C.vi [Cleopatra]; and BM Cotton MS Titus D.xviii [Titus]. MS Bodley 34 [Bodley] and BM Royal MS A.xvii [Royal], while not containing AW, contain several of the texts of the *Katherine Group* and the *Wooing Group*. Shepherd includes an extremely useful chart outlining the distribution of the texts of the *Katherine Group* and the *Wooing Group* in these six manuscripts (p. xiv).

the fact that parts of them were later expanded and/or incorporated into other texts such as *The Chastising of God's Children*, and *A Talking of The Love of God*.<sup>6</sup>

In order to provide a context for *Ancrene Wisse* and the texts associated with it, this introduction will first discuss the nature of the anchoritic life, before proceeding to an introduction of the texts themselves. Then, after a brief overview of recent scholarship devoted to these texts, I will outline the argument of this dissertation and the approach which I will take in my discussion of the spirituality presented in the anchoritic texts.

### THE ANCHORITIC LIFE

The anchoritic life was a life which embodied many paradoxes. It was a difficult life, both physically and spiritually, viewed by St. Benedict as a progression from the communal life.<sup>7</sup> St. Benedict identified anchorites as the chosen few:

those, namely, who not in the first fervor of their conversion, but after long probation in the monastery, have long since learned by the help of many others, to fight against the devil, and being well armed, are able to go forth from the ranks of their brethren to the singlehanded

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<sup>6</sup> See S/W p. 378, n. 61 and p. 429, n. 7; H.E. Allen, "Some Fourteenth Century Borrowings from '*Ancrene Riwe*,'" MLR 18 (1923), pp. 1-8; and Dahood, "*AW*, *KG* and *WG*," pp. 15, 17.

<sup>7</sup> This view of the anchoritic life as a progression from the communal life does not seem to apply to English anchoresses, however, as we shall see below.

combat of the desert, safe now, even without the consolation of another, to fight with their own strength against the weaknesses of the flesh and their own evil thoughts, God alone aiding them.<sup>8</sup>

The anchorite (or anchoress) was a spiritual athlete, a soldier of Christ entering into heroic combat with the forces of the devil in his or her solitary retreat. This notion remained the ideal throughout the middle ages, even when the desert retreat became a cell attached to a church. In fact, the anchorite in his or her cell became a highly visible symbol of the highest spiritual calling. Anchorites and anchoresses provided those who remained in the world with a model to emulate, and in their asceticism and prayer upheld the community through intercession. Anchorites were therefore accorded enormous respect in the middle ages.<sup>9</sup>

The anchoritic cell had many overlapping meanings which affected the symbols used to describe it. It was the symbolic desert, reflecting the desert retreats of the earliest anchorites; it was the mountain of contemplation where the anchorite

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<sup>8</sup> *Holy Rule of St. Benedict*, ch. 2, quoted by Warren, *Anchorites and Their Patrons in Medieval England*, (Los Angeles, 1985), p. 23.

<sup>9</sup> See Warren, *Anchorites and Their Patrons*, pp. 15-17. Although the terms "anchorite" and "anchoress" are gendered, in the discussion which follows, I use the term "anchorite" as a generic term to refer to both male and female recluses. I have struggled with the problem of using a "male" term to describe a profession which was predominantly female in thirteenth century England, at the time when the anchoritic texts under discussion here were written, and have sought a term which would be inclusive. I considered using non-gendered terms such as "solitary" or "recluse;" however, these terms are less specialized than the terms "anchorite" and "anchoress," and lose the connection with cognate terms such as "anchoritic" and "anchorhouse." In the end, in order to retain the technical meaning and nuances of the terminology of anchoritism, I have used the term "anchorite" as an inclusive term, as indeed does Warren, and reserved "anchoress" for the discussion of female recluses in particular.

communed with God. However, it was also a prison: the undeserved prison of the martyr assailed by the forces of the devil and the deserved prison of the penitent sinner who must flee from the world in order to atone for sin. It was the wilderness through which the solitary travelled in order to reach the goal of the heavenly city: lost, alone, and beset by temptation, the anchorite struggled within him or herself to find the direction which would lead to God.<sup>10</sup>

The desert or wilderness thus became a mental state as well as a physical place, symbolizing both the aridity, danger and loneliness of the wilderness of Scripture, and the hidden itinerary of the mystical journey; the prison to which the anchorite is condemned and the mountain upon which he or she communes with God.<sup>11</sup> The images used to describe the anchoritic life thus include images of penance and asceticism, as the anchorite is encouraged to see himself or herself as the weakest of humans, fleeing from the dangers of the world in order to atone for sin. This attitude is exemplified in a passage from Walter Hilton's *The Ladder of Perfection*, written in the fourteenth century for a female recluse:

Discipline your will and, if possible, your feelings to recognize that you are unfit to live among other folk, unworthy to serve God in the fellowship of His servants, unprofitable to your fellow-Christians, and lacking both knowledge and strength to perform the good works of the active life for the benefit of your fellows as other men and women do. Consequently you are a wretched outcast, rejected by everyone, and

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<sup>10</sup> Warren, *Anchorites and Their Patrons*, pp. 8-10.

<sup>11</sup> Warren, *Anchorites and Their Patrons*, pp. 10-12.

confined to a cell alone, so that, since you cannot help anyone by good works, you may not harm anyone by your evil example (I.16).<sup>12</sup>

Enclosure was thus described as imprisonment. However, this was an imprisonment from which the anchorite would never re-emerge. Hence, enclosure was also described using the more extreme imagery of a living death: the cell which was a penitential prison was also a grave. This concept is reflected not only in the imagery used to describe the anchoritic life, but also in the enclosure ceremony itself. Warren describes the earliest extant enclosure ceremony, dating from the twelfth century. The ceremony begins with a lengthy and symbolic mass:

After the mass the recluse is conducted to his reclusorium while the entourage chants antiphons and psalms drawn from the Office of the Dead; the reclusorium is sanctified with holy water and incense. The officiant then proceeds with the Office of Extreme Unction followed by prayers for the dying. Now the recluse enters the house; the officiant sprinkles him with a little dust to the continued singing of antiphons and psalms; all then withdraw save the priest, who remains with the recluse to tell him to rise and to live by obedience. On the

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<sup>12</sup> Walter Hilton, *The Ladder of Perfection*, tran. Leo Sherley-Price, (New York, 1957, repr. 1988), pp. 16-17. That this attitude applies to both male and female recluses is evident from a similar passage from the preface to the ceremony of enclosure found in the early sixteenth-century Sarum Manual: "Let the one who is enclosed learn not to think highly of himself, as though he deserves to be set apart from the mass of mankind; but let him rather believe that it is provided and appointed for his own weakness that he should be set far from the companionship of his neighbours, lest by more frequent sins he should both himself perish and do harm to those who dwell with him, and should thus fall into greater damnation. Let him therefore think he is convicted of his sins and committed to solitary confinement as to a prison, and that on account of his own weakness he is unworthy of the fellowship of mankind." Cited by R.M. Clay, *The Hermits and Anchorites of England*, (London, 1914), p. 193.

emergence of the officiant the command is given to block up the door of the house.<sup>13</sup>

The anchorite was symbolically dead to the world, buried in his or her cell. Here, the anchorite was free to commune with God and to seek the mystical union with God which is the closest earthly approximation of the eternal joy of paradise.<sup>14</sup> Mystical union, however, was not achieved easily. One of the dominant images for the anchoritic life in *Ancrene Wisse* and its related texts is that of crucifixion, an image which combines the extreme asceticism of the prison with the concept of the anchorhouse<sup>15</sup> as a grave. In her cell, the anchoress is described as hanging on the cross with Christ, enclosed within her four walls as he was on the cross and in the sepulchre. The suffering of the penitential and ascetic enclosed life was thus transformed into a vehicle of union with Christ in his passion.

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<sup>13</sup> Warren, *Anchorites and Their Patrons*, p. 98.

<sup>14</sup> The terms "mystical" or "contemplative" have many meanings and are used in many different ways. In this thesis, these terms are used in their broader sense, to describe the life of contemplation of God leading toward a heightened state of consciousness in which union with God can be achieved. The contemplative life is usually contrasted with the active life, the life of Mary as opposed to that of Martha (see AW viii.211-212 [S/W 200]). See also Warren, *Anchorites and Their Patrons*, pp. 100-101 and n. 20.

<sup>15</sup> "Anchorhouse" (*ancre hus*) is the term used throughout *Ancrene Wisse* for the anchoress's cell (eg. AW ii.58 [S/W 88]; vi.193 [S/W 187]). Anchoresses in particular would typically be enclosed in an anchorhouse which was either attached to or close by a church, as they could not live in isolation from humankind for reasons of safety. These cells were often endowed by local patrons.

Although it began as a male profession, anchoritism was a vocation which was more common among women than men throughout the middle ages.<sup>16</sup> This was particularly true in England during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries:

English anchoritism was ... a vocation that already was biased toward women in the twelfth century. It became sharply female in orientation in the thirteenth century.<sup>17</sup>

There are several reasons for this. One was the increase in lay piety which was evident throughout Europe in the thirteenth century.<sup>18</sup> Another was that the anchoritic life offered women a religious vocation with a status which was unavailable to her in any other form of religious life. Unlike men, women could not become hermits, largely for fear of physical molestation.<sup>19</sup> Barred from the priesthood, the only other option open to her was that of a professed nun. For many, this option was either unattractive or unavailable. Nunneries in England were notoriously poor, and many required a "dowry" which would be beyond the means of any but the upper

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<sup>16</sup> Warren, *Anchorites and Their Patrons*, p. 19. The period defined by Warren in her discussion is 1100-1539.

<sup>17</sup> Warren, *Anchorites and Their Patrons*, p. 20.

<sup>18</sup> Warren, *Anchorites and Their Patrons*, p. 22.

<sup>19</sup> The distinction between anchorites and hermits is not always clear in medieval writings. In general, however, scholars distinguish between anchorites, who were enclosed in a fixed site and vowed to maintain stability of abode, and hermits, who were free to move wherever they could find a means of making a living, either through performing some service such as maintaining a chapel or a road, or through alms. The vocation of a hermit includes a much broader range of lifestyles and behavior than anchoritism, which is a narrowly defined vocation under much stricter ecclesiastical control. See Warren, *Anchorites and Their Patrons*, pp. 7-8, 16, 152.

class. In addition, the poverty of many nunneries meant that nuns were forced to work extremely hard just to maintain a very basic level of subsistence. This left precious little time for contemplation.<sup>20</sup>

For women, therefore, the anchoritic life was rarely seen as the progression from the communal life described by St. Benedict. Rather, the enclosed cell of the anchoress provided an alternative for the pious lay woman who wished to dedicate her life to God.<sup>21</sup> Here she could flee from the dangers of the world and, through penance and asceticism, atone for her sins. Here she could enter into heroic combat with the forces of evil, battling sin and temptation and overcoming them through a chaste and ascetic life. But most important, here she could commune with God, through meditation and devotion which was centred around the human Christ suffering with her and for her on the cross.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> See Eileen Power, *Medieval Women*, ed. M.M. Postan, (Cambridge, 1975) ch. 5, and *Medieval English Nunneries* (Cambridge, 1922), upon which it is based; and *Medieval English Nunneries c. 1275-1535*, (New York, 1964). Other studies of the religious vocation open to women in the middle ages include: Sr. Mary Byrne, *The Tradition of the Nun in Medieval England*, (Washington, D.C., 1932); Sharon Elkins, *Holy Women of Twelfth-Century England*, (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1988); Christine Fell, *Women in Anglo-Saxon England*, (London, 1984); John A. Nichols, and Lillian Thomas Shank, (eds) *Medieval Religious Women I: Distant Echoes*, (Kalamazoo, 1984) and *Medieval Religious Women II: Peace Weavers*, (Kalamazoo, 1987); and Susan Mosher Stuard, *Women in Medieval Society*, (University of Pennsylvania Press, 1976).

<sup>21</sup> Warren, *Anchorites and Their Patrons*, p. 22.

<sup>22</sup> For excellent summaries of the anchoritic life, see also S/W pp. 15-28; and Robert W. Ackerman and Roger Dahood (ed. and tran.), *Ancrene Riwe: Introduction and Part I*, (Binghamton, New York, 1984), pp. 7-16.



## THE TEXTS AND THEIR HISTORY

*ANCRENE WISSE*

*Ancrene Wisse* was originally written for three sisters of noble birth who, "in the flower of their youth," renounced the pleasures of the world to become anchoresses. They were fortunate in their situation, for, unlike many recluses, they were provided for by a "friend," who generously supplied all that they needed in the way of food and clothing for both themselves and their maidservants.<sup>23</sup>

The date and provenance of *Ancrene Wisse* have been the subject of much investigation.<sup>24</sup> Early studies proposed dates ranging from the mid-twelfth to the early thirteenth century. H.E. Allen devoted a great deal of work to determining the origins of the text, concluding that the original version was written for a group of

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<sup>23</sup> The passage which tells us of these three sisters is found in full only in Nero f.50, p. 85.8-27 (see the translation by M.B. Salu, *The Ancrene Riwle*, [London, 1955, repr. 1967], p. 84). Warren stresses the need for patronage throughout her book, and gives many examples of the kinds of support that an anchorite or anchoress might receive, indicating that the situation of the three sisters in *Ancrene Wisse* might not have been quite so unusual (see, for example, *Anchorites and Their Patrons*, chapters 2 and 6). However, Warren also gives examples of anchoresses who were without patronage or who lost their support, for example through the death of a patron, and suffered disastrous consequences (*Anchorites and Their Patrons*, pp. 43f.).

<sup>24</sup> For a review of scholarly discussion of *Ancrene Wisse*, see Dahood, "AW, KG and WG," pp. 8-16.

three sisters living in the priory of Kilburn, near London, from the 1130's.<sup>25</sup> While the history of these three sisters does contain some remarkable parallels to that of the three sisters for whom the *Ancrene Wisse* was written, the date is far too early. A considerable amount of the material in *Ancrene Wisse* is based on the writings of Bernard of Clairvaux and Aelred of Rievaulx, as pointed out by, among others, R.W. Chambers.<sup>26</sup> In addition, J.R.R. Tolkien concluded from his study of the dialect of the Corpus manuscript that the original could not have been composed before 1200. He argues that the dialect of the revised Corpus version is too pure to allow for a long period of time between the composition of the original and the revision. Since Corpus cannot have been composed before the arrival of the friars in England (1221-1224), Tolkien concluded that the original must have been written sometime after 1200.<sup>27</sup>

The question of dating was raised again by Shepherd. Shepherd argues for a date "about the year 1200, and on the whole probably after, rather than before 1200."<sup>28</sup> He bases his argument on the liturgical background which is, at the earliest, late twelfth century, and on several references which seem to suggest a date

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<sup>25</sup> See H.E. Allen, "The Origin of the *Ancrene Riwe*," PMLA 33 (1918) pp. 474-546; and "On the Author of the *Ancrene Riwe*," PMLA 44 (1929) pp. 635-80.

<sup>26</sup> "Recent Research upon the *Ancren Riwe*," RES 1 (1925) pp. 4-23.

<sup>27</sup> "*Ancrene Wisse* and *Hali Meidhad*," E&S 14 (1929) pp. 103-26. For the dating of the Corpus revision, see below, pp. 13f.

<sup>28</sup> Shepherd, *AW Six and Seven*, p. xxiv.

"not earlier than the last decade of the twelfth century," such as the treatment of Greek fire, the description of the crucifix with three nails, and the author's reference to tournaments. Shepherd also argues that the devotional content of *Ancrene Wisse* reflects concerns of the twelfth, rather than the thirteenth, century, and that it therefore must have been composed before the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215.<sup>29</sup>

However, G. Sitwell, in his Introduction to Salu's translation of *Ancrene Wisse*, suggested that *Ancrene Wisse* was influenced by the manuals for confession and penance which appeared in great numbers after the Fourth Lateran Council.<sup>30</sup> Similarly, Sitwell points out that many features of the devotions in *Ancrene Wisse* seem to be drawn from the late twelfth or early thirteenth centuries.<sup>31</sup> Sitwell therefore argues for a date after 1215.

The controversy over the dating of *Ancrene Wisse* was taken up by E.J. Dobson, and it is his work which has shed the most light on the origins of the text. He points out several weaknesses in Shepherd's argument that the work should be dated before 1215, primarily with reference to Shepherd's discussion of tournaments and the devotional concerns which Shepherd considers to be incompatible with a date

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<sup>29</sup> Shepherd, *AW Six and Seven*, pp. xxiii-xxiv.

<sup>30</sup> Salu, *Ancrene Riwle*, pp. xviii-xxi.

<sup>31</sup> Salu, *Ancrene Riwle*, pp. 193-196.

after the Fourth Lateran Council.<sup>32</sup> He also directs attention to several other details which suggest a date after 1215 such as the *Ancrene Wisse*'s treatment of the practice of blood-letting, and the concern with meals and diet.<sup>33</sup> In addition, Dobson argues that the textual history of *Ancrene Wisse* must be taken into consideration. The revised version, found in the Corpus manuscript, must be dated after the arrival of the friars in England, as this manuscript contains a unique reference to both Dominican and Franciscan friars (AW 36 [S/W 73]). The Dominicans arrived in 1221 and the Franciscans in 1224, and the Franciscan house in Hereford (near which, Dobson argues, *Ancrene Wisse* was written) was established c.1227. Dobson therefore suggests a date for the Corpus revision of "about 1230."<sup>34</sup> Dobson argues that the revisions in Corpus are so consistent with the original version in both language and style that they must have been composed by the author himself in order to elaborate or clarify the original text and to adapt it to the needs of a community that had grown from its original complement of three anchoresses to twenty or more.<sup>35</sup> In addition, he points to the evidence of the Cleopatra

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<sup>32</sup> "The Date and Composition of *Ancrene Wisse*," in J.A. Burrow (ed.), *Middle English Literature: British Academy Gollancz Lectures*, (Oxford, 1989), pp. 95-98.

<sup>33</sup> "Date and Composition," pp. 100-102. See also pp. 102-105 for further examples of this sort.

<sup>34</sup> "Date and Composition," pp. 104-105.

<sup>35</sup> "Date and Composition," pp. 106-111; cp. AW iv.130 [S/W 141]. Dobson accounts for the growth of the community on pp. 115-118.

manuscript, which has been edited in several hands. One of these, identified by Dobson as "scribe B," corrects the text in a way that suggests "a modern author correcting and revising a bad set of proofs."<sup>36</sup> Dobson concludes that scribe B was, in fact, the author. Thus, according to Dobson's argument,

a single man was responsible for the composition of *Ancrene Wisse*, for the correction and revision of the Cleopaira MS., and for the making of the Corpus version.<sup>37</sup>

While some time must be allowed between the original composition and the writing of Corpus, the gap is considerably narrowed if they were indeed written by the same man. Dobson suggests that *Ancrene Wisse* was written sometime after the decrees of the Fourth Lateran Council became known in England, possibly after the Council of Oxford in 1222, and was revised about 1228-1230.<sup>38</sup>

Dobson has also shed considerable light on the related question of *where* the text originated. The work of J.R.R. Tolkien on the dialect of *Ancrene Wisse*, which

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<sup>36</sup> "Date and Composition," p. 113.

<sup>37</sup> "Date and Composition," p. 115.

<sup>38</sup> "Date and Composition," p. 118. The question of the date, provenance and authorship of the other texts of the *Katherine Group* is usually discussed with reference to *Ancrene Wisse*, as well as to each other. See B. Millett, *Hali Meiodhad*, EETS 284, (London, 1982), pp. xvi-xxii; S.R.T.O. d'Ardenne and E.J. Dobson, *Sainte Katherine*, EETS Supp. ser. 7, (London, 1981), pp. xxxviii-xl; and S.R.T.O. d'Ardenne, *Be Liflade ant te Passiun of Sainte Juliene*, EETS 248, (London, 1962, or. publ. 1936), pp. xl-xlvii.

he called the AB language,<sup>39</sup> established that the language of *Ancrene Wisse* was a West-Midland dialect.<sup>40</sup> Dobson, drawing upon the history of the two manuscripts in which this dialect occurs, establishes the location more precisely as northern Herefordshire or southern Shropshire.<sup>41</sup>

In *The Origins of Ancrene Wisse*, Dobson argues convincingly and in detail that the author of *Ancrene Wisse* was in all probability an Augustinian canon and suggests that the work originated at Wigmore Abbey, in north-west Herefordshire. His argument is too complex to review in detail, but in summary, he concludes that the three anchoresses for whom *Ancrene Wisse* was written were located at the Deerfold, near Wigmore. He further argues that the revised version was written for a larger group of anchoresses at nearby Limebrook Priory, founded by Ralph de Lingen, and that the author was Ralph's son, Brian. He suggests that the lord of Wigmore, Roger de Mortimer, was the "friend" who supplied the needs of the original three sisters, based on a passage in a charter which confirms land to Limebrook in which reference is made to an earlier grant of land made by de Mortimer's grandfather, to "the sisters formerly living in *Le Derefaud*."<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Based on the two manuscripts in which this dialect occurs, Corpus (usually designated "A") and Bodley (usually designated "B").

<sup>40</sup> "*Ancrene Wisse* and *Hali Meithad*."

<sup>41</sup> *The Origins of Ancrene Wisse*. (Oxford, 1976), pp. 116-118.

<sup>42</sup> *Origins*, p. 218.

However, Sally Thompson has pointed out that Dobson's transcription of the Latin is faulty, and that the charter actually refers to *brothers*, not sisters, living at the Deerfold.<sup>43</sup> While this means that there is no specific evidence of  *anchoresses* (as opposed to nuns) at either Limebrook or the Deerfold, Thompson points out that this does not rule out the possibility that Limebrook Priory developed from anchoritic origins, and that Dobson's theory should not be summarily dismissed.<sup>44</sup>

The intellectual background of *Ancrene Wisse* has also been the subject of much discussion and a great deal of time and effort has been devoted to the study of the author's sources and the way in which he uses them. The content of *Ancrene Wisse* derives from a variety of sources. Shepherd identifies several major themes, such as penitence, asceticism, the vision of God, purity of heart, the love of God, and meditation on the passion and imitation of Christ, which run through parts six and seven.<sup>45</sup> He discusses the question of the author's sources, identifying the Bible, the *Lives of the Fathers*, Cassian, Augustine, Gregory, Anselm, Bernard of Clairvaux, Aelred of Rievaulx, and others as major sources of much of the material in *Ancrene Wisse*.<sup>46</sup> Other major studies of the sources of *Ancrene Wisse* are also available.

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<sup>43</sup> Sally Thompson, *Women Religious: The Founding of English Nunneries after the Norman Conquest*, (Oxford, 1991), p. 34.

<sup>44</sup> Thompson, *Women Religious*, p. 35.

<sup>45</sup> *AW Six and Seven*, pp. xli-lviii.

<sup>46</sup> *AW Six and Seven*, pp. xxv-xxix.

Mary Baldwin has produced a monumental work which traces the sources of each major section of *Ancrene Wisse*,<sup>47</sup> and James Maybury has traced the sources of many of the images found in the text.<sup>48</sup>

While *Ancrene Wisse* does draw heavily upon Latin sources, the material is arranged in a unique way. Maybury has shown that the author's use of imagery often varies from his sources. In addition, the author adds his own special touches in the form of anecdotes and imagery drawn from everyday life. His humour and sensitivity to human feelings is apparent throughout his work.

*Ancrene Wisse* is divided into an Introduction and eight "parts." Parts One and Eight deal with the "outer rule," concerning the anchoress's devotions (i) and daily routine (viii). These form a "frame" around parts Two-Seven, which deal with the more important "inner rule." Parts Two-Seven deal in a progressive manner with the areas which the anchoress will need to explore in her enclosed life: the outer senses

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<sup>47</sup> "*Ancrene Wisse* and Its Background in the Christian Tradition of Religious Instruction and Spirituality," Diss. University of Toronto, 1974.

<sup>48</sup> "Sacramentalism in the *Ancrene Riwe*: its Method and its Tradition," Diss. University of Mass., 1969. Maybury discusses the use of animal images, such as the bird imagery of Part iii and the use of the fox and the dog, as well as the imagery of mountains and hills, the fig tree and water. He traces the use of this imagery in such authors as Augustine, Alcuin, Rabanus Maurus, Hugh of Folieto, and Alexander Neckam, comparing the use of the imagery in the sources to that of the AW author. Other studies of the sources of *Ancrene Wisse* include E.J. Dobson, *Moralities on the Gospels*, (Oxford, 1975); Alexandra Barratt, "Anchoritic Aspects of *Ancrene Wisse*," *Medium Ævum* 49 (1980) 32-56; and Sr. Ethelbert Cooper, "Latin Elements of the *Ancrene Riwe*," Diss. Birmingham University, 1956.



and their control (ii); the inner feelings (iii); temptation (iv); confession (v); penance (vi); and love (vii).

The relationship between the inner and outer rule is described as that between a lady and her servant: the outer rule exists solely to serve the inner rule, but without it the inner rule would surely founder (AW I.6-7 [S/W 48]). *Ancrene Wisse* defines the inner rule as the charity of a pure heart, clean conscience and true belief. It is this inner rule, or Lady rule, which governs the heart, making it even and smooth, without the lumps and hollows (*cnost 7 dolc*) of a crooked conscience which accuses the anchoress of sin (AW I.5 [S/W 47]). Thus, the outer rule exists only to serve the inner rule, just as physical chastity is preserved in order to ensure inner purity. As Grayson puts it, "in the ordering of the outer life ... lies the possibility of perfecting the inner life, of purifying the heart."<sup>49</sup>

The outer rule is therefore flexible and many of its precepts vary according to the situation of the individual anchoress. Indeed, the question has been raised as to whether *Ancrene Wisse* ought to be classified as a "rule" in the traditional sense of the word. As Warren points out, texts written for anchorites (or anchoresses) vary widely in both content and form,<sup>50</sup> and it is therefore difficult to establish what an anchoritic "rule" should consist of. Georgianna suggests that the author's attitude

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<sup>49</sup> *Structure and Imagery in Ancrene Wisse*, (Hanover, New Hampshire, 1974), p. 17.

<sup>50</sup> Warren, *Anchorites and Their Patrons*, p. 294, at the beginning of an appendix in which she lists and briefly describes English Anchoritic Rules (pp. 294-298).

towards rules in general is ambiguous: in his response to the anchoresses' repeated requests for a *riwle*, he points out that there are many kinds of rules, and that he will concern himself only with the inner rule which rules the heart and, to a lesser extent, the outer rule which rules the body and bodily actions (AW Intro.5-6 [S/W 47-48]).

Georgianna argues:

The kind [of rule] he chooses to emphasize, what he calls an "inner rule," bears little resemblance to anything we would recognize as a religious rule and is in fact best understood as an antirule. It is descriptive rather than prescriptive, complex and discursive rather than limited, and if its message could be summarized in a sentence it would have to be that the religious life is much more *unruly* than the young anchoresses might have at first supposed.<sup>51</sup>

In fact, although the work is referred to by many scholars as *Ancrene Riwle*, the only title given in the manuscripts is *Ancrene Wisse*, found in the revised Corpus manuscript.<sup>52</sup> This title has suggested to some that the work ought to be seen as much as a "handbook" or "guide" as a "rule."<sup>53</sup> However, the author clearly designates his work as a *riwle* in the first paragraph of his introduction, which contains an intricate word-play on the terms *rectus*, *regula*, *directio*, *rectificatio*, *richte*, and *riwle*, leading into the contrast between the straight and crooked conscience and

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<sup>51</sup> Linda Georgianna, *The Solitary Self: Individuality in the Ancrene Wisse*, (Cambridge, Mass., 1981), p. 9.

<sup>52</sup> It is for this reason that the title *Ancrene Riwle* is commonly used for all versions except Corpus, while the title *Ancrene Wisse* is reserved for the Corpus version alone.

<sup>53</sup> See S/W, p. 43.

the concept of rightness of heart.<sup>54</sup> What is clear is that the author of *Ancrene Wisse* defines the concept of "rule" in his own unique way. *Ancrene Wisse* offers advice, anecdotes, and admonitions, all designed to guide the anchoress through her daily life and aid her in her struggle against temptation as she strives for union and communion with Christ.

The question of the "mystical" nature of *Ancrene Wisse* has also been the subject of controversy.<sup>55</sup> While it is true that the mysticism of *Ancrene Wisse* differs markedly from that of the fourteenth century English mystics, there are many passages which are decidedly mystical in nature.<sup>56</sup> However, Sitwell suggests that these references seem to be incidental, and do not dominate the text. Sitwell argues that this "incidental treatment" of mysticism is in the tradition of Gregory and Bernard, both of whom are cited extensively, rather than the later English mystics.<sup>57</sup>

The author of *Ancrene Wisse* clearly assumes that the anchoresses for whom he is writing will engage in some form of mystical contemplation. Mary Baldwin has argued that the use of the term *bihalden* in *Ancrene Wisse* indicates that the author

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<sup>54</sup> Ackerman and Dahood, *Ancrene Riwe*, p.91.

<sup>55</sup> See, for example, Shepherd, *AW Six and Seven*, pp. lvi-lviii, xxxvii; and Nicholas Watson, "The Methods and Objectives of Thirteenth-Century Anchoritic Devotion," in Marion Glasscoe (ed.), *The Medieval Mystical Tradition in England: Exeter Symposium IV*, (Cambridge, 1987), pp. 134, 145f.

<sup>56</sup> The mystical union of the anchoress with Christ is discussed below in Chapter Five.

<sup>57</sup> Salu, *Ancrene Riwe*, p. xiii-xvi.

intended it to describe meditation, especially meditation on the life of Christ in the manner of Anselm and Aelred.<sup>58</sup> There are many passages in *Ancrene Wisse* which reflect the kind of devotion to the humanity of Christ and meditation upon the passion reflected in the writings of Anselm, as the sufferings of Christ in his Passion are continually put before the anchoress as subjects for meditation. As with the question of rules, however, the author of *Ancrene Wisse* describes the contemplation which he expects of his readers in his own way, adapting his discussion to the specific circumstances of the anchoresses themselves.

#### *HALI MEIÐHAD*

*Hali Meidhad* is closely associated with *Ancrene Wisse* and the other works of the *Katherine Group* and the *Wooing Group* both by manuscript tradition, which groups these texts together,<sup>59</sup> and by parallels in thought, language and imagery. Millett points out many verbal parallels between *Hali Meidhad* and the other texts

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<sup>58</sup> Mary Baldwin, "Some Difficult Words in the *Ancrene Riwe*," *Mediaeval Studies* 38 (1976), pp. 269-271.

<sup>59</sup> HM occurs in Bodley with SK, SJ, SM and SW, and in Titus with AR, SK, SW, and WLD. The edition upon which this study is based is the critical edition prepared by Bella Millett and Jocelyn Wogan-Browne [olim Price], in *Medieval English Prose for Women: Selections from the Katherine Group and Ancrene Wisse*, (Oxford, 1990) [hereafter M/W-B].

of the 'AB group,' some of which are fairly extended.<sup>60</sup> A comparison of the style and content of *Hali Meidhad* with that of the other anchoritic texts reveals both similarities and differences.<sup>61</sup> While common authorship cannot be ruled out, it is more likely that the 'AB group' was written by a group of authors, each of which was well-acquainted with the others' work.

*Hali Meidhad* has often been condemned as narrow and harsh in its approach to marriage and sexuality.<sup>62</sup> However, the context of the work must be taken into consideration as must its genre: the intention of *Hali Meidhad* is not to convince the lady of the castle to give up her position in order to enter into the high tower of virginity,<sup>63</sup> but to affirm those who have already chosen this difficult and demanding life, assuring them that any regrets they may have are unfounded. As Elizabeth Robertson points out:

these narrow views of the work spring from the failure of critics to see this work as designed specifically for women in the religious life. *Hali Meidenhad* shares the psychological sophistication of the *Ancrene Wisse* and confronts the following problems specific to the female recluse: the centrality of virginity to the female recluse's experience; the isolation and sense of abandonment of the anchoress; the temptation facing

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<sup>60</sup> Millett, *Hali Meidhad*, pp. xix-xxi.

<sup>61</sup> Millett, *Hali Meidhad*, pp. xxi-xxii.

<sup>62</sup> See the examples given by S/W, General Introduction, p. 23 and n. 24, p. 335; E.J. Dobson, *Origins*, pp. 155-6; and Nicholas Watson, "Methods and Objectives," p. 138 and n. 40.

<sup>63</sup> As, for example, assumed by Roberta Bux Bosse, "Female Sexual Behavior in the Late Middle Ages; Ideal and Actual," *FCS* 10 (1984), p. 16.

women to lose their virginity; and the attraction of marriage, home, and children for women. The work scrutinizes these fears and desires and seeks to overcome them directly by substituting an image of a more emotionally fulfilling relationship to Christ.<sup>64</sup>

*Hali Meidhad* belongs to the tradition of virginity treatises. The genre was well-established in the patristic period, and continued to be a prevalent form into the Middle Ages. Although virginity literature was written for both men and women, it became a particularly common form of literature for women.

There are several detailed studies of the tradition of virginity literature and *Hali Meidhad*'s use of this material.<sup>65</sup> Many common themes emerge, such as the superiority of virginity, the need to protect virginity through withdrawal from the world, the dangers of pride and lechery, and the horrors of marriage and childbearing (the *molestiae nuptiarum*). Although some authors, such as Tertullian and Jerome, come close to condemning marriage outright, most agree that while marriage is good,

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<sup>64</sup> *Early English Devotional Prose and the Female Audience*, (Knoxville, 1990), p. 77. See also Watson, "Methods and Objectives," pp. 138-9; R.M Wilson, *Early Middle English Literature*, (London, 1939; repr. 1968), pp. 121-122; and Angela M. Lucas, *Women in the Middle Ages: Religion, Marriage and Letters*, (New York, 1983), pp. 23-24.

<sup>65</sup> See, for example, Millett, *Hali Meidhad*, pp. xxiv-lit; John Bugge, *Virginitas: An Essay in the History of a Medieval Ideal*, (The Hague, 1975); Unrue, "Hali Meidhad and Other Virginity Treatises," Diss. Ohio State University, 1972; Diane Bornstien, *The Lady in the Tower: Medieval Courtesy Literature for Women*, (Hamden, Connecticut, 1983), pp. 15-25; Jo Ann McNamara, "Sexual Equality and the Cult of Virginity in Early Christian Thought," *Feminist Studies* 3 (1976) pp. 145-58; Lucas, *Women in the Middle Ages*, pp. 23f. Thomas J. Heffernan, *Sacred Biography: Saints and Their Biographers in the Middle Ages*, (Oxford, 1988), Chapter 6, provides an excellent review of the virginity tradition with reference to vernacular Lives of female saints.

virginity is better. Nevertheless, patristic and medieval virginity literature as a whole reflects a profound dichotomy in the (male) authors' attitudes towards women. While virginity is highly praised, it is often seen as a means by which women can rise above their naturally inferior nature. The female body is seen as a source of temptation and sin, to be controlled by chastity and enclosure. Thus, the authors express a fear and distrust of female sexuality which relegates women to the lowest position in religion, while at the same time exalting virginity to the highest place in the heavenly and earthly hierarchy.<sup>66</sup>

Virginity is, however, more than physical purity: virginity is the physical representation of a state of inner purity or spiritual chastity. As such, it is modelled on Christ and the Virgin Mary, and represents the closest human approximation of the life of the angels (the *vita angelica*). The purpose of virginity is to develop the ability of the soul to see God in contemplation, as the angels do. Ultimately, the virgin is the bride of Christ, and physical chastity is the emblem of the virgin's commitment to a spiritual union and communion with her beloved spouse. Virginity allows one to turn all one's attention to God.

*Hali Meidhad* reflects many of the themes found in traditional virginity literature; so much so, in fact, that it has been seen as merely a compilation of

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<sup>66</sup> For a discussion of these overlapping views of women, both religious and secular, see Penny Schine Gold, *The Lady and the Virgin: Image, Attitude, and Experience in Twelfth-Century France*, (Chicago, 1985); Brenda M. Bolton, "Mulieres Sanctae," in Stuard (ed.), *Women in Medieval Society*, pp. 141-158; and John A. Nichols and Lillian Thomas Shank (eds.), *Distant Echoes*, (Kalamazoo, 1984).

sources with little original material.<sup>67</sup> However, the author of *Hali Meidhad* uses his sources in a highly original way, freely adapting them to his purpose. Unrue has shown that the author of *Hali Meidhad* shows a great concern for structural and thematic unity.<sup>68</sup> In addition, Unrue presents a convincing argument for secular influences on *Hali Meidhad*. He argues that much of the imagery is drawn from everyday life, such as the feudal castle and tower, the realities of medieval marriage and domestic life, and the introduction of elaborate beds as articles of household furnishing in the thirteenth century.<sup>69</sup>

*Hali Meidhad* was written to encourage women who had chosen a life of virginity and to confirm them in the rightness of their choice. It therefore begins with a deliberation on the superiority of virginity, a discussion which is dominated by the image of virginity as a high tower. The dangers posed to virginity by the world, the flesh and the devil are presented in an extended metaphor of the battle between the virgin and the forces of the devil which besiege her in her high tower. *Hali Meidhad* then compares the freedom and nobility of virginity to the slavery and degradation

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<sup>67</sup> So, for example, M/W-B: "Almost everything in it has a direct source or at least a precedent in earlier and contemporary Latin writings" (p. xv). For the stylistic affinity which *Hali Meidhad* retains with its Latin sources, see Bella Millett, "'Hali Meidhad', 'Sawles Warde', and the Continuity of English Prose," in E.G. Stanley and Douglas Gray (eds.), *Five Hundred Years of Words and Sounds: A Festschrift for Eric Dobson*, (Cambridge, 1983), pp. 100-108.

<sup>68</sup> Unrue, "*HM* and Other Virginity Treatises," Chapter Two. See also Robertson, *Early English Devotional Prose*, pp. 78-80.

<sup>69</sup> Unrue, "*HM* and Other Virginity Treatises," Chapter Three.



of marriage, exploring the alternative which might tempt the maiden out of her tower, and rejecting it utterly. The author then offers an alternative of his own, spiritual marriage with Christ. He ends with a warning that virginity without virtue is meaningless, and that the virgin's marriage with Christ is broken through pride.

*Sawles Warde*

*Sawles Warde* is a free translation of the *De Custodia Interioris Hominis*, erroneously attributed to Anselm of Canterbury, which also circulated as part of *De Anima* attributed (also erroneously) to Hugh of St. Victor.<sup>70</sup> It presents an allegory of the castle of the body, inhabited by Wit, the householder, and Will, his unruly wife. The castle is guarded by two kinds of servants; the outer servants (the five senses) and the inner servants (who are identified only as "other senses"). Will's unruliness is reflected in her lack of control over these servants.<sup>71</sup>

Within the castle is the treasure of the soul, guarded against the assaults of the devil and his forces by the four daughters of God. The household is visited by two messengers, Fear (of Death), who describes the terrors of hell, and Love of Life, who

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<sup>70</sup> S/W ed. note to SW, p. 210. For an interesting discussion of the relation of *Sawles Warde* to its Latin source, see Millett, "'Hali Meidhad', 'Sawles Warde', and the Continuity of English Prose."

<sup>71</sup> SW occurs in Bodley (with SK, SM, SJ and HM), Royal (with SK, SM, SJ, and LLe), and Titus (with AR, SK, HM, WLD). This study is based on the critical edition prepared by M/W-B.

describes heaven and its joys. The combined effect of these two messengers is that Will submits to Wit and order is restored. The allegory ends with an admonition to contemplate well these two messengers and their tidings in order to keep the household in order.

*Sawles Warde* adapts the allegory in its source freely, clarifying with increased detail, changing allegorical characters and expanding the messengers' accounts of heaven and hell.<sup>72</sup> Some of these changes, such as the expanded description of the heavenly maidens, seem to be intended to adapt the source to a female anchoritic audience.<sup>73</sup> Like the other anchoritic texts, *Sawles Warde* is concerned to show its readers how to deal with one aspect of their enclosed life: the guarding of the soul through the control of the senses and meditation on the joys of heaven and the terrors of hell.

#### *THE SAINTS' LIVES*

There are three saints' Lives included in the *Katherine Group*: *Seinte Margarete*, *Seinte Iulienne*, and *Seinte Katerine*, from which the *Katherine Group* takes its name.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> See M/W-B pp. xxvii-xxix.

<sup>73</sup> S/W SW n. 20, p. 409.

<sup>74</sup> All three saints' Lives occur in Bodley (with HM and SW), and Royal (with SW and LLe). SK also occurs in Titus (with AR, HM, SW, and WLd). The editions upon which this study is based are: the critical edition of *Seinte Margarete*, prepared

All three are based on Latin sources, which they alter in various ways. The Lives of the virgin martyrs share certain characteristics: the virgin martyrs are all presented as young women who have dedicated themselves as brides of Christ and vowed their chastity to him; they are all highly born, but are alienated from their natural families, either through death (St. Katherine's parents are both dead), or by conflict over the choice of a bridegroom; they are all sought after by highly placed pagan admirers and tortured and imprisoned when they refuse the advances of these suitors; their fortitude and fidelity to their heavenly spouse under torture inspires many of the spectators to convert; and, eventually, they are all put to the sword and joyfully embrace the death which is their gateway to eternal reward. In addition to the characteristics shared by all three Lives, some specific details are shared: both Juliana and Katherine are tortured by a wheel; Juliana and Margaret are immersed in vats of various liquids; both Juliana and Margaret wrestle, literally and figuratively, with a demon.

Many of the characteristics shared by the three saints' Lives are conventional features of hagiographic literature. Heffernan identifies three structural "archetypes" found in medieval English Lives of saints, in particular female saints: renunciation, testing, and consummation. Heffernan argues that "these archetypes are not

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by M/W-B; the "emended" text of *Sainte Julienne*, prepared by D'Ardenne; and the "edited" text of *Sainte Katerine*, prepared by D'Ardenne and Dobson.

arbitrarily imposed on the material but rather are the primal constituents of the Christian experience of conversion.<sup>75</sup>

In the first stage of the narrative, the saint renounces social class, family and marriage for the sake of a commitment to Christ. This renunciation is not made easily; the saint must typically struggle against her family (usually represented by the father), a potential suitor (a conflict "fraught with sexual overtones"), and a representative of the state.<sup>76</sup> In the three saints' Lives of the *Katherine Group*, the latter two are combined. The focus of this archetype is intellectual, as the saint debates with her antagonist(s) in order to defend her faith.

The second archetype, the test of the saint's faith and resolve, takes the form of physical torture. The sexual symbolism of the torture is dictated by the sexual choice of the saint, i.e., her commitment to virginity:

the test moves the concern from argument to action. Broken, naked bodies are the concern of these narratives. Here, in the guise of suitor, magistrate, governor, or emperor, the saint's male antagonist combines his interest in forcing her to recant her Christianity with his desire to possess her sexually.<sup>77</sup>

The saint must defend both her faith and her chastity, the symbol of that faith.

The third archetype, consummation, presents the saint's death and her union with Christ at death, ending with an invocation of her memory and supplication for

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<sup>75</sup> Heffernan, *Sacred Biography*, pp. 265-266.

<sup>76</sup> Heffernan, *Sacred Biography*, pp. 267-269.

<sup>77</sup> Heffernan, *Sacred Biography*, p. 275.

her aid. This is the shortest of the structural divisions of the narrative, presenting a rapid denouement which focuses the foregoing elements in one dramatic moment.<sup>78</sup>

*Seinte Margarete* is perhaps the crudest account of the "saintly virago" who defies the forces arrayed against her and maintains her chastity in the face of incredible odds. The English account is specifically addressed to widows, married women, and above all, maidens (SM 44 [S/W 288]), and Margaret is clearly intended as a model of endurance in the face of extreme adversity. *Seinte Margarete* is concerned with the public vindication of Margaret's commitment to Christ, and Margaret is repeatedly visited by heavenly messengers which publicly affirm the rightness of her choice. Many signs appear throughout, including doves from heaven, beams of light, crosses, crowns, an earthquake and thunder. Her chastity is specifically identified as the source of her power, a power which is exercised over whatever poses a threat to that chastity. Thus, she is not only able to withstand the lust of Olibrius, but is also able to transform the instruments of her torture into symbols of her faith, as the torches which burn her flesh become the fire of the Holy Spirit, and the water in which she was to be tortured becomes a baptism.

The most potent manifestation of the power of chastity, however, comes in Margaret's direct confrontation with the devil, in the forms of a dragon and a demon. Her encounters with the devil are the scenes which are most altered by the English

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<sup>78</sup> Heffernan, *Sacred Biography*, p. 275.

author, who adds fearsome details to the description of the dragon and includes a vivid account of the devil's strategy in the war against chastity.<sup>79</sup> She overcomes the dragon, an obvious symbol of lechery with his phallic tongue who reaches out and swallows Margaret, with the power of the cross, and she defeats the demon which then appears with the cross and the blazing light of her chastity. Her encounter with both dragon and demon are expressed in extremely physical terms, reflecting the text's concern with physical chastity and the power which it confers.

*Sainte Juliene* is more concerned with interior virtue, and Juliana's chastity is more clearly the outward sign of her inner purity and commitment to Christ. This is reflected in her prayers, which are more self-effacing than are Margaret's and which concentrate on her dependence upon her heavenly spouse. Nevertheless, it is Juliana's chastity which is attacked, as the symbol of her marriage to Christ for which she rejects marriage to Eleusius. Juliana also engages in a physical contest with a demon, whom she publicly humiliates before casting him into a pit of filth. She is persecuted in a series of tortures, which emphasize the damage done to her naked body in what can only be described as symbolic rapes. However, she is miraculously

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<sup>79</sup> See M/W-B p. xxii-xxiii and Robertson, *Early English Devotional Prose*, pp. 110-113.

healed of her wounds, and her unbroken flesh becomes a symbol of her intact virginity.<sup>80</sup>

*Sainte Katerine* is concerned with the question of wit and wisdom and is permeated by images of battle. The opponent faced by Katherine is not, at first, an earthly suitor, but a pagan intent on destroying the Christian faith. Katherine is pitted against fifty eminent scholars and defends her faith in a war of words which ends in the conversion of her opponents. It is at this point that her persecutor, Maxentius, attacks Katherine herself and her story begins to take on the characteristics of the other Lives. Unique to *Sainte Katerine* is the visit and subsequent conversion of Queen Augusta and Porphyrius. Katherine describes to them the city built in the heart, the heavenly Jerusalem which in *Hali Meiohad* and *Ancrene Wisse* is contrasted with the earthly city of Babylon.<sup>81</sup> This reflects the concern of *Sainte Katerine* for the question of "citizenship" in the heavenly city which replaces citizenship on earth, a concern which is also evident in *Ancrene Wisse* and *Hali Meiohad*.

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<sup>80</sup> The various versions of the legend of St. Juliana and the relationships between them are discussed by d'Ardenne, *Sainte Juliene*, pp. xviii-xxiv. For the complicated textual history of the Middle English version, see d'Ardenne, pp. xxxviii, in which she proposes an elaborate reconstruction in order to explain the extensive divergences between the two manuscripts in which *Sainte Juliene* occurs (MS Bodley 34 [B], and MS Royal 17 A.xxvii [R]). But see also Bella Millett, "The Textual Transmission of *Sainte Juliene*," *Medium Aevum* 49 (1990) 41-54, who simplifies the process by suggesting a connection to the tradition of memorization for oral public performance.

<sup>81</sup> For a discussion of the background of the concept of the two cities, see Millett, *Hali Meiohad*, pp. xxvi-xxviii.

The English version of St. Katherine alters the Latin, reducing some sections and adding to others. Many of the additions seem to be designed to emphasize God's care for those who remain steadfast in their faith, as for instance the remark, added in the English, that the bodies of Porphirius and his men were decently buried in spite of Maxentius' orders to the contrary, because God had promised that not a hair of their heads should be lost.<sup>82</sup> In addition, the English author adds the military imagery and emphasizes Katherine's heroism.<sup>83</sup> He clarifies the theological debate, expanding the discussion of the incarnation and stressing the humanity of Christ.<sup>84</sup>

In spite of the individual differences, the similarities of plot and theme in the legends of the virgin martyrs, as well as the fact that these three Lives are grouped together in the manuscripts, suggest that they were meant to be read as a unit, each reinforcing the message of the others.<sup>85</sup> In addition, it seems clear that the saints' Lives were meant to exemplify the lessons set out in the other anchoritic texts: at one point, the author of *Ancrene Wisse* specifically refers his readers to the English legend of *Seinte Margarete*. The saints' Lives provide the anchoresses with role

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<sup>82</sup> The additions and omissions in the English text are outlined by d'Ardenne and Dobson, *Seinte Katerine*, pp. xxxiv-xxxviii, and are discussed by S/W in their notes to their translation.

<sup>83</sup> S/W SK n. 8, p. 423, and n. 17, p. 424.

<sup>84</sup> S/W SK n. 9, p. 423, and nn. 22-23, p. 425.

<sup>85</sup> See M/W-B, p. xxi.



models of women who resist various threats to their virginity, maintaining their chastity in the face of torture and even death. The virgin martyrs embody the virtues to which the anchoress aspires; they typify the anchoress's struggle against sin; and they epitomize the relationship with Christ which is the anchoress's goal.

#### THE WOOING GROUP

The *Wooing Group* takes its name from the longest work in the group, *Ʒe Wohunge of Ure Lauerd*.<sup>86</sup> *Wohunge* is an expansion of the passion meditation found in *Ancrene Wisse* vii, and seems also to have been influenced by the devotional tradition of meditation which is exemplified by Anselm's *Prayers and Meditations*, and Aelred's *Rule for a Recluse*. It begins with a meditation on the reasons for choosing Christ over an earthly lover, and then moves into an impassioned meditation on the passion. The anchoress identifies completely with the crucified Christ, imagining

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<sup>86</sup> The *Wooing Group* is studied as a group because of stylistic and linguistic affinities, even though there is no extant manuscript containing the entire group. WLd is found in Titus (with AR, SK, HM, and SW), LLe is found in Royal (with SK, SM, SJ, and SW), and LLe, LLo, and UrG are found in Nero (with AR). This study is based on the texts as they are found in Meredith Thompson (ed.), *Ʒe Wohunge of Ure Lauerd*, EETS 241 (London, 1958). Nero also contains *On God Ureisu of Ure Lefdi*, a work in a similar vein but which is clearly male-oriented, and is different from the other works in this group in various ways, and is therefore not included in the *Wooing Group* (see Thompson, p. xiv, n. 1). *On God Ureisu of Ure Lefdi* has been edited with a translation by Richard Morris, *Old English Homilies and Homiletic Treatises*, EETS 29 and 34, (1868), vol. 2, pp. 191-199.

herself hanging on the cross with him in her enclosure.<sup>87</sup> *Wohunge* exemplifies the meditation upon Christ's suffering which is recommended in *Ancrene Wisse* both as a means of controlling the anchoress's own senses and as a means of communion with Christ.

The other texts of the *Wooing Group*, *On God Ureisun of God Almihti* [UrG], *On Lofsong of ure Louerde* [LLo], and *On Lofsong of Ure Lefdi* [LLe], also exhibit parallels to *Ancrene Wisse* and the texts of the *Katherine Group*.<sup>88</sup> However, as well as similarities, there are also differences. The *Wooing Group* is lyrical, meditative, and emotional, presenting the anchoress's relationship with Christ as a passionate union, sometimes impeded by sin, always involving suffering, but culminating in ecstatic communion in a mystical embrace upon the cross.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> This does not necessarily mean that *Wohunge* was written by a woman, as supposed by Thompson, p. xxiii. The texts of the *Wooing Group* belong to the same context as the other anchoritic works and were likely written by members of the same literary and intellectual circle. See S/W WLd n. 1, pp. 418-419, and Dobson, *Origins*, p. 154, n. 2.

<sup>88</sup> See Thompson, *Wohunge*, pp. xiv-xviii; Millett, *Hali Meidhad*, pp. xx-xxi.

<sup>89</sup> See Thompson, *Wohunge*, pp. xviii-xx. A brief review of scholarship on KG and WG can be found in Dahood, "AW, KG and WG," pp. 16-18.

## THE ARGUMENT

Much of the secondary literature on the *Ancrene Wisse* and its sister texts is concerned with questions of language,<sup>90</sup> style,<sup>91</sup> authorship, date, and sources.<sup>92</sup> Recently, however, the liturgical and religious aspects of these texts, particularly *Ancrene Wisse*, have become a focus of interest.<sup>93</sup>

Although *Ancrene Wisse* has long been recognised as a literary masterpiece, it is only in the last twenty years that scholars have turned to the serious study of its literary qualities. Janet Grayson has produced a detailed study of the interaction of structure and imagery in *Ancrene Wisse*, in which she builds on Shepherd's identification of the "spiralling" patterns of imagery.<sup>94</sup> Grayson argues that the imagery of *Ancrene Wisse* is artfully constructed, producing a constant interaction of

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<sup>90</sup> For example, Tolkien, "*Ancrene Wisse* and *Hali Meïðhad*," and d'Ardenne and Dobson, *Seinte Katerine*.

<sup>91</sup> For example, R.W. Chambers, *The Continuity of English Prose from Alfred to More and his School*, EETS 191a (London, 1932); D. Bethurum, "The Connection of the Katherine Group with Old English Prose," *JEGP* 34 (1935) pp. 553-64.

<sup>92</sup> See above, pp. 10f.

<sup>93</sup> See, for example, Ackerman and Dahood, *Ancrene Riwe, Introduction and Part I*; Shepherd, *AW Six and Seven*; Sitwell's Introduction and Appendix to Salu, *Ancrene Riwe*; Peter Hackett, "The anchoress' Guide," in James Walsh (ed.), *Pre-Reformation English Spirituality*, (London, 1965), pp. 67-80; and Watson, "Methods and Objectives."

<sup>94</sup> *AW Six and Seven*, pp. lix-lixii.

images of inner and outer as the text moves from physical to spiritual in its delineation of the anchoress's progress towards union with God in her heart.<sup>95</sup> Linda Georgianna also explores the imagery of inner and outer in *Ancrene Wisse*, setting her discussion in the context of the twelfth century focus on the individual and the related problem of self-knowledge.<sup>96</sup> Georgianna demonstrates that the author's use of images from daily life is grounded in the recognition that human experience cannot and indeed should not be avoided, but should rather be turned to spiritual advantage.

More recently, attention has turned to the significance of the fact that the anchoritic texts were written for *women*. Cheryl Frost has proposed that the author's choice of imagery and *exempla* is influenced by his desire to appeal to his readers as women.<sup>97</sup> She argues that the author of *Ancrene Wisse* adopts common patristic and medieval views of women, representing women as a source of sin (particularly

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<sup>95</sup> Grayson, *Structure and Imagery*. For the interaction of images of inner and outer, see Jocelyn Price, "Inner' and 'Outer': Conceptualizing the Body in *Ancrene Wisse* and Aelred's *De Institutione Inclusarum*," in Kratzmann and Simpson (eds.), *Medieval English Religious and Ethical Literature: Essays in Honour of G.H. Russell*, (Cambridge, 1986), pp. 192-208. Dennis Rygiel also discusses the relationship between structure and the use of imagery: see "A Critical Approach to the Style of *Ancrene Wisse*," Diss. Cornell, 1972; "A Holistic Approach to the Style of *Ancrene Wisse*," *ChauR* 16 (1982) pp. 270-81; and "Structure and Style in Part 7 of *Ancrene Wisse*," *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 81 (1980) pp. 47-56.

<sup>96</sup> *The Solitary Self*, pp. 5, 32f., and *passim*.

<sup>97</sup> Cheryl Frost, "The Attitude to Women and the Adaptation to a Feminine Audience in the *Ancrene Wisse*," *AUMLA* 50 (1978) pp. 235-50.

sexual sin) and presenting the alternatives open to women as a choice between the temptress Eve or the passive, submissive Mary. Women are ultimately relegated to the role of either scapegoat or martyr.

Elizabeth Robertson has taken the argument further, studying the question of the female audience in *Ancrene Wisse* and the texts of the *Katherine Group*.<sup>98</sup> Robertson argues that *Ancrene Wisse* in particular is deeply embedded in the misogynist biases of its author, and indeed of the Middle Ages as a whole. She contends that the anchoritic texts offer a spirituality which is conditioned by the authors' assumption that women are inferior to men and are therefore capable only of an inferior, limited spirituality, rooted in the physical world and expressed in imagery of the body and of the everyday world. Robertson herself, however, falls into the trap of defining spirituality in terms which are prescribed by male writers. She takes as her model the mysticism of Bernard of Clairvaux, a mysticism which is expressed in decidedly male terms, and assumes that any mystical experience which is different is also in some way inferior. If she had taken as her basis for comparison the writings of continental women such as Hildegard of Bingen, Hadewijch of Antwerp and, later, Mechtild of Magdeburg, her conclusions might have been different.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> Elizabeth Robertson, *Early English Devotional Prose*.

<sup>99</sup> For example, Elizabeth Petroff lists several characteristics of women's devotional writing: it is emotional, repetitive, proverbial, and non-analytical, using language which is concrete rather than abstract. She argues that these characteristics

In addition, Robertson approaches the anchoritic texts with assumptions rooted in a Platonic world-view, a world-view which is not that of the authors.<sup>100</sup> The Platonic world-view sees the world as a mere shadow of eternal reality, to be contemplated only for what it can reveal of eternal truth. This view leads one away from the world: as the mystic becomes more adept, he or she can move away from contemplation of the world, which only imperfectly reflects eternal truths, to contemplation of the eternal truths themselves. The author of *Ancrene Wisse*, however, views the world sacramentally. The sacramental world-view posits similar parallels between the world and eternal reality: the world reflects truths that are eternal; the microcosm reflects the macrocosm. Unlike the Platonic view which denies any real worth to the world which is merely a shadow, however, the sacramental view perceives an inherent worth in individual events or things because they reflect eternal truth. The fact that the real world is a shadow or image of the eternal world gives it more, not less, validity. Thus, rather than leading one away from the world, the sacramental world-view leaves one deeply rooted in the physical world. The imagery of *Ancrene Wisse* is thus grounded in the everyday world of the

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arise from the use of the vernacular and its connection to oral thought and expression, and lists a number of characteristics of oral expression which are extremely close to the characteristics of the style of *Ancrene Wisse* for which Robertson castigates its author. See *Medieval Women's Visionary Literature*, (Oxford, 1986), pp. 28-29.

<sup>100</sup> See John Stevens, *Medieval Romance: Themes and Approaches*, (London, 1973), pp. 151-152, for the distinction between the Platonic and sacramental world views.

anchoress, drawing upon her real situation in order to illustrate the eternal truth which she seeks.<sup>101</sup>

The question of audience is a crucial one, for the imagery of *Ancrene Wisse* and its associated texts is powerfully influenced by two dominant factors: the anchoresses' enclosure, and their gender. The anchoress is required to take only three vows: obedience, chastity, and stability of abode. The latter two give rise to a series of images which pervade the anchoritic texts, as the authors treat the anchoritic life in terms of the daily experience of the anchoress herself.

This thesis will argue that the spirituality reflected in the anchoritic texts is inextricably linked to the anchoress's sexuality. The spirituality of the anchoritic texts is characterized by the paradox of the virgin who is at the same time Christ's lover and bride, and is expressed in images associated with virginity and with the bride of the Song of Songs. These images centre on the female body and, specifically, the body enclosed.

The interaction of images of "inner and outer" discussed above is profoundly influenced by the fact of the anchoress's enclosure. The imagery of the enclosed

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<sup>101</sup> See, for example, Maybury "Sacramentalism in the *Ancrene Riwe*," who discusses the author's use of animal images and images such as the fig tree, and the mountain, and Unrue, "*HM and Other Virginity Treatises*," who discusses the interest of HM in images drawn from everyday life. But cp. also G.V. Smithers, "Two Typological Terms in the *Ancrene Riwe*," *Medium Ævum* 34 (1965) 126-128, who discusses the use of the terms *schadewe*, and *peintunge* in AW iv.124 [S/W 136] (cp. AW iv.99 [S/W 118]; vi.194 [S/W 187]) with reference to the "neo-Platonic" terms *umbra* and *imago* and their use in the writings of Hugh of St. Victor.

building is found throughout the anchoritic texts, creating a complex tapestry as the images which are applied to the anchorhouse which encloses the anchoress's body are also applied to her body itself, which encloses her heart and soul: the sealed anchorhouse which protects the purity of her body parallels the unbroken, sealed virgin body which protects the purity of her heart. The matrix of anchorhouse/body/heart is described in various images such as the tower in which the anchoress is besieged as she battles the forces of the world, the flesh and the devil; the enclosed chamber in which she prepares for the coming of her God; and the bower, nest, or womb in which she receives him. Even the image of the cross, which becomes the most powerful image of enclosure,<sup>102</sup> is also applied to the body as the anchoress is compared to a bird who makes herself into the form of a cross when she spreads her wings in flight.

The imagery which gives voice to the spirituality of the anchoresses for whom these texts were written is also controlled by the fact that the texts were written for *women*. Throughout the anchoritic works, the spirituality of the anchoresses is inextricably fused with their sexuality. The images for the body which are an integral part of the matrix of anchorhouse/body/heart are uncompromisingly conditioned by the femaleness of their audience.

The anchoritic texts are always aware that the body enclosed in the anchorhouse is a female body, sealed by physical chastity as the anchoress is sealed

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<sup>102</sup> See below, pp.230, 235, 245f.



into her anchorhouse. Chastity, specifically female chastity, therefore becomes a dominant theme of these texts, and is symbolized by physical virginity which comes to embody the anchoress's chaste purity of heart and soul. The primary image of the sealed building, corresponding to the sealed virginal body, is profoundly affected by the anchoress's gender: as Wogan-Browne notes, "technical intactness" (i.e. physical virginity) is given a great deal more emphasis in discussions of female virginity than of male virginity. For male virgins, "anatomical marking" is neither necessary nor possible, but for female virgins the seal of the hymen is considered essential.<sup>103</sup>

Similarly, the treatment of lust in the anchoritic texts is tempered by the awareness that, as a woman, the anchoress is subject not only to her own lusts and desires, but also to those of others. She must therefore be careful not to arouse the lust of men, by which she may be victimized. The Lives of the virgin martyrs present examples of women who heroically battle the lust of others, triumphing through faith and prayer over the threats posed by the world, the flesh and the devil, and finally escaping through death from what, for them, is literally a "fate worse than death."

The stress on enclosure and containment of the female body is due not only to a concern with the potential threat to chastity, but also to the deep-seated ambivalence toward the female body reflected in the writings of male authors

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<sup>103</sup> J. Wogan-Browne, "The Virgin's Tale," forthcoming in Lesley Johnson and Ruth Evans (eds.), *The Wife of Bath and All Her Sect*, (London: Routledge), used by permission. Wogan-Browne points out that the presence of the hymen is an issue not only for "career virgins" such as nuns or anchoresses, but also for young women embarking on marriage, who are required to be virgins. She also points out that many (indeed most) women are unaware of having a hymen. Thus there is a gap between cultural perceptions of female anatomy and women's own experience of their bodies.

throughout the patristic and medieval periods. While these authors exalt the virtue of virginity and praise those women who practise it, at the same time they express a fear and distrust of female sexuality. The anchoritic texts are thus not only concerned with the danger *to* the female body, but the danger *of* the female body:<sup>104</sup> the anchoress must beware of rousing the lust of another, for in causing another to sin she is herself culpable. However, the subject is treated with more sensitivity than is usual in earlier virginity literature. The author of *Ancrene Wisse* is not concerned to condemn female sexuality outright. He emphasizes the dangers inherent in the mere fact of the anchoress being seen in order to warn her of the possibility of sinning through being the cause or occasion of another's sin. It is not enough to be pure oneself if one is the cause of the loss of another's purity.<sup>105</sup>

Physical purity is itself an image or symbol of the purity of the heart and soul. In exploring the imagery of virginity in the anchoritic texts, one must always be aware that physical chastity is maintained primarily to promote spiritual chastity. Chastity is a means to an end: the chaste and ascetic life of the anchoress is itself a preparation for the goal of union with God. It is for this, and this alone, that she has turned from the world and enclosed her body and heart in the confines of her anchorhouse.

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<sup>104</sup> Wogan-Browne, "The Virgin's Tale."

<sup>105</sup> Although this emphasis is found in medieval writings primarily in the context of the dangers which the female body poses to others, it is also found in general terms, for example, in the citation from the Sarum Manual quoted above (n. 12), where the anchorite (in this case a male) flees from the world in order not to harm others through his sins.

The union with God which the anchoress seeks is also described in images which are governed by both her enclosure and her female gender. The spiritual quest of the anchoress is unequivocally the search of a *female* devotee for a *male* God, who approaches her in very human terms. The enclosed chamber which she prepares for his coming is the bower in which she greets her beloved, and the nest or womb into which she receives her God.

The anchoress's preparation for union with God begins with a process of purification which is focused upon her body and the heart which it encloses, for it is that body and heart which will become the chamber into which Christ will descend. She begins with meditation upon her own body, its sinfulness and the suffering which is necessary to expiate that sinfulness. She focuses her meditation upon her five senses, which are both the gateways through which sin may enter and the guardians who, when well guarded themselves, prevent sin from penetrating the castle of her body. Meditation upon the sins and sufferings of her own senses shifts to meditation upon the sufferings of Christ in his five senses and upon his five wounds which heal the wounds inflicted by the sins of her senses. Through meditation upon Christ's passion, the anchoress is taught to see her own sufferings as an imitation of Christ's suffering on the cross.

However, the suffering of the anchoress is more than just an imitation of Christ's sufferings: it is an identification with them. Through suffering she hangs on the cross with Christ, and her body is fused with Christ's human body which hung on

the cross to redeem mankind. Meditation upon her own body thus merges with meditation upon the body of Christ as she joins with him in a union which is described in intensely erotic terms. She throws herself into his embrace as he hangs on the cross, ever present before her eyes in the crucifix upon her wall and above the altar of the church beyond her anchorhouse wall. Suffering is thus transformed into joy, as her ascetic life becomes the vehicle for the mystical embrace of her beloved.

The mystical embrace is also experienced in the celebration of the eucharist, during which Christ appears before her in bodily form and descends into the "inn" of her heart. In the eucharist, the anchoress experiences both the passionate embrace of her beloved as he enters into the bower of her heart, and the re-enactment of the Incarnation, as her body becomes the womb into which the human Christ descends. Here, as elsewhere in the anchoritic texts, erotic imagery merges with images of motherhood and fertility, celebrating the essential femaleness of the anchoress.

The spirituality of the anchoritic texts is thus profoundly rooted in the female body. The sinfulness of the body is recognised in the most vehement of terms, and the body and the heart which it encloses are then purged and purified through suffering and meditation. This prepares the body and heart for the descent of Christ, as he enters into the anchoress's body through the eucharist and into her heart through meditation and prayer. Through her physical suffering, she can become one with Christ as he hangs on the cross, a union which is described in the most physical of terms as the passionate embrace of her lover and lord.

Accordingly, in spite of the importance of spiritual purity, or the virginity of the soul, the *body* becomes the dominant image and symbol for the spirituality of the *female* anchoress. Thus, for example, in the saints' Lives it is the virgin's body which is desired<sup>106</sup> and her body which is attacked as the symbol of her faith and commitment to Christ. The body is the castle which must be defended against the attacks of the devil: it is the body which is enclosed, the body (and its senses) which guards the heart, the body which is purified through suffering, the body which hangs on the cross with Christ. However, the body is also the *locus* of spiritual fulfilment: it is the body which is the bower, nest and womb.

The chapters which follow examine the relationship between female sexuality and spirituality in the anchoritic texts through an exploration of the imagery used to depict their understanding of chastity and the erotic union with Christ for which chastity is maintained. The first four chapters discuss the images used to describe virginity. Chapter One explores the imagery of enclosure as withdrawal from the world, both as it is applied to the anchorhouse itself and as it describes the body of the anchoress which is enclosed therein. The concept of purity of both body and heart and the role of the senses as guardians which must themselves be guarded is central to this discussion. Chapter Two examines the spiritual combat undertaken by the anchoress in her enclosure, with its associated imagery of battles, weapons, and

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<sup>106</sup> St. Katherine is an exception: Maxentius is first impressed with her wisdom, although her beauty is also remarked upon. However, when he fails to overcome her through argument, it is her body which he attacks.

castles under siege. The power conferred upon the anchoress by her virginity is the driving force behind her ability to fight the forces of the devil. In the battle against the army of hell, however, the anchoress is often wounded by sin. Chapter Three therefore explores the imagery of the wounds of sin and the associated imagery of penance and asceticism as the anchoress atones for her sin in her anchorhouse, which is both her prison and her grave. Chapter Four discusses the rewards which await the anchoress who overcomes.

The final two chapters examine the erotic imagery of the mystical union of the anchoress with Christ as his bride and lover. Chapter Five explores the anchoress's union with Christ in the mystical embrace which is experienced through suffering with Christ on the cross and through consuming Christ in the eucharist. The imagery of the body/anchorhouse as bower and womb is central to the understanding of mystical union outlined in this chapter, as erotic imagery merges with imagery of nurture and fertility. Chapter Six discusses the spousal metaphor itself, which must be understood in light of the mystical union outlined in Chapter Five.

Before proceeding to the discussion itself, a brief word on this approach is in order. *Ancrene Wisse* and the texts which together make up the *Katherine Group* and the *Wooing Group* survive in collections, and were evidently meant to be read carefully and mulled over, referring from one to the other. *Ancrene Wisse*, for example, was clearly meant to be read in two ways, straight through, and in bits and pieces (AW viii.221 [S/W 207]; cp. AW Intro.11 [S/W 51]). The author of *Ancrene*

*Wisse* constantly refers the reader back to previous sections (e.g. AW ii.36 [S/W 73], iv.97 [S/W 117], iv.141 [S/W 149], iv.145 [S/W 151], vi.190 [S/W 185]). As well, it was taken for granted that *Ancrene Wisse* would be read in conjunction with other material.<sup>107</sup> Sections seem to be intended to be read aloud (for example, to the servants [AW viii.220; S/W 206]), as were *Seinte Margarete* (SM 44 [S/W 288]) and *Wohunge* (WLd 37.651-653 [S/W 257]). It is also clear that, with the limited reading material available to the anchoress and the stress on reading (the author of *Ancrene Wisse* actually encourages his readers to pray less that they might read more, [AW iv.148; S/W 153]) these texts would become very familiar to their readers. The images and symbols would thus tend to merge from one text to another: when an image which was used in one context recurred in another, the former use would come to mind. The works may thus legitimately be studied as a group, each text informing and interpreting the others.<sup>108</sup>

In an effort to enter the world of the anchoress, the images examined in this thesis will therefore be discussed as they occur throughout the body of literature, without always distinguishing between their use in different texts. *Ancrene Wisse* will be the base from which we will build our discussion, as it is the central text of the group. The use of these images in other texts will be drawn in as it sheds light on the

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<sup>107</sup> Cp. AW iv.125 [S/W 137], where the author refers the reader to *Seinte Margarete*, and vii.209 [S/W 198], which appears to refer to either *Sawles Warde* or parts of *Hali Meidhad* (see S/W AW vii, n. 38, p. 402).

<sup>108</sup> See Watson, "Methods and Objectives," pp. 132-3.

symbols and images used by the author of *Ancrene Wisse*. This approach, which will study the interaction of images between the anchoritic texts rather than treating each text in isolation from its sister texts, is one which has not, to date, been attempted in any consistent way.

The approach taken here is an attempt to read the texts as they would have been read by the women for whom they were written (so far as this is possible for the twentieth century reader who is distanced from the original audience by time, experience and outlook); the understanding of the texts by the man or men by whom they were written is thus not our primary concern. Therefore, although some reference will be made to possible sources for the material discussed here in order to understand the tradition out of which these texts emerged and the way in which it has been manipulated for a female audience, the emphasis will be on the images used in the anchoritic texts and their significance in the texts at hand, rather than on sources with which the anchoresses would most likely not have been familiar.

The anchoritic texts are available in several editions. Unless otherwise stated, all quotations are from the following:

AW: Tolkien, J.R.R. ed. *The English Text of the Ancrene Riwe: Ancrene Wisse, MS Corpus Christi College Cambridge 402*. EETS 249 (1962). [Reference by page number].

HM, SW, and SM: Millett, Bella and Wogan-Browne, Jocelyn, eds. *Medieval English Prose for Women: Selections from the Katherine Group and Ancrene Wisse* Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990. [Reference by page, and where necessary, line number].



SJ: d'Ardenne, S.T.P.O., ed. *Pe Liflade ant te Passiun of Seinte Iulienne*. EETS 248 (1962). (or. publi. 1936). [Reference by page number to the "emended text"].

SK: d'Ardenne, S.R.T.O. and Dobson, E.J. eds. *Seinte Katerine*. EETS, Supp. ser. 7 (1981). [Reference by page number to the "edited text"].

The *Wooring Group*: Thompson, W. Meredith, ed. *Pe Wohunge of Ure Lauerd* EETS no. 241. London: Oxford University Press, 1958. [Reference by page and line number].

All translations are from:

Savage, Anne, and Watson, Nicholas, eds. and trans. *Anchoritic Spirituality: Ancrene Wisse and Associated Works*. New York: Paulist Press, 1991.

CHAPTER ONE  
THE VIRGIN ENCLOSED

The anchoritic life was, first and foremost, a life dedicated to a relationship with Christ. Virginity, or physical chastity, was seen as an indispensable element of that relationship. In *Ancrene Wisse* the anchoress is encouraged to take only three vows: obedience, chastity and stability of abode (AW 1.8 [S/W 48]). Of these three, it is chastity which pervades anchoritic literature and becomes the most obvious and distinguishing characteristic of the anchoress and of the models she is encouraged to imitate. Throughout the anchoritic literature, the importance of preserving virginity is stressed: in fact, the sole purpose of *Hali Meiodhad* appears to be to confirm virgins in their choice of lifestyle.<sup>109</sup> The alternatives to virginity are thus described in the harshest possible terms.

The virgin martyrs which the anchoress is encouraged to emulate preserve their virginity at tremendous cost. The preservation of virginity, indeed, is the central theme of the saints' Lives which are included in the *Katherine Group*. The martyrdoms of St. Margaret and St. Juliana are the direct result of their refusing to submit to human suitors, preferring instead to maintain the chastity which they have vowed to Christ. St. Katherine's story is slightly different: the opponent she faces is a spiritual one, who threatens purity of the Church rather than that of Katherine

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<sup>109</sup> S/W, Ed. note to *HM*, p. 223; cp. Elizabeth Robertson, *Early English Devotional Prose*, p. 77.

herself. While all three virgin martyrs face heathen persecutors, Katherine is not initially sought in marriage as are Margaret and Juliana, but rather seeks out and challenges Maxentius when she perceives the threat he poses to the Christian faith. Maxentius considers the use of terror or love to overcome her, but chooses to try argument first. However, after she has defeated her spiritual foe (the fifty scholars), her story begins to take on the characteristics also found in the stories of Margaret and Juliana. Maxentius offers her marriage and a place as his queen, which she rejects wholeheartedly, asserting that she is united to Christ in a marriage which cannot be dissolved. At this point Maxentius' persecution of her shifts from the intellectual to the physical; having failed to overcome her in argument, he turns to force. Katherine's battle now shifts to the struggle to preserve her chastity for her heavenly spouse, to whom she has vowed to be faithful.

Virginity is thus highly valued in the anchoritic texts, as a symbol of the physical chastity which is the means by which the anchoress affirms her fidelity to the God with whom she seeks a relationship described in terms of bride and lover. As will be seen below, physical virginity is the symbol of the virginity of the anchoress's soul, the chaste purity which is expressed in the image of maidenhood, even for the anchoress who may not be technically a virgin.

Virginity is a gift: it cannot be bought from God, but is given by grace. The most fitting response to the gift of maidenhood is to preserve it intact in order to present it back to the giver. Thus, St. Margaret attributes her power over the devil to *wilzeoue*

*unofseruet, þet he haueð me izettet, for to zelden hit himseoluen* ("a voluntary gift, undeserved, which he has given me to give back to him," SM 72.1-2 [S/W 300]). Although the gift is not specifically identified in this particular passage, it is clearly the gift of virginity: Margaret elsewhere describes her virginal body as the gift which she gives to Christ (SM 48 [S/W 289], 74 [S/W 301]), and throughout the stories of the virgin martyrs it is their virginity which gives them such tremendous power over their opponents.<sup>110</sup> Each of them is therefore willing to undergo hideous torture and even death in order to maintain its integrity.

The gift of virginity must indeed be guarded diligently, for the honour of maidenhood, once lost, can never be recovered, and by comparison with it all else is worthless (HM 24 [S/W 234]; cp. SM 68 [S/W 298]). *Hali Meidhad* describes virginity as the treasure which once lost can never be found again,<sup>111</sup> the star which once gone down can never rise again, the flower which once completely cut down will never bloom again (HM 8-10 [S/W 228]).<sup>112</sup> Maidenhood is a healing balm, a precious ointment. But this ointment is contained in the brittle vessel of a woman's flesh (AW iii.85-86 [S/W 109]; cp. HM 10 [S/W 229]).<sup>113</sup> The virgin anchoress is urged to keep in mind

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<sup>110</sup> See below, pp. 189f.

<sup>111</sup> Cp. SM 48 [S/W 289], 74 [S/W 301].

<sup>112</sup> Cp. SM 48 [S/W 289].

<sup>113</sup> Note that the vessel is not brittle because it is female, but because it is flesh. The brittle flesh of the virgin which can be lost through desire is *human* flesh, not only female flesh, as is illustrated by the example of St. John, with which the author

that the lust of the flesh soon fades, but the punishment for it lasts forever. She is thus urged to guard her maidenhood diligently and not lose for the sake of a moment's lust what can never be regained:

*Forþi þu ahest, meiden, se deorliche te witen hit, for hit is se heh þing ant se swiðe leof Godd ant se licwurde, ant þet an lure þet is widwæten couerunge* (HM 10.7-9).

Therefore, maiden, you ought to guard it most dearly, because it is so sublime a thing and so very lovely to God and so praiseworthy, and is the one loss that can never be recovered [S/W 228].<sup>114</sup>

The anchoress is thus urged to consider what she will lose if she succumbs to the devil's wiles. As the demon who accosts St. Margaret asserts:

*þenchen zef ha beied me, to hu bitter beast ha buhed, ant hwas luue ha forleied; hu lufsum þing ha leosed, þet is, wiþ meidhæd meidenes menske, ant te luue of þe luuliche Lauerd of heouene ...; ant henlunges makied ham wið al þet heouenliche hird, and unmenskið hamseolf bimong worldliche men, and forleosed þe luue nawt ane of heh in heouene ah of lah ec on eorðe, and makied þe engles murne ant us of muche murhde to lahhe se lude, þe seoð ham lihte se loh of se swiðe hehe* (SM 68.4-11).

They [maidens] should think what a cruel beast they obey if they obey me—and whose love they give up, and what a lovely thing they lose, that is, maidenhood, the honour of maidenhood, and the love of the lovely Lord of heaven. ... And they make themselves contemptible before all the heavenly host, and dishonour themselves among worldly men, losing not

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illustrates his point. In addition, the context of this passage, coming as it does directly after the description of the first reason for fleeing the world (i.e. security), indicates that the vessel of human flesh is brittle not only because it is weak (i.e. that it may succumb to its own lusts), but because it is vulnerable (i.e. to the desires of others and to the machinations of the devil). In *Sainte Juliene*, this same vessel of virgin flesh contains Christ and is implicitly contrasted with the heathen idols which are vessels of devils (see, for example, SJ 15 [S/W 309]).

<sup>114</sup> Cp. SM 68 [S/W 298].

only the love of the high ones in heaven but the low ones on earth, making the angels grieve and us [the demons] to laugh so loud with glee, when we see them come down so low from so very high [S/W 298].

Indeed:

*þe sehe þenne hu þe engles beoð isweamet þe seoð hare suster se seorhfulliche aueallet, ant te deoflen hoppin ant kenchinde beaten honden togederes, stani were his heorte zef ha ne mealte i teares!* (HM 14.25-27).

Anyone who could see then how grieved the angels are, who see their sister so sorrowfully brought down—and the devil, hopping and laughing, clapping his hands together—would have a heart of stone if it did not melt in tears [S/W 231].<sup>115</sup>

Although the anchoritic literature tends to treat the loss of virginity as irrevocable, there are some passages which are less absolute. The extreme fragility of virginity is stressed: once broken, the vessel of flesh which encloses the balm of virginity can never be mended to its former wholeness. Yet it breaks more easily than glass, for glass breaks only when struck while the flesh can lose its wholeness through one desire (AW iii.86 [S/W 109]). However, although the vessel of the *flesh* cannot be mended once it is broken (i.e. physical virginity cannot be restored), *Ancrene Wisse* indicates that virginity lost through desire only can be restored to its original wholeness through the medicine of confession and true repentance (AW iii.86 [S/W 109]; cp. SM 68 [S/W 298-299], where lust is cured by confession).<sup>116</sup> Similarly, *Hali Meidhad* declares that

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<sup>115</sup> Cp. SK 104 [S/W 279], where the situation is reversed.

<sup>116</sup> This discussion may be based on a similar discussion in Aelred's *RR* 14-15. However, the author of *Ancrene Wisse* differs with Aelred on the question of the recovery of virginity lost through desire, which Aelred asserts is impossible (see S/W AW iii, n. 69, pp. 368-369). The importance of spiritual chastity, maintained throughout

although the flower of maidenhood never blooms again once it has been completely cut down, it may grow green again if it has merely withered due to unfitting thought: (HM 8-10 [S/W 228]).

Even the loss of physical virginity may be partially repaired. A virgin who has fallen from the virgin state, either through sinful lust or through marriage, must repent; she may then be revived to the rank of widows (above the wedded). Widows are granted a song to sing in heaven which, while not on a par with the song of the maidens, is nonetheless sweet, a song of thanks to Christ for holding them in chaste purity after they have tried the filth of the flesh. Thus they are able to atone for their sins in this world (HM 18 [S/W 222-223]). Similarly, in comparing God's approaching of a woman to man's, the author of *Ancrene Wisse* tells the anchoress that, while a man makes a virgin into a wife, God can make a wife into a virgin: if she has prostituted herself through sin but returns to God, he will make her a new virgin (AW vii.201 [S/W 193]).<sup>117</sup> *Ancrene Wisse* stresses, however, that the preservation of this type of chaste purity is as difficult as the preservation of virginity (AW iii.86 [S/W 109]). Here, virginity is not entirely exclusive of non-virgin women (i.e. the chaste wife or widow), but rather symbolizes the physical chastity which is seen as the mode of the anchoritic life.

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the anchoritic texts, comes into play here (see below, pp.57f.).

<sup>117</sup> See Bugge, *Virginitas*, p. 61, for a possible source in Philo of Alexandria, and S/W AW vii, n. 22, p. 400, for a more likely source in Augustine's *De Civitate Dei* I.15-17 (PL 41, cols.30-31).

## THE VIRGINITY OF THE SOUL

Physical chastity is thus seen as an absolute prerequisite for the spiritual life of the anchoress, the vow taken prior to enclosure which defines the character of the enclosed life. Chastity is symbolized by physical virginity, its merits, its rewards and its preservation. However, physical chastity is more than simply an end in itself. In *On Lofsong of ure Louerde* the anchoress prays to Christ for guidance:

... · red me þ am helples 7 redles. hu ich schule leden me 7 liuien on eorde wið meidhod 7 ine clenness of soule . 7 of bodie boðe . (LLO 12.85-88)

... counsel me who am helpless and perplexed, how I may lead my life and live on earth with my maidenhood, and in purity of both soul and body [S/W 326].

Physical chastity alone is not enough: the anchoress maintains her physical chastity in order to cultivate an inward purity, described as the virginity of her soul. This is entirely in keeping with the tradition of virginity literature. As Millett and Wogan-Browne point out:

In early Christian thought, a virginal habit of mind is even more important than literal intactness (which can be rendered meaningless by the wrong interior disposition).<sup>118</sup>

Thus Price notes that in *Seinte Iulienne* virginity is presented as the proper disposition of

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<sup>118</sup> M/W-B p. xv.



the will rather than mere technical intactness.<sup>119</sup> As Alexandra Olsen states so succinctly:

the most important aspect of Juliana's virginity is spiritual. In defending her virginity, she defends her soul.<sup>120</sup>

The goal of physical virginity, therefore, is purity of heart, for it is in the heart that spiritual life is contained (AW vii.201 [S/W 193]; LLo 12.85-88 [S/W 326]).<sup>121</sup>

St. Margaret sums it up nicely in a prayer to Christ:

*Hald, hehe Healen, min heorte, Ich biseche þe, in treowe bileue; and biwite þu mi bodi, þet is al bitaht to þe, from flesliche fulþen; þet neauer mi sawle ne isuled beo in sunne þurh þet licomes lust þet lute hwile liked.* (SM 46.33-48.1)

Hold my heart, high Lord, I beseech you, in true belief, and protect my body, which is entirely given to you, from fleshly filths, so that my soul is never soiled with sin through the body's desire, which pleases for only

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<sup>119</sup> "The *Liflade of Seinte Iuliane* and Hagiographic Convention," M&H 14 (1987), p. 52.

<sup>120</sup> Alexandra Hennessey Olsen, "Cynewulf's Autonomous Women: A Reconsideration of Elene and Juliana," in H. Damico and A.H. Olsen (eds.), *New Readings on Women in Old English Literature*, (Indianapolis, 1990), p. 229.

<sup>121</sup> Cp. S/W HM n. 47, p. 417, n. 57, p. 418. Grayson points out that the heart is the symbol of spiritual life in *Ancrene Wisse* (*Structure and Imagery*, p. 12). In *Ancrene Wisse* purity of heart is defined as a clean and shining moral sense or conscience (*inwit* AW I.7 [S/W 47]), and the charity which rules the pure heart is identified as virtues which are God's commands (AW I.8 [S/W 49]). Georgianna notes that *Ancrene Wisse* contains the earliest discussion in English of *inwit* or personal conscience (*The Solitary Self*, p. 3). However, the stress on purity of heart found in the anchoritic texts goes back to Cassian's *Collations* (see S/W AW vii, n. 2, p. 398 and the more extensive note in Shepherd, *AW Six and Seven*, 19/15f., p. 52). It is interesting to note that the adjectives used to describe the pure heart, i.e., clean, bright, and shining, are also used to describe virginity itself and the maidens who preserve it in their bodies and hearts.

a little while [S/W 289].<sup>122</sup>

The importance of the virginity of the soul is stressed throughout the anchoritic literature, as the virginal life is associated with a life of virtue, both outer and inner. *Seinte Iulene* asserts that Christ will guard those who keep virginity in their hearts, if they are mild and meek as a maiden ought to be (SJ 45 [S/W 315]). *Ancrene Wisse* defines virginity of the soul as good works and faithful belief (AW vii.201 [S/W 193]). *Hali Meidhad* is addressed to maidens who have maidenly virtues (HM 2 [S/W 225]) and stresses the importance of cultivating virtues rather than breeding vices through whoring with the devil (HM 36-38 [S/W 240-241]). The virgin is warned:

*ne beo þu nawt to trusti ane to þi meidhad wiðuten oðer god ant þeawful  
mihes ant, ouer al, miltschipe ant meekeschipe of heorte* (HM 38.34-40.1).

do not trust too much in your maidenhood alone without other good and virtuous powers, and above all mildness and humbleness of heart [S/W 242].

Virginity thus becomes symbolic of every virtue which the anchoress ought to display and, ultimately, of the entire anchoritic life (SW 102 [S/W 218]; HM 2-4 [S/W 225-226]). Virginity characterizes not only the renunciation of the

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<sup>122</sup> Note that it is Olibrius' desire which would soil Margaret's soul, not her own. This is a theme to which the author of *Ancrene Wisse* devotes a great deal of attention: it is not only a sin to succumb to one's own lust, it is also a sin to be the victim of the lust of another (see pp. 92, 94, 95f, below).

anchoritic life, but also its goal and the means by which that goal is achieved. In the same way, its opposite, lechery, becomes symbolic not only of the loss of physical virginity, but of all sin, and of anything which might threaten the purity and integrity of the anchoritic life. For example, in the enumeration of the sins which the anchoress should confess in *Ancrene Wisse*, what she in fact confesses to is lust (AW v.163-164 [S/W 164-165]). In the discussion of Greek fire, in AW vii, the fire of love for God can be quenched with the urine of sin (AW vii.205 [S/W 195-196]), which is later identified as lust (AW vii.207 [S/W 197]). As Savage and Watson point out: "lechery is a basic theme to and from which discussions of other sins lead."<sup>123</sup> Hence, when investigating the symbols of virginity in anchoritic literature, we will often find that what is under discussion is not simply the renunciation of sexual relations, but the nature of the entire anchoritic life, for which virginity is the prerequisite and governing symbol.

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<sup>123</sup> AW ii, n. 7, p. 349. For other examples see AW iv, n. 23, p. 373; AW iv, n. 96, pp. 382-383. Note, however, that while lechery is symbolic of all sin, it is often used as *only* a symbol. Just as purity of heart is more important than physical virginity, the sins of the soul are more deadly than the sins of the body; in the end, lechery is less dangerous than some other sins, especially pride (AW iv.141-142 [S/W 149]).

## FLEEING THE WORLD

The primary symbol of the female virgin is the virginal body, sealed, unbroken. For this reason Price stresses the importance of the acknowledgement of the body in *Ancrene Wisse*, and the imagery associated with it.<sup>124</sup> The virginal female body, physically sealed by her hymen, becomes a symbol of the anchoress's fidelity to Christ. Virginité is the seal which marks the maiden as Christ's own, the mark which he has set upon her (SM 50, 52 [S/W 290, 291], drawing upon Romans 8.39). 'The virginité which seals the anchoress to Christ is symbolized by the seal on the anchorhouse door, which proclaims her enclosure and her commitment to Christ for all the world to see. The anchoress's body is itself sealed and protected within the four walls of the anchorhouse with which it becomes identified: the unbroken body is the anchorhouse enclosing the pure heart, which in turn encloses the soul.

In AW vi.192-193 [S/W 186-187] the anchorhouse and the anchoress's body are identified as two anchorhouses, corresponding to Christ's grave and the virginal body of the Virgin Mary, respectively. The anchoress is told that just as Christ emerged from both his anchorhouses: *3e went to alswa of bapine ancre huses. as he dude wið ute bruche. 7 leaf ham ba ihale.* ("you too will go out of both your anchorhouses as he did, without a break, and leave them both whole" AW vi.193, f.102b.8-9 [S/W 187]). Here, the unbroken body of the Virgin Mary, the unbroken body of the

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<sup>124</sup> "Inner' and 'Outer'," pp. 192-208.

anchoress, the sealed anchorhouse in which that body is enclosed and the sealed tomb of Christ merge in a complex matrix of images which stresses the characteristic of inviolate virginity.<sup>125</sup> It is thus doubly important that the virginal body remain intact, for it is the integrity of the body which guarantees the security of the pure heart and the soul whose life is contained therein.

The fact of the anchoress's enclosure thus defines the entire character of her life, and images of enclosure are used to explore not only the physical fact of her reclusive life, but the spiritual meaning behind it. The most profound expression of what the virginal life of the anchoress means is thus found in the imagery of enclosure. What is enclosed is as important as how it is enclosed: the virgin body of the anchoress enclosed within her anchorhouse; the pure heart enclosed within the unbroken body; the soul enclosed within the pure heart. The perils which threaten the integrity of the anchorhouse, the virginal body and the pure heart are a major concern of the authors of the anchoritic texts.

The three major threats to virginity are the traditional ones of the world, the flesh and the devil. The perils presented by all three are avoided, at least in part, by fleeing the world and entering into the enclosed life of the anchorhouse. The walls

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<sup>125</sup> The matrix also includes the imagery of the castle of the body: the anchorhouse which encloses the body is likened to the outer wall around a castle (cp. S/W AW vi, n. 35, p. 397). See also Grayson, *Structure and Imagery*, p. 39, and below, pp. 246f.

of the anchorhouse provide security from the dangers which threaten the pure heart and the soul whose life is contained therein.

The author of *Ancrene Wisse* discusses the anchoress's reasons for fleeing the world in AW iii.<sup>126</sup> The anchorhouse protects the anchoress from the perils of the outside world which endanger the precious treasure of virginity which she must strive to preserve. Those who remain in the world are jostled together, and through this jostling the brittle vessel of the flesh may become broken and the purity contained therein may be spilt (AW iii.86 [S/W 109-110]). The physical threat of losing her virginity through contact with those in the world is thus one of the dangers from which the anchoress flees.

The threat posed to the anchoress by the outside world, however, is not only physical but spiritual. Purity of body and of heart is endangered by *any* contact with the outside world, but especially by contact with the evil found outside the walls of the anchorhouse. The virgin anchoress must flee the fellowship of foul people: the bright gold of virginity may catch rust from contact with rusty metal. Since good and evil exist together in the world, one cannot flee evil unless one also flees the good. Therefore, the virgin anchoress encloses herself in solitude within the safety of her anchorhouse (AW iii.T 82-83 [S/W 107]; cp. HM 6 [S/W 227]; WLd 35.570-575 [S/W

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<sup>126</sup> In addition to those outlined below, the author of *Ancrene Wisse* gives several reasons for fleeing the world which are more properly examined in the context of the reward for virginity (the gaining of heaven, companionship with Christ, brightness, and swiftness; see below, Chapter Four) or in the context of the anchoress as the Bride of Christ (proof of nobility, and generosity; see below, Chapter Six).

256]; UrG 5.21-22 [S/W 322]). Even when she has hidden herself in the sanctuary of her anchorhouse, however, she must guard herself carefully. People whom she knows well will wait outside as they wait for a thief who has escaped into the church, hoping to lure her out. Similarly, in SW 86-88 [S/W 212], the devil and vices prowl around the castle of the body waiting for a chance to steal the soul. Paradoxically, the image of the thief is applied both to the anchoress who flees into the anchorhouse as into the sanctuary of the Church and must guard herself safely within, and to the devil, who must be kept out lest he steal her soul.<sup>127</sup> Thus, she must fear every man lest he draw her out (AW iii.90-91 [S/W 112-113]).<sup>128</sup>

The anchorhouse also protects the anchoress from the peril of the devil:

*zef a wod llun urne zont te strete. nalde þe wise bitunen hire sone? ant  
 Selnte peter seið. þ helle llun rengeð ⁊ reccheð eauer abuten. forte  
 sechen in zong sawle to forswolthen. ... for þi beoð ancren wise þe habbeð  
 wel bitund ham azein helle llun forte beo þe sikerure. (AW iii.85,  
 f.44a.27-44b.2, 44b.6-7).*

If a mad lion was running through the street, would not a sensible woman shut herself in at once? And St. Peter says that "Hell's lion always ranges and prowls around, to look for an opening to swallow the

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<sup>127</sup> See below, pp. 67f and 85, 117f.

<sup>128</sup> Cp. AW ii.62 [S/W 91], where, warning of the dangers of the outside world, the author declares that he would rather see all three of the anchoresses for whom he writes hanging on a gibbet to avoid sin than to see them give a single kiss to any man on earth. It would appear that to hang on an earthly gallows would be far preferable to the gallows of hell to which they would be condemned for the sin of lechery symbolized by such a kiss. For the image of the gallows of hell, see below pp. 237f.

soul," ... so anchoresses are wise who have shut themselves in well against hell's lion in order to be the more secure [S/W 109].<sup>129</sup>

The anchoress flees into the anchorhouse seeking a hiding place from the devil, entering the cave of her anchorhouse as David went into the cave to hide from Saul. Saul is the enemy who hates and hunts the anchoress, and she flees into her anchorhouse to hide from his claws. The anchoress is warned, however, that she must not enter the cave as Saul did, to practise the filths of the flesh in secret. Saul also represents worldly men and worldly sins which the anchoress must shun (AW iii.68-69 [S/W 96-97]).

The threat posed to the anchoress's soul by the devil is often expressed in the image of the devil as a thief who wishes to steal her precious treasure. The image of the precious treasure is found throughout *Ancrene Wisse* and the *Katherine Group*. The treasure, sometimes also described as gold or jewels, symbolizes virginity (HM 8 [S/W 228]; AW iii.83 [S/W 107]), the pure heart (AW ii.57-57 [S/W 88]), or the soul (SW, AW iv.94-95 [S/W 115-116]). The treasure can also symbolize the kingdom of heaven and good works (AW iii.79 [S/W 104]). The treasure of the soul or the pure heart has been purchased by God: the purchase price is Christ's blood (SW 86 [S/W 212]; AW iv.150 [S/W 154-155]).<sup>130</sup> The high price that God is willing to pay

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<sup>129</sup> The description of the devil as a lion or a wild animal is a familiar feature of the anchoritic texts.

<sup>130</sup> This is in distinct contrast with Judas, who sells Christ (SJ 57 [S/W 318]). The kiss which betrays Christ to death is thus a prelude for the mystical embrace and kiss offered by Christ as he hangs on the cross, which leads to union and salvation for the



underlines the value he sets on this treasure; indeed, *Wohunge* bewails the cost as too high for so little a gain:

*A . deore cheap hefdes tu on me . ne was neauer unwurði þing chepet  
swa deore ...* (WLú 32.446-448).

Ah, you had an expensive buy in me! Never was an unworthy thing bought so dearly [S/W 254].

The treasure is not come by easily. In *Ancrene Wisse*, the pure heart is described as a treasure hidden in the ground (AW ii.58-59 [S/W 88-89]).<sup>131</sup> The treasure is buried in the earth, as the heart is enclosed in a body of clay and the anchoress must delve until she finds it.<sup>132</sup> The closer one gets to the treasure, the deeper one must dig. The treasure must therefore be sought with great toil. In a curious reversal of images, *Ancrene Wisse* illustrates the strenuous labour required to reach the treasure. The heart's treasure is not, in fact, on earth, but in heaven. The anchoress must therefore dig upwards, seeking spiritual gold rather than worldly

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anchoress and, indeed, for the world (see below, Chapter Five, especially pp. 327f.).

<sup>131</sup> The immediate reference is to Job 3.21. However, one is also reminded of the treasure buried in the field to which Christ compares the Kingdom of Heaven in Matthew 13.44, and, conversely, of the unfaithful servant who buried his treasure in the ground in the Parable of the Talents (Matthew 25.14-30).

<sup>132</sup> For the imagery of the soul enclosed within a body formed from the earth, see below, pp. 109, 112.

wealth.<sup>133</sup> This delving is accomplished through yearning and high thoughts of heaven.<sup>134</sup>

The image of digging in the ground in order to find the treasure of the heart is also found later, when the earth in which the heart is buried (i.e. the anchoress's body) and the heart itself are cultivated with the tools of hardship and suffering (AW vii.196 [S/W 189]). One is reminded of the fragile flower of virginity, which must be cultivated with such care. The image of the virgin anchoress as a plant which must be nurtured and protected recurs, for example in *Ancrene Wisse* vi.193 [S/W 187], where the anchoress is described as a young sapling in God's orchard, surrounded by the thorns of hardships which protect them from the beast of hell.<sup>135</sup>

Once found, the priceless treasure is in constant peril and must be guarded diligently. The treasure of the soul is thus enclosed in the castle of the body,<sup>136</sup>

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<sup>133</sup> S/W AW ii, n. 83, p. 358. S/W point out that this image, combined with the image of rowing against the current, emphasizes the difficulty of the anchoritic life. See below, p. 135.

<sup>134</sup> Cp. the discussion of prayer and meditation below, pp. 116f.

<sup>135</sup> See also the image of the fig tree, pp. 130, 330 below, and the use of images of the garden, pp. 317f., below. The imagery of gardening and fertility in *Ancrene Wisse* is discussed by Grayson, *Structure and Imagery*, pp. 181f.

<sup>136</sup> For the background and possible sources of the image of the castle of the body and the wardens of the soul, see Roberta D. Cornelius, *The Figurative Castle*, Diss. Bryn Mawr College, 1930.

where it must be defended by the five senses from the thief of hell, who is constantly plotting to steal it (SW 86 [S/W 211-212] and *passim*).<sup>137</sup>

If the devil is unable to steal the treasure of the soul, he will attempt to trick the anchoress into selling it, and the author of *Ancrene Wisse* urges the anchoress not to bargain with the devil at the cost of her soul. The anchoress is warned against the merchant of hell who leads the beast of lechery to market and offers it for sale. The anchoress must exercise extreme caution, for the scorpion of lechery which the devil offers for sale in return for her soul is fair of face but has a poisonous tail by which the anchoress may be stung. Therefore the devil hides its tail and exposes its head. But it is a foolish merchant who would look only at the head of any animal he considers buying (AW iv.107-108 [S/W 124]). Similarly, the anchoress is warned of the foolishness of the one who buys herself hell with the price of heaven by trading the honour of virginity for the beast of lechery (AW iii.79 [S/W 104]).<sup>138</sup>

The bargain with the devil contemplated by the anchoress is one into which she enters of her own free will. The merchant of hell can only show her his "ape

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<sup>137</sup> Cp. AW ii, where the five senses guard the heart from the attacks of the devil. The image of the devil as a thief abounds in the anchoritic texts; for example, see below pp. 85, 117. See also the images of sin as a thief (below, p. 73) and the anchoress as a thief through sin (below, p. 74). Paradoxically, the thief of hell is robbed of his prey through the Incarnation and the power of virginity (see below, p. 152).

<sup>138</sup> The imagery of the marketplace is found throughout the *Ancrene Wisse*, (as well as in *Sawles Warde*, *Hali Meïðhad*, and *Wohunge*). See, for example, pp. 72, 85f., below, and Grayson, *Structure and Imagery*, Ch. 7, *passim*.

wares" and wheedle or threaten to make her buy them; he has no power over her except what she herself gives him, and if she laughs him to scorn through true faith he will run away (AW iv.126 [S/W 138]).<sup>139</sup> Thus, the anchoress is urged:

*spite him amid te beard to hoker 7 to scame þe flikereð swa wið þe 7  
fikeð dogge fahenunge. Hwen he for se liht wurd. for þe licunge of alust  
ane hwile stucche chapeð þi sawle godes deore bune þ he bohte mid his  
blod. 7 mid his deorewurde deað o þe deore rode. aa bihald hire wurd  
þ he paide for hire. 7 dem þrester hire pris 7 beo on hire þe deorre. ne  
sule þu neauer se eðeliche his fa 7 ðln eider his deorewurde spuse þ  
costneðe him se deore. (AW iv.150, f.79a.24-79b.2).*

Spit at him in his beard with contempt and scorn, who trifles so with you and deceives you with dog-like fawning, when he bargains with such worthless things—with the satisfaction of a single lust for so brief a time—for your soul, God's dear purchase, which he bought with his blood and with his precious death on the dear cross. Ah! ah! Consider the price that he paid for her, and so judge her worth, and hold her the more valuable. Never sell his precious spouse, who cost him: so dearly, to his enemy and yours so cheaply. [S/W 154-155].

The virgin who sells her chastity for a price which does not reflect its true value is thus castigated (HM 22-24 [S/W 234-235]; SM 68 [S/W 298]). In *Hali Meidhad* the virgin anchoress who is tempted to renounce her maidenhood for the imagined joys of marriage is warned that "all that glitters is not gold" and if she gives up the treasure of virginity for the temptations of the world she will soon find that all her gold has turned to brass. She is urged to examine the lives of the queens, rich courtesans and proud ladies whom she so envies, and consider whether they are not,

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<sup>139</sup> Cp. SJ 45-47 [S/W 316], 57 [S/W 318], 65 [S/W 319-320], where the devil is shamed by Juliana, and SK 80 [S/W 275], where Katherine laughs in the face of her suffering.

in fact, licking honey from thorns, for the sweetness of the world (marriage) is bought with a double share of bitterness (HM 6 [S/W 227]; cp. AW iv.98 [S/W 118]). The image of licking honey from thorns recurs in a similar context in *Ureisun*, where the author points out that it is a foolish merchant who pays too high a price for an inferior thing, and refuses a priceless thing (in this case, grace) which is not only offered to him free, but carries a reward for taking it. The author concludes, *Nis no blisse soðes iþinge ðet is wtewið, ðet ne beo to bitter abowt . ðet tet uni ðer inne . ne beo illicked of þomes* ("Truly there is no happiness in anything which is external that is not too bitterly bought, whose honey is not licked off thorns" UrG 6.33-36 [S/W 322]).<sup>140</sup>

Thus the author of *Hali Meidhad* warns his readers against the lures of marriage:

*hwet weole oðer wunne se þer eauer of cume, to deore hit bið aboht þet tu þe seolf sulest fore, ... wið swuch uncouerlich lure as meidhades menske is, ant te mede baðe, for worldlich biþete. Wa wurðe þet cheaffear, for ei hwilende weole sullen meidhad awei, þe cwen is of heouene! For alswa as of þis lure nis nan acouerunge, alswa is euch wurð unwurð hertowart. (HM 24.3-9).*

Whatever joy or happiness that ever comes of it is too dearly bought; when you soil [M/W-B sell] yourself for it ... with such irrecoverable loss as the honour of maidenhood, and its reward too—and all for worldly gain. A curse on that bargain in which maidenhood, which is queen of heaven, is sold for any short-lived well-being! For just as

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<sup>140</sup> Cp. S/W HM n. 9, Millett, *Hali Meidhad*, p. xx, and J.C. Unrue, "HM and Other Virginité Treatises", pp. 189-90. The image of honey recurs in a positive context when Christ is described as sweeter than honey in the mouth (see below, p. 402).

there is no recovering from its loss, so, compared to it, everything of value is worthless [S/W 235].

In the end, the anchoress will pay for her bargain with every burning flame in hell (HM 40-42 [S/W 243]).

The temptation of marriage which would lure the maiden from her vowed virginity is thus described as a false treasure, a sort of "fool's gold" which deceives and disappoints those who succumb to its glittering allure. Earthly treasure (worldly wealth) is a threat to the treasure of the soul, for the heart is only confused by the love of worldly things (AW vii.196 [S/W 189]).<sup>141</sup> The anchoress is warned against love of earthly wealth and ease, for worldly people buy hell with more pain than that with which the anchoress buys heaven (AW iv.98 [S/W 118]). They will pay later what she pays now.

The enemies of virginity and the threats they pose are often described in images similar to those used to describe virginity itself. The enemies of virginity seem to take on the characteristics of virginity in order to deceive, just as the devil can take on the appearance of an angel of light (eg. SJ 31 [S/W 312]), presenting distorted images of that which they seek to destroy.<sup>142</sup> When the devil appears to St. Margaret in the form of a dragon, he is covered in gold and his eyes are described

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<sup>141</sup> Cp. the image of the eyes of the heart, below, pp. 119f.

<sup>142</sup> See pp. 87, 107.

as more blazing than stars or gemstones. The description of the enemy is here very close to the images used to describe virginity (and its crown) in *Hali Meidhad*.

The similarity between the images used to portray virginity and those which describe its enemies illustrates the danger to the virgin from within herself, as well as the devil's tendency to deceive. This idea is reinforced by a passage in *Ancrene Wisse* iv.115-116 [S/W 130] where the author cautions the anchoress about the devil's wiles. In order to make the anchoress fall into sin, the devil tempts her to an action which on the surface appears to be good. For example, the anchoress who begins as an almsgiver must seek goods to give away. Soon she will appear to be accumulating treasure and she and her house will be robbed. On the surface, this is a simple reference to the dangers of burglary. However, when read in the light of the sustained imagery of the devil as a thief seeking entry into the house of the body to steal the treasure of the soul and the parallels of the anchorhouse enclosing the body which encloses the heart (soul), the passage takes on new meaning. The passage in *Ancrene Wisse* iv is primarily a warning against pride; the anchoress who becomes a successful almsgiver falls into the sin of pride.<sup>143</sup> Perhaps this is one way in which the devil steals the treasure of the soul housed in the body. When the guardians of the heart loosen their vigil and allow pride into the heart, the thief of hell can enter and steal the soul.

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<sup>143</sup> See below, pp. 106f.

The author of *Ancrene Wisse* warns the anchoress not to accept items for safe keeping on much the same grounds (AW viii.213-214 [S/W 201]). Although the anchorhouse might be considered a secure place to keep items of value, this practice could lead to complicated negotiations, theft, and, in general, material preoccupations that the anchoress should seek to avoid. Similarly, although the anchoress is permitted to sell her handiwork to provide for her needs, she is warned not to conduct business, for: *Ancre þ is chepilt. þ is. buð forte sullen efter bi zete, ha chepeð hire sawle þe chapmon of helle.* ("an anchoress fond of bargaining, that is, one who buys to sell for gain, sells her soul to the merchant of hell" AW viii.213, f.113a.9-10 [S/W 201]).<sup>144</sup>

The danger from robbers and thieves, then, comes from without (temptation, the instrument of the devil), but also comes from within, for through sin we are all potential robbers of God. For example, in *Ancrene Wisse* v.171 [S/W 170-171] the two vices of despair and presumption are likened to two fierce robbers who steal from God: presumption steals his just judgement and righteousness, and despair steals God's mercy. Similarly, the anchoress is warned that when someone harms her she should leave vengeance to God and not presume to take it upon herself and thus rob God of what is rightfully his (AW iv.148 [S/W 153]).

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<sup>144</sup> See S/W AW viii, n. 15, p. 404, and Warren, *Anchorites and Their Patrons*, pp. 111-112.



Despair and presumption are also described as murderers who seek to kill God, for God cannot be without justice or without mercy. The remedy for these two vices is a combination of hope (for mercy) and fear (of just judgement). The killing force of sin is also depicted in *Sawles Warde* 88 [S/W 212], where the devil who seeks to steal the treasure of the soul also wishes to murder it. The concept of sin as a murderer of God or of the soul is found throughout *Ancrene Wisse* iv-v (e.g. AW iv.143 [S/W 150], v.157 [S/W 160], v.160 [S/W 162]). For example, in *Ancrene Wisse* v.159 [S/W 162] the author asserts that through deadly sin in the soul, one spiritually slays God. This is expanded into the slaughter of an entire spiritual family: the father (God), the mother (the Virgin Mary and Holy Church), friends, brothers and sisters (angels and saints), and children (good works). Elsewhere, the angry anchoress is compared to a pelican as she slays the good works which are her children through anger (AW iii.63-64 [S/W 93-94]; cp. AW iv.104-105 [S/W 122], where anger leads to homicide and murder of oneself).

Sin thus makes the anchoress herself a murderer and a thief. As opportunity makes a thief, the anchoress is urged to guard against the opportunity for sin by fleeing lechery (HM 14 [S/W 231]). In order to protect the treasure of virginity, she must flee into the security of her anchorhouse for protection from the thief of hell who would steal her soul through sin. However, the anchorhouse which is the anchoress's protection is also Jerusalem, the church's sanctuary, to which the anchoress, herself God's thief, may flee. Once there, she is counselled:

*Haldeð ow feaste inne. nawt te bodi ane, for þ is þe unwurðest. ah ower fif wites. ⁊ te heorte ouer al ⁊ al þer þe sawle lif is. for heo ha bitrept utewið, nis þer bute leade forð towarde to gealforke. þ is þe wearitreo of helle. (AW iii.90, f.47a.10-14).*

Keep yourself fast within: not only your body, for that is of least significance, but your five senses, and above all the heart, in which is the whole life of the soul. For if she is caught outside, there is nothing for it but to lead her forth to the gallows, that is to the gibbet of hell [S/W 112].<sup>145</sup>

#### THE GUARDIANS OF THE HEART

The anchorhouse is thus the place to which the anchoress flees from the dangers of the enemies which would surround her in the outside world. The anchorhouse encloses and protects the virgin anchoress, enabling her to preserve and maintain her chastity pure and unstained (AW I.10 [S/W 50]). Here she can guard her soul from the intrusions and temptations of the world which would draw it away from God, the flesh which would lure it to a life of ease, and the devil who seeks to steal God's treasure.

However, the outside world can never be completely banished from the anchoress's cell; it is eternally present just outside her window and constantly invades her thoughts. Georgianna discusses the interaction between the world of the

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<sup>145</sup> For the images of the gibbet of hell and the anchorhouse as a prison, see below, pp. 237f.

anchorhouse and the world outside in detail. She argues that "the interpenetration of inner and outer realities is not merely an imagistic pattern; it typifies the anchoress's *experience*."<sup>146</sup> Unlike the desert fathers, who fled to a literal desert, the anchoress flees to a spiritual desert in her anchorhouse, which is nevertheless situated in the centre of village life, under the eaves of the church. The anchoress is therefore placed in a paradoxical position where she must participate in the world even as she seeks to flee it.<sup>147</sup> Georgianna points out that if the world is an enemy, it is an enemy which the anchoress brings into the anchorhouse with her, for the world is inescapable. The author of *Ancrene Wisse* thus deals with both the inner and outer realities of the anchoress's experience (for example in his comments concerning the keeping of a cat or a cow), and defines the anchoress's relation with God in terms of the everyday world.<sup>148</sup> Since she cannot leave the world behind, she must learn to manipulate it to her own spiritual advantage:<sup>149</sup> "the world is not only helpful to the anchoress's spiritual progress, it is essential."<sup>150</sup> Thus, Georgianna states:

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<sup>146</sup> *The Solitary Self*, p. 58.

<sup>147</sup> *The Solitary Self*, p. 57.

<sup>148</sup> *The Solitary Self*, pp. 5-6; cp. pp. 65-66.

<sup>149</sup> *The Solitary Self*, p. 59.

<sup>150</sup> *The Solitary Self*, p. 66.

the various birds the author uses in part III to describe the solitary life are apt images not so much because their flight represents the anchoress's freedom from the world, but because birds belong to *two* worlds at once [i.e. the world of the trees in which they roost, and the earth to which they must descend for food].<sup>151</sup>

The author of *Ancrene Wisse* devotes a great deal of time and space to the anchoress's relations with the outside world, stressing the dangers of contact with those outside the anchorhouse and the need to avoid such contact. The threats to the anchoress enclosed within her cell are paralleled by the threats to the pure heart enclosed within her body as the dichotomy between inner and outer is explored in the relationship between the heart and the outside world (linked by the senses), and the anchoress and the outside world (linked by the window of the anchorhouse).<sup>152</sup>

The heart must therefore be guarded, enclosed securely within the anchoress's body as her body is enclosed within her anchorhouse. The author of *Ancrene Wisse* describes the five senses as the guardians of the heart (AW ii.29 [S/W 66]) and devotes two entire sections (ii and iii) to the senses and the life they guard.<sup>153</sup>

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<sup>151</sup> *The Solitary Self*, p. 56. See also Price, "'Inner' and 'Outer,'" p. 192. Unrue notes that the author of *Hali Meïðhad* also recognizes the immediacy of the outside world and illustrates points with images which were important parts of everyday life in the thirteenth century ("*HM* and Other Virginité Treatises," p. 191). These images are discussed in detail in Unrue's dissertation.

<sup>152</sup> Cp. Georgianna, *The Solitary Self*, p. 61; Grayson, *Structure and Imagery*, p. 57; and Price, "'Inner' and 'Outer,'" *passim*.

<sup>153</sup> See S/W AW ii, n. 1, p. 347.

In the Introduction to his work, the author tells the anchoress that the subject of chapter ii will be

*hu 3e schulen þurh ower fif wittes witen ower heorte þ̅ ordre 7 religiun 7 sawle lif is inne. I þis destinctiun aren chapitres fiue. as fif stuchen efter fif wittes þe witeð þe heorte as wakemen hwer se ha beoð treowe. (AW I.11-12, f.4a.24-28).*

how through your five senses you must guard your heart, within which are order and religion and the life of the soul; in this distinction there are five chapters, like five branches, corresponding to the five senses which guard the heart like watchmen when they are faithful [S/W 51].

Upon closer examination, however, it is clear that the chapter is as much about guarding the senses themselves as about how the senses guard the heart. The senses are like wardens outside the heart which encloses the life of the soul (AW ii.63 [S/W 92]). Like servants who can be either trustworthy or untruly, the senses can be the anchoress's allies or her foes. If they are properly regulated, they become the means by which the anchoress can guard and cultivate her heart's purity, turning inward through reading, prayer, physical asceticism, etc. However, if the senses themselves are not well guarded, they become a threat to the inner and outer purity of the anchoress, drawing her heart outward. Thus, in *Hali Meiohad* the five senses are seen as enemies, the allies of lechery in the war on maidenhood, against which the anchoress must guard (HM 14 [S/W 230-231]). Similarly, in AW ii the author quotes Lamentations 3.51, "my eyes have robbed my soul" (*min eche haueð irrobed al min*

*saule* Cleopatra f.26.18-19, p. 52 [S/W 71]).<sup>154</sup> The senses may guard the soul from the thief of hell, but they themselves may also threaten the safety of the treasure, if through sin they cause the anchoress to become a thief.<sup>155</sup>

The guardians themselves must therefore be guarded, for like the unruly servants of *Sawles Ward*, they will neglect their duty unless they are regulated by Wit (Reason). Wit, or Reason, must be constantly vigilant in order to prevent sin from entering. For example, the author of *Ancrene Wisse* cites the story of Isboeth, who set a woman who was winnowing wheat to keep the door while he slept. The doorkeeper is wit, or reason, who must separate the chaff from the clean grain, i.e., divide the good from the evil. But Isboeth, or the "man bemused," set a woman as the doorkeeper. This woman, representing weak reason, falls asleep; thus the reason

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<sup>154</sup> Cp. Nero: *min eie haueð i robbed al mine soule* (f.14v.26-27, p. 27). At this point there are two leaves missing from the Corpus ms.. Most of the material is supplied by Savage and Watson from Cleopatra, with reference to Nero, but these mss. omit the final paragraph, in the midst of which the Corpus ms. resumes. The only other ms. to include the passage is a thirteenth century Anglo-Norman translation preserved in Cotton Vitellius F.vii, from which Savage and Watson translate the missing passage (S/W AW ii, n. 20, p. 350; cp. n. 14, pp. 349-350). Salu translates most of the missing material from Nero and gives "the substance" of the material from Vitellius in a condensed form (*The Ancrene Riwle*, [London, 1955, repr. 1967], p. 24, n. 3 and p. 27). All references to Cleopatra are taken from E.J. Dobson, *The English Text of the Ancrene Riwle*, B.M. Cotton MS Cleopatra C.VI, EETS 267 (1972). References to Nero are from Mabel Day, *The English Text of the Ancrene Riwle*, Cotton Nero A.XIV, EETS 225 (1952). References to Vitellius are from J.A. Herbert, *The French Text of the Ancrene Riwle*, EETS 219 (1944).

<sup>155</sup> See above p. 74. For further discussion of the senses as the guardians of the heart see Grayson, *Structure and Imagery*, pp. 12-14 and Ch.2 *passim*.

begins to consent to sin. Then the devil can sneak in and slay the bemused spirit (AW iv.139-140 [S/W 147]; cp. SW 86 [S/W 211]).

The same point is graphically illustrated using the story of Shimei (AW iii.89-90 [S/W 111-112]). Shimei made a bargain with Solomon to remain in Jerusalem in order to avoid a sentence of death.<sup>156</sup> However, when his servants escaped he went out after them and was subsequently condemned to death. Shimei is said to represent the anchoress who allows her senses to escape and then follows them outward with her heart. The senses should remain at home like good servants and serve their lady:

*þenne ha seruið wel þe ancre hare leafdi, hwen ha notieð ham wel in hare sawle neode. hwen þe ehe is oþe boc. oþer o sum oðer god. þe eare to godes worl. þe muð in hali bonen. (AW ii.90, f.46b.16-19).*

They serve their lady the anchoress well when she uses them well for her soul's needs—when the eye is on a book or some other good thing, the ear turned to God's word, the mouth in holy prayers [S/W 112].

The relationship between the senses and the heart is thus parallel to that between the outer and inner rule; the senses serve the heart by guarding it when they are turned inward, just as the outer rule serves the inner lady-rule by ordering the anchoress's outer life in order to guard the inner.

Once the anchoress's heart has escaped, her physical enclosure is meaningless:

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<sup>156</sup> Cp. the image of the anchorhouse as Jerusalem, the place to which the anchoress flees as to the sanctuary of the church in order to avoid the gallows of hell (above, p. 74), and the image of the anchorhouse as a prison (below, pp. 236f.) and a grave (below, pp. 240f.).

*for nawi ha beoð bilokene (nwið wah oðer wal þe þes 3eten openið, bute a 3ein godes sonde, 7 ltueneð of sawlc. ... Ouer alle þing þenne ... witeð ower heorte. þe heorte is wel iloket, 3ef muð. 7 ehe. 7 care. wisliche beon ilokene. for heo ... beoð þe heorte wardelns. ant 3ef þe wardeins wendeð ut, þe ham bið biwist uuele. (AW ii.55, f.27a.26-27b.7).*

She is locked in for nothing, inside fence or wall, if she opens these gates, except to God's messenger and the soul's nourishment. ... 'Above everything, then ... guard your heart.' The heart is well locked in if mouth and eye and ear are wisely locked in. For they ... are the heart's guardians, and if the guardians go out, the home is badly guarded [S/W 86].

The anchoress must therefore guard her senses carefully, for if she allows them to escape it is almost inevitable that her heart will follow them outward.

The senses are also seen as gateways which guard the heart in the sense that a drawbridge or a gate guards the entrance to a castle, controlling what comes in or goes out. The mouth, eyes and ears especially are seen as gates or windows which the anchoress must watch carefully, for it is through these gates that sin may enter or the heart may escape. Similarly, it is through the gates or windows of the five senses that the heart may be wounded by sin in battle (AW i.17 [S/W 57]; LLe 15.13-14, 18-20 [S/W 329]). These wounds are in turn healed by the five wounds of Christ (AW ii.62 [S/W 90]).<sup>157</sup>

Because of the senses' role as gateways, Savage and Watson suggest that the real theme of *Ancrene Wisse* is not, in fact, the role of the senses as guardians of the heart. Rather:

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<sup>157</sup> See the discussions of battle imagery in Chapter Two, below, and of the imagery of the wounds of the soul, Chapter Three, below.



the part's real theme is the shutting out of physical sensation. ... The senses are not in practice seen as guards but as dangerous gateways through which evil must at all costs be prevented from entering (as too in *Sawles Warde*).<sup>158</sup>

However, physical sensation is not shut out, nor indeed should it be. As will be seen in the following discussion, Part ii of *Ancrene Wisse* deals with the *control* of physical sensation and sensory perception, not its elimination. The senses guard the heart by controlling what comes in: i.e. which sights, sounds, feelings, etc. are acceptable and which are not. Thus, the eye must be turned inward, gazing at a holy book or at the cross, rather than outward to the sights outside the window of the anchorhouse. The flesh endures discomfort and often pain, the nose endures harsh smells, the mouth bitter tastes. The mouth must avoid idle talk so as to be occupied in prayer; the ear must be closed to worldly chatter so as to be open to the voice of God. As Georgianna points out, the anchoress's denial of her senses in *Ancrene Wisse* is not geared towards the elimination of the activity of the senses, but rather "the concentration of it in her imagination (or her heart) for another purpose."<sup>159</sup> Georgianna contrasts *Ancrene Wisse* with Aelred's *Rule for a Recluse*, in which the goal of the anchoress is, indeed, the elimination of the activities of the senses. This is an example of the author's adaptation of his sources to his own style, which *uses*

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<sup>158</sup> S/W AW ii, n. 1, p. 347. See also Alexandra Barratt, "The Five Wits and their Structural Significance in Part II of *Ancrene Wisse*," *MÆ* 56 (1987) pp. 12-24.

<sup>159</sup> *The Solitary Self*, p. 68.

the body and images of the body in order to portray the spirituality of the anchoress, rather than denying the body.

Savage and Watson note in the introduction to their translation of *Ancrene Wisse* that the senses are the link between the anchoress and the world outside, between the inner world of the heart (and soul) and the outer world of physical sensation.<sup>160</sup> In the same way, the window of the anchorhouse links the anchoress and the outside world. The window is associated primarily with the eye as the dichotomy between inner and outer is explored, and the way in which the senses guard the pure heart if they themselves are carefully guarded is paralleled by the way in which the window shields the anchoress from the outer world if she guards it conscientiously.<sup>161</sup>

The anchoress is fittingly enclosed behind a black curtain bearing a white cross, symbolic of her virginity and the difficulty of maintaining the virginal life which she has chosen:

*þe hwite [cros] llimpeð ariht to hwit meidenhad ⁊ to cleanness. þet is muche pine wel forte halden. Pīne is ihwer þurh cros idon to understonden þus bitacneð hwit cros þe warde of hwit chastete. þ is muche pine wel to biwītene. (AW ii.30, f.13a.5-9).*

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<sup>160</sup> S/W ed. note to *Ancrene Wisse*, p. 43.

<sup>161</sup> See Grayson, *Structure and Imagery*, p. 40. Thus S/W note that the elaborate care which the anchoress must take to manage the window, a key point of contact with the world is paralleled in the analogy between anchoress's cell and body by the care which must be taken to control the eyes through which heart may leap back into world (AW.ii, n. 4, p. 348). See below, pp. 95f.

The white cross is rightly proper to white maidenhood and to purity, which it is very hard to keep well. By a cross, hardship is always to be understood—so the white cross symbolizes the defense of white chastity, which it is very hard to protect well [S/W 66].<sup>162</sup>

The author of *Ancrene Wisse* tells his readers that God will guard those who close their windows well; those who leave them open will be punished and allowed to fall into sin. The emphasis upon the anchoress's reliance upon God's help is typical of *Ancrene Wisse* and the *Katherine Group*: it is simply assumed that the anchoress cannot guard herself alone. In the same way, St. Margaret commits her maidenhood to Christ to guard and to rule (SM 46 [S/W 289]), and St. Katherine is assured that Christ will guard her in her battle of words (SK 36 [S/W 268]).

The anchoress is urged not to linger at the window with mouth or eye (in gossip or looking out), with hand or ear (touching or listening to wicked talk) (AW ii Vitellius, f.11b, col.ii, pp. 46.33-47.8 [S/W 71]).<sup>163</sup> In fact, sitting long at her window is one of the sins which she is to confess, suggesting that this was seen as a very real possibility, and therefore a very real danger (AW v.175 [S/W 173]).<sup>164</sup>

The dangers presented by the window are given a great deal of attention in *Ancrene Wisse*, and the anchoress is urged not to go to her window unless it is

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<sup>162</sup> For a discussion of the physical qualities of the anchoress's window, and their relation to the spiritual life which the window protects, see Georgianna, *The Solitary Self*, p. 62, and Price, "'Inner' and 'Outer'," *passim*.

<sup>163</sup> See above, n. 154.

<sup>164</sup> See below, p. 88.

absolutely necessary. If she is called to the window, she should find out who is there, and if she *must* go, she is counselled: *crossið ful zeome muð. ehnen ⁊ earen. ⁊ te breaste mid al. ⁊ gað forð mid godes dred.* ("cross yourself fervently on mouth, eyes and ears, and breast as well, and go out in fear of God" AW ii.35, f.15b.22-23 [S/W 72]). The anchoress defends herself with the sign of the cross, covering the three sense-gates which receive the most attention and which pose the greatest danger. The mouth which gossips, the ears which listen to idle speech, and the eyes which are the first step in lechery's attack, must be the first line of defense, guarding the heart contained within the breast, which is also defended by the sign of the cross.<sup>165</sup>

The dangers presented by the mouth and ear (i.e. what is spoken and what is heard) are dealt with at length. When the anchoress goes to her window, she must follow the example of the Virgin Mary who did not hold a long discussion with the angel, but merely asked briefly what she needed to know. She must not sit and chat at her window, for this idle pastime can lead to great peril. She is reminded that it was too much speech which got Eve into trouble: Eve had a long conversation with the serpent in Paradise, allowing the enemy to learn her weakness from her words (AW ii.35 [S/W 73]). The anchoress is thus urged to speak with no oæ often or for long, and not at all through the church window (AW ii.37 [S/W 74]).

The anchoress must not only avoid idle speech, she must not even speak of her good works, for like the cackling hen who allows the crow to steal her eggs, the

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<sup>165</sup> See the discussion of the cross as a weapon and shield, below, pp. 207f.

chattering anchoress provides opportunity f... the devil to steal her good works (AW ii.35-36 [S/W 73]). In a charming analogy, the author of *Ancrene Wisse* describes good works as a hoard of gold with which one may buy heaven. However, he stresses that this treasure must be hidden, not noised abroad, or it will soon be lost, just as the travelling merchant who advertises the contents of his baggage will be robbed. The soap merchant cries his wares aloud, as they are of little interest to thieves. The merchant who carries precious jewels, however, keeps his merchandise hidden (AW iii.79 [S/W 104]).

*Ancrene Wisse* stresses the need to guard the tongue from worldly speech which would draw it away from God when it prays. Otherwise the anchoress will cry out to God for a long time before he hears her; he will turn from her voice because it smells of "the world's babbling and her jabbering" (*of þe worldes meaðelunge ⁊ of hire chafle*). She must bridle her tongue, for the tongue is wet and slippery and slides lightly from a few words to many: a drop can become a great flood of words on which the heart will float away (AW ii.40-41 [S/W 76]).

The tongue, representing speech, is thus one of the guardians of the heart which the anchoress must defend in order to keep to the way of heaven (AW ii.42 [S/W 76]). The anchoress who guards her mouth guards her soul, for the mouth which is open to speak is like an open gate through which the army of hell enters into the heart (AW iii.40 [S/W 75]). Like the other senses, the tongue may be

guarded by meditation on the passion.<sup>166</sup> The anchoress is to remember Christ's silence in the face of suffering and scorn and think of how easy her own lot is compared to his (AW ii.59 [S/W 89]; cp. WLd 25.199-204 [S/W 250]).

The anchoress is warned, however, that many dam up their words only to let out more, like water at a mill. Job's friends were silent for seven nights, but then could not stop their babbling. Silence must therefore be kept in the proper manner:

*Als wa as ze mahe seon weater hwen me punt hit, ⁊ stoppeth hit bioure wel þ hit ne mahe duneward, þenne is hit inedd a zetn, forte climben uppart. ant ze al þisses weis pundeð ower wordes. forstoppið ower þohtes. as ze wulleð þ ha cllimben ant hehin toward heouene. ⁊ nawt ne fallen duneward, ⁊ to fleoten zont to worlt, as deð muchel chaffle. Hwen ze nede moten, a lute wiht lowsioð up ower muðes stod zetn as me deð ed mulne ⁊ leoteð adun sone. Ma sleað word þen sweord. Mors ⁊ uita in manibus lingue. lif ⁊ deað seið Salomon is i tunge honden. (AW ii.39, f.18a.23-18b.6).*

Just as you can see water, when someone dams it and stops it up firmly so that it can not go downward, having to go on rising upwards, in exactly this way dam your words, stop up your thoughts, since you want them to climb and rise toward heaven, and not fall downward to float through the world like so much babbling. When you have to, open the flood-gates of you mouth a little, as one does at a mill, and let them down again right away. The word kills more than the sword. *Mors et uita in manibus lingue* (Proverbs 18.21)—'Life and death,' says Solomon, 'are in the tongue's hands.' [S/W 75].<sup>167</sup>

The anchoress is also told to beware of the devil's silence, when in wicked furtiveness one person does not speak to another out of envy or anger (AW iv.104 [S/W 122]).

<sup>166</sup> See below, pp. 121f.

<sup>167</sup> For the importance of silence see below, p. 127.

Again, the devil imitates a characteristic of the anchoritic life in order to lure the anchoress into sin.<sup>168</sup>

The anchoress must not only close her mouth and avoid idle chatter herself, she must not listen to idle speech, shutting her ear and the window of her eye against it (AW ii.38 [S/W 74-75]). Above all, she must not engage in gossip, and must avoid even the appearance of doing so:

*Me seið up on ancren þe euc meast haueð an ald cwene to feden hire earen. A meaðelilt þe meaðeleð hire alle þe talen of þe lond. a rikelot þe cakeleð al þe ha seið 7 hereð. swa þe me seið i bisahe. From mulne 7 from chepinge. from smiððe 7 from ancre hus me tidinge bringeð. Wat crist þis is a sari sahe. þe ancre hus þe schulde beon anlukes stude of alle, schal beon ifeiet to þe ilke þreo studen, þe meast is in of chaffe (AW ii.48, f.23a.14-22).*

It is said of anchoresses that almost every one of them has some old woman to feed her ears, a gossip who tells her all the local tidbits, a magpie who cackles about all that she sees and hears, so that the saying now runs, 'You can hear the news from a mill or a market, from a smithy or an anchorhouse.' Christ knows this is a sorry saying!—that an anchorhouse, which should be the loneliest place of all, can be compared to these three places that are most full of gossip [S/W 81].<sup>169</sup>

Idle speech is a danger in its own right, as it draws the anchoress away from the devotions and meditations which purify the heart. But idle speech can also lead

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<sup>168</sup> See also pp. 71, 107.

<sup>169</sup> It would appear that this was indeed a rather common problem. Aelred includes a similar caution in his treatise (*RR* 2 p. 46; cp. Price, "Inner' and 'Outer,'" p. 194). In fact, much of the material discussed in the previous pages concerning the dangers of speech and the importance of silence and solitude is based on Aelred (*RR* 2 pp. 45-53). As always, however, the author of *Ancrene Wisse* adds and interprets in his own way.

to a far worse sin: lechery. The peeping and gossiping anchoress is compared to the lady of the Song of Songs 1.7 who goes out of the high estate of maidenhood and follows the herds of goats (i.e. lusts) to pasture her kids (i.e. feed the five senses). She feeds her "eyes with peeping out, [her] tongue with jabbering, [her] ears with gossip, [her] nose with smelling, [her] flesh with soft touching." From these, deeper sin, and more specifically lust, will grow. The anchoress is therefore urged to keep her senses safely inside where they belong, so that they may guard the heart as they should (AW ii.53-55 [S/W 85-86]).<sup>170</sup>

The author of *Ancrene Wisse* stresses the related dangers of speech and looks. The heart can escape through looks, words or touch, and every foolish word can lead to foul sin, for treason is inside the foolish heart. It is thus vitally important to keep well enclosed (AW ii.33 [S/W 71]). If anyone is so mad as to attempt to open the curtain covering her window, the anchoress is to shut the window tightly and withdraw at once (AW ii.34, 51 [S/W 71-72, 82-83]); she must keep her face covered from

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<sup>170</sup> Ritamary Bradley quite rightly points out that this is a blatant misreading of the biblical text. However, it is not, as she suggests, a sexist attempt by a male author to twist the loving tone of God into one of anger ("In the Jaws of the Bear: Journeys of Transformation by Women Mystics," *Vox Benedictina* 8.1 (Summer, 1991), p. 139). As will be seen in Chapters Five and Six, the author of *Ancrene Wisse* is more than aware of the intimate, loving relationship between the anchoress and her heavenly spouse, and exploits the imagery of the Song of Songs to the fullest. However here, as elsewhere, the author does not hesitate to reinterpret biblical passages to suit his present purpose. This is part of the originality which makes *Ancrene Wisse* so relevant and so appealing.



men's sight, either with a wall or a cloth over a well fastened window (AW viii.15 [S/W 203]).<sup>171</sup> So too, she is told:

*Sone se eauer eani feleð in to ei luder speche þ̅ falle toward ful huue,  
sperreð þe þurl ananriht* AW ii.51, f.25a.13-15.

as soon as anyone ever falls into wicked speech tending towards foul  
love, seal your window right away [S/W 84].

She must not attempt to rebuke such a man, for he might answer back *ʒ blawen se liðeliche, þ̅ sum sperke mahte acwikien*. ("and blow so lightly, that some spark might quicken"). This is an underhanded wooing, for the heart will dwell on his words even when he has gone (AW ii.51-52 [S/W 83]).

The anchoress is thus warned above all not to open the curtain of her window to *any* man, good or evil.<sup>172</sup> Since the world is made up of both good and evil men, the anchoress must guard herself even from the good if she is to protect herself from the evil. Even holy people sitting together to talk about God may be drawn into lust. In *Seinte Margarete* the demon describes how he drags holy people into lust by allowing a pure man and woman to sit together and talk about God. When they begin to trust each other and feel secure sitting together, he begins to draw them into

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<sup>171</sup> This caution occurs in the midst of the practical discussion of whether an anchoress needs a wimple: the author states that she does not when her face is properly hidden from the world by the simple fact of her enclosure. The question of wimpling reinforces the dangers of pride or vanity arising from being seen and admired, raised by Grayson (*above*, p. 93). The wimple is itself a form of vanity, indicative of social status, with which the anchoress could and should dispense.

<sup>172</sup> See *above*, p. 63.

lust, *lütliche on alre earest, wið luueliche lates* ("lightly at first with loving looks") which become burning glances, then with playful talk, and thoughts of love. At first, it is against their will, but then they come to like it and are drawn into false love. The sparks of lust begin to burn, blinding them so that they no longer have eyes to guard themselves with: their courage melts, their wits are destroyed, their wisdom rots, and they fall into defilement (SM 68-72 [S/W 297-299]; cp. SJ 37-39 [S/W 314]). Thus, the anchoress is also warned to take care what she confesses to whom: fleshly temptation must not be confessed to a young priest, and even with an older confessor, she must be discreet (AW v.176 [S/W 174]).

#### LIGHT LOOKS AND LIGHT LEAPS

Of all the senses, it is the eye which is most closely associated with the window and which receives the most attention. The proverbial saying "much comes of little" is used to introduce the dangers of a seemingly innocent glance out the window (AW ii.31 [S/W 67]). The anchoress who peeps out of her window is compared to an unruly bird in a cage who pecks out and is caught by the cat of hell who seizes the head of her heart and drags her whole body out after with the claws of temptation (AW ii.54 [S/W 85]). Similarly, the anchoress who looks out her window is warned that wanton eyes are the messenger of the wanton heart, for the arrows of the eyes

are the first weapon in lechery's attack. She is cautioned not to lean out over the battlements of her castle, i.e. to look out her window, lest she be struck in the window of her eye and cause the death of her soul (AW ii Cleopatra f.24v.21-25v.20, pp. 49-51; cp. Nero f.14-14v pp. 26.5-27.6 [S/W 70]).

The danger lies not only in what the anchoress herself may see but also in the possibility that she herself may be seen. The anchoress must therefore beware of going to the window even to visit with a trusted woman. The author cites the story of Dinah to illustrate the possible danger. Genesis 34 tells the story of Dinah who went out to visit "the women of the land" and was seen by Shechem, who raped her. Thus, *Ancrene Wisse* asserts, Dinah lost her maidenhood and became a whore (AW ii.32 [S/W 68]). The author censures Dinah for her behaviour, which although not sinful in itself, provoked the lust of another and caused him to sin.<sup>173</sup>

A similar point is made using the analogy of an uncovered pit.<sup>174</sup> If a pit is left uncovered and an animal falls in, the one who has left the pit uncovered is liable for the cost of the animal:

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<sup>173</sup> This interpretation radically alters the sense of the Biblical passage, which is unequivocal in its condemnation of Shechem. However, the author of *Ancrene Wisse* is here concerned with the conduct of the anchoress, not the guilt of the one who might see her and be overcome with desire. He therefore shifts the focus of his discussion to Dinah and the implications of her actions.

<sup>174</sup> The material concerning the open pit is found in the passage supplied from Cleopatra, f.24, pp. 47-49 [S/W 69], cp. Nero, f.13v-14, pp. 25-26 [Salu, p. 25]. See n. 154 above.

*þis is a swiðe drefful word to wummon þ schaweð hire to weþmones eчне. heo is bitacned bi þeo þ vnwrið þe put. þe put is hire feire neb. hire hwite swire. hire lichte echnen. hond 3ef ha halt forð in his ech 3e 3et beoð hire word put. bute habeon þe bet iset. Al 3et þe fea 3eð hire. hwet se hit eauer beo. þurh hwat machte sonre fol lokig<sup>175</sup> awacnin al vre leuerd put cleopeð. þis put he hat þ heo ilided þ beast þrin ne falle 7 druncni in sunne. (AW ii.Cleopatra, f.24.5-16, pp. 47-48).*

This is a most fearsome saying for a woman who shows herself to the eyes of men. She is symbolized by the one who uncovers the pit; the pit is her fair face and her white neck and her light eyes, and her hand, if she holds it out in his sight. And also her words are a pit, unless they are well-chosen. Everything to do with her, whatever it may be, which might readily awaken sinful love, our Lord calls all of it a pit. This pit he commanded to be covered, lest any beast fall in, and drown in sin [S/W 69].

The beast is the man who may fall into the pit if he finds it open, i.e. who will fall into sin if he sees the anchoress at her window. Paradoxically, the animal's fall is caused by not seeing the pit into which he tumbles, while the man falls into the pit of sin through seeing too much.

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<sup>175</sup> Dobson notes that scribe B, whom he identifies with the original author of *Ancrene Wic. z.*, has emmended *lokig* to *luue*, and suggests that the latter is the correct reading. The emmendation is supported by Nero, which reads: *þis is a swiðe drefliche word to wummon þ scheaweð hire to weþmones eien. heo is bitocned bi þeo. þ vnwrið þene put. þe put is hire veire neb. 7 hire hwite sweore. 7 hire liht eie. 7 hire hond 3if heo halt forð in his eihsihðe. 7 3et beoð hire word put. buten heo beon þe bet biset. 7 al 3et þ falleð to hire hwat so hit euer beo. þurh hwat muhte sonre ful luue of aquikien. al vre lauerd cleopeð put. þes put he hat þ beo euer i lided 7 i wrien leste eni best ualle þerinne. 7 drunc-nie ine sunne. (Nero f.13v.11-19, p. 25). "These are very terrible words for the woman who shows herself to men's sight. It is she who is represented by the man who uncovers the pit. The pit is her fair face, and her white neck, and her light eye, and her hand if she holds it out before his eyes; and further, her speech is a pit, if it is not controlled, and all other things whatsoever that belong to her, through which sinful love may be aroused. All this Our Lord calls a pit. He commands that this pit should always be covered with a lid, lest any animal should fall into it and perish in sin" [Salu, p. 25].*

Grayson points out that the danger is not only to the man who gazes upon the anchoress and thus leaps into lust, but to the anchoress herself, whose heart is a wild animal which might leap into pride.<sup>176</sup> She suggests that in the image of the leaping animal, the author anticipates:

the paradoxical function of the pit, which, if it is also seen to be beauty and vanity (or pride) arising from physical beauty and over-confidence, becomes as much a fatal trap for the anchoress as for a man.<sup>177</sup>

The author of *Ancrene Wisse* thus warns that judgement will fall on the one who uncovers the pit, i.e., on the anchoress who does not guard her window well. She is guilty of the animal's death, i.e., of the man's sin. She must answer for his soul at judgement and pay with the only coin she has, herself. The anchoress who, through her carelessness, sparks the lust of another, is just as guilty as the anchoress who feeds her own lust.

The idea that the virgin is soiled not only by her own sin but also by allowing herself to become the victim of another's lust is also reflected in *Seinte Margarete*.<sup>178</sup> Savage and Watson acknowledge the explicit assumption "that any sexual incident is always the woman's fault" but point out that:

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<sup>176</sup> See below, p. 105.

<sup>177</sup> *Structure and Imagery*, p. 44.

<sup>178</sup> See n. 122 above.

the anchoresses are only meant to be concerned with their own guilt, not that of those they unwittingly tempt into sin, so that the questir : of male responsibility is mostly irrelevant here.<sup>179</sup>

They also note that the author is concerned with the physical danger that the anchoress would be in if she should seem sexually attainable in any way.<sup>180</sup>

The anchoress must therefore take great care not to provide occasion for another to sin through sight of her. However, she must also control her own eyes, keeping them turned inward, watching the heart which they must guard rather than the world outside her window. The author of *Ancrene Wisse* warns the anchoress that: *þe heorte is a ful wilde beast. 7 makeð moni liht lufe* ("the heart is a most wild beast and makes many a light leap out" AW ii.29, f.12b.9-10 [S/W 66]).<sup>181</sup> And where does the heart escape most often? Through the window of the eye.<sup>182</sup> The

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<sup>179</sup> AW ii, n. 13, p. 349.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid. For an excellent discussion of the background to the question of whether women were to blame for their own victimization and the lengths to which women often went to preserve their chastity, see Jane Tibbetts Schulenburg, "The Heroics of Virginit: Brides of Christ and Sacrificial Mutilation," in Mary Beth Rose (ed.) *Women in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance: Literary and Historical Perspectives*, (Syracuse, 1986), pp. 29-71.

<sup>181</sup> S/W AW ii, n. 2, pp. 347-348 note the association of "light leaps" and "light looks" throughout this section of *Ancrene Wisse*. There is also a danger of light words, light works and light touches (AW iv.148 [S/W 153], AW ii.51 [S/W 82]; SM: 68-72 [S/W 297-299]). For further discussion of the motif of the leaping animal, see Grayson, *Structure and Imagery*, pp. 39-53.

<sup>182</sup> The heart which escapes out the window of the eye through a light glance can also float away on a great flood of speech (see above, p. 86). Either way, the anchoress will find it difficult to gather her heart back to herself (AW ii.41 [S/W 76]).

peeping anchoress who opens her window to look out may find herself in the position of David, who looked upon Bathsheba bathing and allowed his heart to escape through the window of his eye (AW ii.30 [S/W 66]). Through this one glance he was led into three sins: adultery with Bathsheba, treachery, and the murder of Uriah (AW ii.33 [S/W 68-69]). Thus from one light look much evil was born: "much comes of little."

The danger of the light look which leads to the light leap of the heart is also illustrated by the story of Eve. Eve allowed sin to enter first through sight, through one light glance. She saw that the apple was fair, and her delight led to desire. The apple, the author explains, represents all the things that delight and desire of sin may turn to; thus, the anchoress who looks at a man may find herself in Eve's situation when she looked at the apple (AW ii.31 [S/W 67]). Anticipating the anchoress who, like Eve, would answer that she is forbidden to eat, not to look, the author exclaims:

*O mine leoue sustren as eue haueð monie dehtren þe folhið hare moder þe ondswerieð o þisse wise. Me wenest tu seið sum þ̅ ich wulle leapen on him þah ich loki on him? godd wat leoue suster mare wunder ilomp. Eue þi moder leop efter hire ehnen. from þe ehe to þe eappel. from þe eappel iparais, dun to þer eorðe. from þe eorðe to helle. þer ha lei i prisun fowr þusent zer 7 mare. heo 7 hire were ba. 7 demde al hire ofsprung to leapen al efter hire to deað wið uten ende. Biginnunge 7 rote of al þis ilke reov:ðe, wes aliht sihðe. þus ofte as me seið. of lutel, muchel waxeð. (AW ii.32, f.14a.1-12).*

O my dear sisters, Eve has many daughters who follow their mother, who answer in this way: "But do you think," someone says, "that I will leap on him just because I look at him?" God knows, dear sister, stranger things have happened. Eve your mother leapt after her eyes, from the eye to the apple, from the apple in paradise down to the

earth, from the earth to hell, where she lay in prison four thousand years and more, she and her husband both, and condemned all her offspring to leap after her to death without end. The beginning and the root of all this sorrow was one light look; just so, as it is often said, much comes from little [S/W 68].<sup>183</sup>

Georgianna notes that in the discussion of the leap of the heart, illustrated by the stories of David and Eve,

static verbs of keeping, guarding, and being are quickly replaced by images of leaping, escaping, and flying out, on the one hand, and returning, or coming home, on the other,<sup>184</sup>

all of which result from a seemingly passive looking. She stresses that it is not simply the heart's light leap itself that is discussed here, but the more important problem of how to prevent it. The key to the problem is in the anchoress's regulation of her contact with the outside world through the window of her anchorhouse and the window of her eye:

the anchoress, simply by virtue of being human, has already made the most important leap from paradise to earth, from the desert to the world.<sup>185</sup>

While this is in one sense true, Georgianna's preoccupation with the encroachment of the outside world causes her to neglect the interior nature of the world of the anchoress who is successful in guarding her heart within. The anchoress, in her

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<sup>183</sup> Thus R.E. Kaske notes that the analysis of the dangers of undisciplined sight lead to the "leaping" image which dominates this section ("Eve's 'Leaps' in the *Ancrene Riwle*," *MÆ* 29 [1960], p. 22).

<sup>184</sup> *The Solitary Self*, p. 61.

<sup>185</sup> *The Solitary Self*, p. 64.



enclosure, has begun to reverse the "leap" of Eve by retreating from the world into the spiritual desert of the anchorhouse.<sup>186</sup>

The danger of the light glance, however, is clear: it will lead to a leap into desire which will eventually become a leap into the pit of hell. Consistent with the pattern established throughout *Ancrene Wisse* and the *Katherine Group*, where virginity is symbolic of all virtue, and lechery is symbolic of all that threatens it, lechery becomes the sin which illustrates the danger of the light glance.<sup>187</sup> Savage and Watson note that although the eyes are associated particularly with lechery, lechery is considered "both as a danger in its own right and as a symbol for all the allurements of the world beyond the cell."<sup>188</sup> Thus, *Hali Meidhad* warns of the dangers of succumbing to the lure of marriage, with all its seeming advantages. The anchoress who is tempted by marriage is warned that she is putting herself into a position where she will succumb to and be tainted by lust:

*fleschliche þonkes, þe leaðieð þe ant dreaið wið hare procunges to flesliche fulðen, to licomliche lustes, ant eggieð þe to brudlac ant to weres cluppunge, ant makieð þe to þenchen hwuch delit were þrin* (HM 2.15-18).

fleshy thoughts, which incite you and draw you with their stirrings to fleshy filth, to bodily lusts, and urge you on to marriage and a

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<sup>186</sup> See *The Solitary Self*, pp. 60-65. For the motif of the spiritual desert or wilderness see below, pp. 145f.

<sup>187</sup> See above, p. 60.

<sup>188</sup> AW ii, n. 7, pp. 348-349.

husband's kisses, and make you think how much delight there would be in it [S/W 225].<sup>189</sup>

The anchoress who descends into marriage may not tumble into the pit of hell, but she will fall a great distance. The maiden is raised one hundred degrees toward heaven, but the anchoress who leaps into marriage lowers herself to the thirtieth degree, lower by seventy degrees.<sup>190</sup> However, even marriage is to be preferred to fornication:

*Nis þis ed en cherre a muche lupe dunewart? Ant tah hit is to þolien, and Godd haueð ilahet hit ... leste hwa se leope ant þer ne edstode lanhure, nawt nere þet kepte him, ant driue adun swireuorð widuten ikeþunge deope into helle. (HM 20.25-28).*

Is this not a big leap downward in one moment? And yet it can be endured, and God has made it lawful ... lest anyone whoever leapt and did not stop at least there would find nothing to catch them, and would rush downward headlong without stopping deep into hell [S/W 233].

Thus, the wedded thank God that when they would have fallen they did not fall all the way to hell, because marriage held them (HM 16-18 [S/W 232]).

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<sup>189</sup> Savage and Watson point out that although at first glance this might seem to refer to those who stay in the world and marry or to the anchoress who marries, it could also refer to lust outside of marriage: "the distinction between the two subjects is here purposely blurred—although later, when the subject of marriage comes into focus, the author will be more cautious" (HM n. 8, pp. 411-412). See below, Chapter Six.

<sup>190</sup> Based on a common interpretation of the parable of the sower (Matthew 13.1-23), in which maidenhood is the soil in which the seed which produces fruit a hundredfold is sown. The seed sown in the soil of chaste widowhood produces sixtyfold and that sown in the soil of marriage thirtyfold (see S/W HM n. 31, pp. 414-415; Millett, *Hali Meidhad*, pp. xxxviii-xxxix).

The leap into marriage is thus associated with the leap into lechery which is inevitably followed by a leap into hell. So, for example, in *Seinte Iuliane* Juliana refuses to marry Eleusius:

*Schulde ich do me to him, þet alle deoflen is bitaht ant to eche deað forðemet, to forwurðe wið him worlt buien end: i þe putte of helle, for his wedlakes weole ...? (SJ 13).*

Should I give myself to him, who is wholly surrendered to devils and condemned to eternal death, to perish with him world without end in the pit of hell merely for the benefit of marriage to him ...? [S/W 308].

Her assessment of Eleusius' fate is confirmed at the end of the story when Eleusius leaps into a boat to recover Juliana's dead body, only to be drowned in a storm. The fate of this man who has become increasingly bestial in his character is fitting, as his dead body is cast up on the shore for the wild beasts to tear apart and his soul sinks to hell! (SJ 69-71 [S/W 321]).<sup>191</sup> His leap into the boat, prompted by the lust which has caused him to pursue Juliana, thus becomes a leap to death and hell.

The imagery of the pit is frequently associated with the light looks and light leaps of *Ancrene Wisse*. The anchoress's light eyes can uncover the pit of sin (AW ii.Cleopatra f.24.7-11, p. 48 [S/W 69]). The fair hands which also lure another into the pit of sin by reaching out of the window, should instead be scraping up the earth out of the pit which is the anchoress's grave (AW ii.62 [S/W 91-92]).<sup>192</sup> She is also counselled to hide in the pits of Christ's wounds, dug out of the earth of his flesh

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<sup>191</sup> See the discussion of the motif of torn flesh, below, pp. 225f.

<sup>192</sup> See pp. 240f., below.

(AW iv.151 [S/W 155]).<sup>193</sup> The remembrance of these pits will prevent the anchoress from "lightly" following the pleasures of the flesh (AW ii.62-63 [S/W 92]), and thus taking the "light leap" into the pit of hell. The anchoress is warned against the devil, who seeks through pride or lechery to throw her deep into hell (AW iv.144 [S/W 150]), for the leap into pride or lechery is ultimately a leap into the pit of hell (*putte of helle*, SJ 13 [S/W 308]; AW iv.112 [S/W 127]; or *helle grunde*, AW iv.144 [S/W 150] cp. AW iv.138 [S/W 146]).

The image of the pit of hell is also associated with the image of the privy, the pit of sin. The proud lecher, who stinks so much that the angel who did not care about the stink of a rotting corpse held his nose as the lecher rode by, will be tortured with endless stench in the pit of hell (*put of helle*, AW iv.112 [S/W 127]). Backbiters and flatterers are the devil's privy men: the backbiter uncovers the filthy pit (*fule put*) of sin, while the flatterer covers it up (AW ii.45-47 [S/W 79-81]). Juliana throws the demon with whom she wrestles into a "pit of ordure" (*put of fulde* SJ 47 [S/W 316]) from which he emerges only to be dragged down into "the pit of all devils" (*alre diche deofle* SJ 65 [S/W 320]).<sup>194</sup>

Through lust, the anchoress not only leaps into hell, she bows down and allows the devil to leap on her.

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<sup>193</sup> See p. 142, below.

<sup>194</sup> Cp. d'Ardenne's note on *diche*, *Seinte Julienne*, p. 147. For further discussion of the motif of the pit, see Grayson, *Structure and Imagery*, pp. 43-49, 124.

*þeo buheð hire. þe to hise fondunges buheð hire heorte. ȝor hwil ha stont upriht, ne mei he nowðer up on hire rukn ne riden. Lo þe treire hu he seið. Incurvare ut transeamus. Buh þe let me leapen up nule ich þe nawt longe riden. ah ich chulle wenden ouer. ... Sum ... lefde htm 7 beah him 7 he leop up. 7 rad hire baðe dei 7 niht twenti ȝer fulle. ... þ ha lei 7 roteð þrn swa longe as ich seide. 7 ȝef a miracle nere, þe puſte adun þen deouel þe set on hire se feaste, ha hefde iturplet wið him baðe hors 7 lade dun in to helle grunde. (AW iv.137-138, f.73a.2-19).*

She bows down who bows her heart to his temptations, for while she stands upright he can in no way mount her or ride her. Listen to how the traitor says, *Incurvare ut transeamus*—"Bow yourself down, let me leap up; I do not want to ride for long, but I shall pass over." ... Someone ... believed him, bowed to him, and he leapt up, riding her both day and night for fully twenty years; ... so that she lay and rotted in it as long as I said. And if a miracle had not happened, which blew off the devil who was sitting on her so firmly, she would have toppled with him, both horse and load, down into the bottom of hell [S/W 145-146].

Similarly, the author of *Hali Meiohad* applies Joel 1.17, "they rotted in their dung like beasts of burden," to those who succumb to lust:

*þe ilke sari wrecches þe i þ fule wurðinge vnwedeð walewið beoð þe deofles eaures, þet ri ham ant spureð ham to don al þet he wule. Þeos walewið i wurðinge ant forrotieð þrn aþet ha arisen þurh bireowsunge, ant healen ham wið soð schrift ant wið deaðbote. (HM 12.8-12).*

the same sorry wretches who, unwedded, wallow in the foul dung are the devil's beasts of burden; and he rides them and spurs them to do everything he wants. They wallow in dung and rot there until they rise up through repentance, and restore themselves with true confession and with penance [S/W 229].<sup>195</sup>

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<sup>195</sup> Millett notes that the image of the devil's beasts of burden is traditional (*Hali Meiohad*, 6/32-7/2n., cp. 6/29n.; cp. also M/W-B 12/5-10n.).

The anchoress's purity is not only threatened by the physical acts of lechery, but by desire and by reason's consent to desire.<sup>196</sup> In *On Lofsong of ure Lefdi* 17.31-34 [S/W 329] the anchoress avows that she is wounded by sin in both body and soul, for even if her body did not do the deed, the desire was in her heart. The light glance which leads to the heart's light leap is the glance which sees that the "apple" is fair, something to be desired. The eye must be guarded by reason, the householder who controls the servants who are the guardians of the heart. The anchoress is warned:

*þe feond þurhsticheð þe schére, hwen delit of lecherie þurleð þe heorte.  
 7 þis nis bute i slep of 3emeles 7 of slawðe* (AW iv.14G, f.74b 7-8).

The enemy stabs the groin when the delight of lechery pierces the heart; and this does not occur except in the sleep of negligence and sloth [S/W 147].

The sleep of negligence or sloth is when reason, the doorkeeper, sleeps.<sup>197</sup> If reason weakens and consents to desire,

*þis is hwen þe heorte draheð to hire unlust as þing þe were amatnet. 7  
 feð on as to winkin. to leote þe feond iwurðen. 7 leið hire seolf  
 duneward. Buheð him ... þenne leapeð he to, þe stod ear feorrenio. 7 bit  
 deaðes bite o godes deore spuse. iwiss deaðes bite, for his teð beoð attri  
 as of a wed dogge.* (AW iv.149, f.78b.22-79a.1).

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<sup>196</sup> Cp. *Seinte Iulienne*, in which Price finds a "subtle presentation of virginity as integrity of the will," or "volitional wholeness" ("SJ and Hagiographic Convention," pp. 46, and 39), not only with reference to the resistance of lechery or desire, but in terms of steadfast faith and commitment to Christ.

<sup>197</sup> See above, p. 79.

this is when the heart approaches her evil desire like a helpless thing, and begins as though to shut her eyes, to let the enemy be, and lays herself down. She bows to him ...Then he leaps forward who before stood far off and bites a death's bite on God's dear spouse—a death's-bite indeed, for his teeth are poisonous like a mad dog's [S/W 154].

At this point the anchoress's only defense is to arm herself with the staff of the cross and beat the dog of hell.<sup>198</sup>

When the devil threatens to leap upon the anchoress, she is thus instructed to "leap" back, swinging the staff of the cross. She has before her the example of St. Katherine, who, upon hearing of the heathen practices initiated by Maxentius, arms herself with faith and comes "leaping" forth inflamed by the Holy Spirit (SK 12 [S/W 263]). Juliana also "leaps" on the demon who accosts her in her cell and seizes him (SJ 33 [S/W 313]).

There is, however, a tension in the texts of the *Katherine Group* concerning whether lechery is a sin which the anchoress ought to confront boldly, or whether it is better simply to flee. The anchoress is told to follow the example of the virgin martyrs and resist the devil (HM 40-42 [S/W 242-243]) and is given various tactics to use against lechery: the will of the heart (HM 8 [S/W 228]), reason (HM 14-16 [S/W 230]; AW iv.140 [S/W 148]), confession (HM 12 [S/W 229]; AW iv.106f. [S/W 123f.]; SM 68 [S/W 298-299]), asceticism (SM 66-68 [S/W 298]), firm faith (AW iv.137 [S/W 145]), the example of the virgin martyrs, meditation on Christ, the joys of heaven and the pains of hell (AW ii.63 [S/W 92]; HM 40-42 [S/W 242-243]). In the end, however,

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<sup>198</sup> See the image of the cross as a weapon, below pp. 207f.

the ultimate weapon is flight: while the anchoress can stand and fight against other sins, she must flee lechery (SM 68 [S/W 299]; HM 14-16 [S/W 231]). At the same time, the anchoress is warned that while she can flee sin, she will never be entirely free of temptation. She must always be prepared for a bitter fight against the devil (AW vi.190 [S/W 185]).

The author of *Ancrene Wisse* recognizes this tension within his own work. In the discussion of the incarnation as the "humility-throw," in which Christ falls to the earth and tricks the devil (AW iv.144-145 [S/W 151]), the author asserts that his injunction to the anchoress to imitate Christ by falling before the devil in humility is not a contradiction of his earlier statement that she must stand firm against the devil (AW iv.136-137 [S/W 144-145]). He resolves the contradiction in terms of the contrast between the resources of God upon which the anchoress may call and those of the anchoress herself. Standing against the devil is an image for faith's firm trust in God's strength; falling is the anchoress's humble knowledge of her own weakness.

A similar tension is also found between the author's recognition of the holiness of the anchoress and his warnings against the dangers of pride. The heart which so lightly leaps out through the eyes into lechery may also leap into pride, the sin which, along with lechery, poses the greatest danger to the anchoress, who ought to be characterized by humility. Pride, the chief of the deadly sins, is the sin most deplorable in the virgin, and it is also one which, with lust, must be most carefully guarded against. For this reason, the author of *Hali Meidhad* devotes a long section



the dangers of pride (HM 36-40 [S/W 240-242]). The anchoress is warned that pride can attack even the purest heart: she came to life in the pure nature of an angel, and one who overcame an angel presents a dire threat to humanity. Pride lurking in the anchoress's heart mars the maidenhood of her soul and makes her heart impure, an unfit place for the dwelling of God. God dwells in the heart that is humble and mild, but the heart that harbours pride exiles God. For this reason, a mild wife or a humble widow is better than a proud maiden. In fact, the anchoress is told:

*For al meidhad, meokelec is muche wurd; ant meidhad widuten hit is edelich ant unwurd, for als wa is meiden i meidhad bute meokeschipe as is widute liht eolie in a lampe.* (HM 40.11-13).

Humility is of great value to the whole state of maidenhood, and maidenhood without it is useless and worthless; for a maiden in maidenhood without humility is just like oil in a lamp without a light (Matthew 25.1-13) [S/W 242].

The anchoress must not be like Lucifer, who saw his own fairness and leaped into pride (AW ii.31 [S/W 67]): she must not look upon her own spiritual fairness, prowess or sanctity as a reason for pride. Pride can blind the eyes of the heart:

*Ah wast tu hwet awilged monnes feble ehnen þ is hehe iclumben, þ he bihalt duneward. Als wa hwa se bihalt to þeo þe beoð of lah lif, þet maked him þunchen þ he is of heh lif.* (AW iv.143, f.75b.19-21).

Do you know what dazes the feeble eyes of people who have climbed up high? That they look downwards. Just in the same way, whoever looks at those who are inferior in life comes to think they are superior in life [S/W 149].<sup>199</sup>

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<sup>199</sup> Cp. HM 38 [S/W 241].

The anchoress is cautioned that the higher she stands the more she should fear to fall, for the devil is envious of those who climb so high towards heaven through the power of maidenhood (HM 12 [S/W 229-230] cp. SM 72 [S/W 300]). She is reminded of St. Sarah, who stood firm against the devil, knowing that anguish leads to reward. After thirteen years, having failed to overcome her, the devil appeared and admitted that she had overcome him, thinking in the end to make her leap into pride. Sarah, however, was too much for him, and humbly attributed her victory not to her own strength, but to Christ (AW iv.121 [S/W 134]). Similarly, in an attempt to deceive the anchoress, the devil may make a sweet smell from a hidden thing, such as the dust of hidden seeds, in order to deceive the anchoress into thinking that God has sent it as comfort because of her holy life. This will cause her to think highly of herself and leap into pride (AW ii.56 [S/W 87]).<sup>200</sup>

The sweet smell which accompanies meditation or a holy life is a commonplace in medieval mystical writings.<sup>201</sup> In *Ancrene Wisse* and the *Katherine Group* this sweet smell is most often referred to in the context of the virgin's reward

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<sup>200</sup> For similar reasons, the anchoress is cautioned against almsgiving, lest she receive praise from others and leap into pride. The devil may also make something which could be useful smell bad so that the anchoress will avoid it. Once again, the devil deceives the anchoress by making something evil appear virtuous. See above, pp. 71, 87.

<sup>201</sup> See, for example, Wolfgang Riehle, *The Middle English Mystics*, trans. Bernard Standring. (London, 1981), pp. 115-116.

in heaven<sup>202</sup> or with reference to the relationship with the heavenly spouse,<sup>203</sup> and is contrasted with the stench of hell (AW ii.55-56 [S/W 87]; cp. SW 90 [S/W 213]), the devil (AW iv.118 [S/W 132]; cp. SM 58 [S/W 294]), and sin (AW ii.45-46 [S/W 80], ii.54 [S/W 85], iv.112 [S/W 127], v.167 [S/W 168], vii.205 [S/W 196]). The anchoress is assured that those who delight in fleshly smells on earth will be condemned to suffer the stench of hell, but those who suffer from bitter smells on earth, such as sweaty attire, stale air in the house or rotting things, will be rewarded with heavenly smells. She is reminded that Christ suffered such smells on the cross, and is urged to guard the sense of smell through meditation on Christ's suffering in that sense (AW ii.55-6 [S/W 87]).<sup>204</sup>

The remedy for the leap into pride is to fall in humility.<sup>205</sup> Like the sparrow, the anchoress should cultivate the "falling sickness" as a remedy against pride. When she is tempted, she should think that she is falling downward from her holy sublimity, and through humility fall to the earth lest through pride she fall into

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<sup>202</sup> See below, Chapter Four, pp. 287f.

<sup>203</sup> See below, Chapter Six, p. 402.

<sup>204</sup> For a discussion of the role of meditation on Christ's suffering in the guarding of the anchoress's senses, see below, p. 121.

<sup>205</sup> There are many exhortations to humility to be found throughout *Ancrene Wisse* and the *Katherine Group* (eg. AW iv.144 [S/W 150], AW iii.69 [S/W 97], AW v.168 [S/W 168-169]; HM 38-42 [S/W 242]).

hell (AW iii.T 91 [S/W 113]).<sup>206</sup> The anchoress is thus urged: *Bihald wið wet ehe þine scheome sunnen. Dred zet þi wake cunde þ is eð warpe* ("Look with wet eyes upon your shameful sins, fear your weak nature still, which is easily thrown..." AW iv.143, f.76a.3-4 [S/W 150]).

The author of *Ancrene Wisse* points out that the soul is created in God's image, and is, according to Augustine, nearly the highest thing apart from God:<sup>207</sup>

*Ah godd nalde nawt þ ha lupe i pride. ne wilnede to climben. ⁊ feolle as dude lucifer for he wes bute charge. ⁊ teide for þi a clot of heui eorðe to hire as me deð þe cubbel to þe ku, oper to þe oper beast þ is to recchinde, ⁊ renginde abuten ... þ is þ heuie flesch þet draheð hire duneward.* (AW iii.73-74, f.38a.25-38b.4).

But God did not want her to leap into pride, nor wished her to climb and fall as Lucifer did—for he was tied down by no weight—and so he tied a clod of heavy earth to her, as one puts a hobble on a cow, or on any other beast that tends to pull itself loose and wander. ... that is, the heavy flesh which draws her downward [S/W 100].<sup>208</sup>

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<sup>206</sup> The author of *Ancrene Wisse* here weaves a complicated web of imagery, drawing upon several shades of meaning in the term "fall" in order to effectively contrast this image with the complicated use of the image of "leaping."

<sup>207</sup> S/W suggest Augustine's *Contra Maximum* II.25 (PL 42, col.803) as a possible source (AW iii, n. 37, p.364).

<sup>208</sup> For a discussion of the image of the body as earth or dust, see Grayson, *Structure and Imagery*, pp. 70-71. Note that the restrictions of the earthly body disappear in heaven, where the body is light and swift, moving like a sunbeam (AW ii.50-51 [S/W 82]; cp. SW 104 [S/W 220]), just as the anchoress's flesh becomes lighter than the wind and brighter than the sun if it follows the soul (AW iii.74 [S/W 100]). The anchoress is thus able to transform her flesh on earth from the heavy clot of clay which drags her downward to the brightness of the sunbeam which soars towards union with God. See below, pp. 270f.

The anchoress's flesh is thus the *pondus*, which draws her soul to its proper position in the divine scheme of things. The soul loves the body so much that in order to please the body's foul nature it will leave its high heavenly nature (AW iii.73-74 [S/W 100]). Thus, the anchoress should be humbled by the nature of both her body and her soul, for the flesh is tied to filth and weakness, and the soul to sin and ignorance or lack of wisdom (AW iv.142-143 [S/W 149-150]).

Here the soul and body are intimately linked. The author of *Ancrene Wisse* asserts elsewhere that the soul and body make but one single person, and to both comes a single judgement. He advises that no one be so mad as to divide what God has fastened together (AW iv.96-97 [S/W 117]). Similarly, St. Katherine asserts that the man of clay (i.e. the body) is made in God's image (SK 52 [S/W 270-271]), and St. Juliana prays before her death that Christ will not leave his image (implying both body and soul) to his enemies (SJ 67 [S/W 320]). This prayer is answered when her soul is borne to heaven by angels and her body is decently buried, despite the attempts of Eleusius to retrieve it and sink it in the sea (SJ 69-71 [S/W 320-321]). The overall stress in the anchoritic texts, therefore, is on the unity of body and soul, underlining again the importance of the body in these texts. What affects the body has a corresponding effect on the soul.<sup>209</sup>

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<sup>209</sup> St. Margaret, however, asserts that her soul is in the sight of God in heaven, and it therefore matters not at all what is done to her body on earth (SM 56 [S/W 293]).

The fact that the anchoress is but earth is also recalled to help the anchoress endure the scorn of others. If people insult her, she should remember that people tread and spit on the earth. However, she must be careful not to *deserve* such scorn, like the fleshly anchoress, who tries to look as if she is flying and beats her wings like an ostrich, for whoever looks carefully will laugh her to scorn (AW iii.70 [S/W 97-98]).

The anchoress should also call to mind the suffering and shame of Christ on the cross, which he endured silently (AW iii.65 [S/W 94]; cp. AW ii.59 [S/W 89]; LLe 17.43-18.66 [S/W 329-330]; WLd 25.196-215 [S/W 250], 27.262-269 [S/W 251], 30.366-32.440 [S/W 253-254]). The anchoress's humility is yet another form of the *imitatio Christi* which is to characterize the anchoress's life.<sup>210</sup> The anchoress must follow the example of Christ:

*þe 3ape wreastlere nimeð 3eme hwet turn his fere ne kunne nawt. þ he wið wreastleð. for wið þ turn he mei him unmundlunge warpen. Alswa duide ure lauerd. ⁊ seh hu feole þe grimme wreastlere of helle breid up on his hupe ⁊ weorp wið þe hanche turn in to galnesse þe rixleð i þe lenden. hef on heh monie ⁊ wende abuten wið ham ⁊ swong ham þurh prude dun in to helle grunc'e. þohte ure lauerd þe biheold al þis. Ich schal do þe a turn þ tu ne cuðest neauer. ne ne maht neauer cunnen. þe turn of eadmodnesse. þ is þe fallinde turn. ⁊ feol from heouene to eorðe. ⁊ strahte him swa bi þe eorðe. þ te feond wende þ he were al eorðlich. ⁊ wes bilurd wið þ turn. ⁊ is 3et euche dei of eadmode men ⁊ wummen þe hine wel cunnen. (AW iv.144-145, f.76b.5-17).*

The clever wrestler takes note of what throw his fellow-wrestler does not know, for with that throw he can cast him down unawares. Just so our Lord did, and saw how many the grim wrestler of hell caught on

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<sup>210</sup> See below, pp. 186, 240, 247, 248f. and pp. 321f.

his hip and threw with a hip-throw into lechery, which rules in the loins; and lifted many up high and walked about with them, and swung them through pride down into the pit of hell. Our Lord, who watched all this, thought, "I'll show you a throw you never saw before and could never understand, the humility-throw," that is, the falling-throw. And he fell from heaven to earth, and stretched himself out on the earth so much that the enemy thought that he was completely earthly, and was tricked by that throw—and still is every day by humble men and women who know it well [S/W 150-151].<sup>211</sup>

The anchoress falls to the earth in humility as Christ did when he took on human flesh, enclosing himself in an earthly body as her heart is enclosed in her body of earth and her body is enclosed in the four walls of her anchorhouse.<sup>212</sup> Eve's leaps, which symbolize the leap into pride or lechery, are thus countered by Christ's fall in the incarnation, which becomes the pattern for the fall of the anchoress.

Thus, like the lady of the Song of Songs who rejoices as her love comes "leaping" over the mountains (Song of Songs 2.8), the anchoress should be glad when someone mistreats her, for when she endures the insults of Slurry, the cook's boy, who was once beneath her notice, she becomes like a mountain raised high towards heaven (AW vi.193 [S/W 187]), in contrast to the heart which, swollen with pride, is lifted up like a hill (AW iv.145 [S/W 151]). Christ treads only on the high mountains; he simply leaps over the lower hills, which only bear his shadow. The anchoress thus

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<sup>211</sup> For the idea of the Incarnation as a trick to deceive the devil, cp. SK 62 [S/W 272]: "through the humanity he was hidden in and shrouded with he misled the enemy, deceived the old devil and lacerated his head." See also pp. 152, 196, below.

<sup>212</sup> See the image of the heart as a treasure buried in the earth of the body, above, p. 66.

rejoices in the scorn which is heaped upon her, for through her suffering she is like the mountain which receives Christ's footprints and bears in her body the likeness of his death (AW vi.193 [S/W 187-188]).

The reparation of Eve's leaps through the Incarnation is thus associated with the leaps of the beloved in the Song of Songs 2.8. Kaske suggests that the leaps of Eve outlined in AW ii.32 [S/W 68] are "a rather sophisticated ironic allusion" to the medieval interpretation of Song of Songs 2.8, which describes:

a series of 'Leaps' undertaken by Christ in redeeming mankind: from heaven into the Virgin's womb; thence into the manger; sometimes, thence into the sepulchre; occasionally, thence to the Harrowing of Hell; and thence back to heaven.<sup>213</sup>

The association of the leaps of Eve with this interpretation of Song of Songs 2.8 is further supported by the reference to that passage in AW vi.193-194 [S/W 187], where the leap into pride is countered by humility, here expressed in the image of the leaps of Christ.<sup>214</sup>

Kaske points out several contrasts and parallels between the leaps of Eve and those of Christ, most notably that Eve's leaps lead to the fall of humankind, while Christ's leaps lead to their redemption. He further points out "the likenesses and differences between Eve's unwilling leap from Paradise to earth, and Christ's

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<sup>213</sup> Kaske, "Eve's Leaps," p. 22. Kaske cites examples of this interpretation from Ambrose and Gregory, as well as numerous other examples.

<sup>214</sup> Kaske notes the occurrence of this passage in *Ancrene Wisse*, but beyond pointing out parallels for the author's interpretation in the *Glossa ordinaria* and others, he gives it little attention.



voluntary Leap from heaven to earth."<sup>215</sup> This parallel is made all the more interesting by the fact that Eve's leap from paradise to earth is, in fact, the fall which Christ's leap from heaven to earth (i.e. the Incarnation, described in AW iv.144 [S/W 151] as Christ's "fall" from heaven to earth) is to redeem. In addition, Kaske notes the parallels between the respective leaps of Eve and Christ into hell and the fact that Christ's leap into hell redeems the offspring of Eve from their leap into hell. He suggests a further basis for comparison in the traditional parallels between Eve as the bride of Adam and the bride of the Song of Songs who is the mystical bride of Christ.<sup>216</sup>

The association of the "leaps" of Eve with the leaps of Christ and the predominance of the image of the "light leap" into the pit of hell might shed some light on the curious use of the term *lihtleapes* in AW vi.185 (f.98a.7) [S/W 181]. Shepherd notes that the compound is not found except in this context, and that the editor of Nero has emended the reading in that ms., *lihu-leapes*, to *lihcheapes*, reflecting the reading in Titus. This is the meaning given by Savage and Watson in their translation, "on the cheap." This reading certainly does make sense in the context and disposes of a rather difficult interpretive problem. Nevertheless, as Shepherd notes, the reading in Corpus ought to be retained, even if it is difficult to

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<sup>215</sup> "Eve's Leaps," p. 24.

<sup>216</sup> "Eve's Leaps," p. 24.

explain. Shepherd suggests that, in the context, the term can be read as meaning "in short measures" or "in dribblets," or, "with easy steps."<sup>217</sup>

Given the use of the image of leaps and leaping elsewhere in *Ancrene Wisse*, however, it would seem that the connotation of "light leaps" ought to be retained. The emphasis on "light leaps" in AW ii suggests that the phrase *lihtleapes* in AW vi.185 is a deliberate one, indicating that the ease and comfort of the flesh which some seek on their way to heaven is a sin corresponding to the sins of the senses which cause the heart to leap out like a wild animal. Elsewhere, the author of *Ancrene Wisse* compares the flesh which is indulged in ease and comfort to a wild beast (AW iii.72 [S/W 99]). It would appear that the anchoress who transforms her flesh into a wild beast through seeking too much fleshly ease is herself the animal that leaps into the pit of hell, thus following her mother Eve. Similarly, the anchoress is prevented from "lightly" following the pleasures of the flesh by the thought of the pit which is her grave, and therefore is averted from the "light leap" into the pit of hell (AW ii.62-63 [S/W 92]). Further, if heaven, lost through the leaps of Eve, is regained through the leaps of Christ, the treatment of Christ's leaps in AW vi.193-194 [S/W 187] suggests that the process involves suffering and humiliation, as the leaps of Christ mark the anchoress with Christ's footprints (i.e., her own suffering which parallels his, visible in his footprints in the marks of the nails). These, indeed, are

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<sup>217</sup> *AW Six and Seven*, 9.21n, p. 39; cp. Salu's translation, which reads "with easy jumps" (p. 160).

not "light" leaps, and it would be truly foolish to imagine that one could, in the words of the passage in question, *wid lihtleapes buggen eche blisse* (gain [or buy] heaven with light leaps).

The leap into marriage or human sensuality, symbolized by the leaps of Eve, then, is contrasted with the leap of Christ. In Robertsonian terms, Eve's leaps, representing *cupiditas*, are thus paralleled and remedied by the leaps of Christ, the manifestation of *caritas*.<sup>218</sup> The anchoress must therefore "leap," not from earth into hell with Eve (as, by virtue of being human, she has leapt with Eve from paradise to earth), but rather from earth to heaven with Christ. The anchoress must take the mystical leaps of the bride, shunning the undisciplined sight which leads to the leaps of Eve and contemplating the leaps of Christ with her inner sight.<sup>219</sup>

#### THE EYES OF THE HEART

The senses must therefore be turned inward, rather than outward. The anchoress turns her bodily eye away from her window so that she may focus the eye of her heart on prayer and meditation; in this way the inner senses are guarded and nurtured by the regulation of the outer senses.

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<sup>218</sup> See Kaske, "Eve's Leaps," pp. 22-24.

<sup>219</sup> "Eve's Leaps," p. 24.

The importance of prayer and meditation is stressed throughout the anchoritic texts. Meditation upon the joys of heaven and the terrors of hell is often encouraged as a means of preserving chastity (AW ii.62-63 [S/W 92], iv.123-124 [S/W 135-136]; SM 68 [S/W 298]). *Sawles Warde* presents an allegory outlining the role of meditation in the defense of the treasure hidden within the castle of the body, the soul enclosed within the unbroken, virginal body. Within the castle are Wit, the householder, and Will, his unruly wife. They are served by outdoor servants, the five senses, and indoor servants, who are not specifically identified but may include the thoughts and appetites which Will must regulate.<sup>220</sup> Hidden inside the house is a precious treasure, the soul, which is guarded by the virtues against the vices, who, under the command of the devil, seek to enter the house and steal or murder the treasure within.<sup>221</sup> The virtues are assisted by the four daughters of God (the four chief virtues), virgins all. As Watson suggests:

it seems clear that the soul-house is intended also to represent an anchorage, while Will is perhaps a figure of the foolish and ill-disciplined anchoress and the other major female characters, the daughters of God, figure wise anchoresses.<sup>222</sup>

In the allegory two messengers appear: Fear, the messenger of Death, gives a graphic description of the horrors of hell, and Love of Life, the messenger of Joy,

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<sup>220</sup> S/W SW n. 3, p. 406.

<sup>221</sup> As S/W point out, this is precisely the position of the soul in AW ii (SW n. 5, p. 406).

<sup>222</sup> "Methods and Objectives," p. 138.

recounts the wonders of heaven. The terrors of hell are portrayed in images which recur throughout the *Ancrene Wisse* and the *Katherine Group* in the presentation of the perils faced by the virgin anchoress as she seeks to guard her chastity.<sup>223</sup> The four daughters of God vow to defend the castle and the treasure entrusted to them, so that the soul need not fear Death or hell, again using images which are familiar to the anchoritic reader.<sup>224</sup> Likewise, Love of Life's portrait of heaven is replete with images used elsewhere to characterize the nature and rewards of virginity.<sup>225</sup>

Although Fear is banished from the house for the duration of Love of Life's stay, he stresses the importance of his message, and Measure confirms that both messengers are indispensable:

*'Nu, nu!' quod Farlac, 'Ich seide for god al þet Ich seide; ant þah hit muri nere, nes na lessere mi tale þen wes Murhðes sondes, ne unbihefre to ow, þah hit nawt ne beo so licwurðe ne icweme.'*

*'Eiðer of ow', quod Meað, 'haueð his stunde to speokene, ne nis incker noðres tale to schunien in his time. Þu warnest of wa, he telleð of wunne. Muche neod is þet me ow ba ȝeornliche hercni.'* (SW 106.17-22).

"Here now!" Fear says. "Everything I said, I said for good. And though it was not happy, my story was not less important than the messenger of Joy's, and no less profitable to you, though it was never so pleasing nor delightful."

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<sup>223</sup> For example, fire, darkness, dragons, despair, bitterness, deep pits, a strange land, and Death's house.

<sup>224</sup> For example, the devil as a raging lion, and images of battle such as weapons and shields.

<sup>225</sup> For example maidens, crowns, song, sweetness, light, swiftness, and access to hidden secrets. See Chapter Four, below.

Measure says, "Each of you has his time to speak, and neither's story is to be disregarded in its time. You warn of grief, he tells of joy. It is very necessary that people listen to both of you" [S/W 220-221].

The conclusion of the allegory presents the desired effect of the visits of the two messengers. Will, the unruly housewife, becomes quiet and she and her whole household submit completely to Wit, her husband. *Sawles Warde* closes with a warning that all should avoid the sleep of carelessness and keep their hearts awake through meditation on the thoughts inspired by these two messengers.<sup>226</sup>

The senses thus guard the heart when they themselves are guarded well, and prevented from escaping outward in pursuit of the pleasures of the outside world. The anchoress must turn her senses inward, for then the heart's eyes will look with clear sight at God:

*eauer se þes wittes beoð mare isprengde utward, se ha leasse wendeð inward. Eauer se recluse toteð mare utward, se ha haueð leasse leome of ure lauereð inward. ... lo hwet sein gregoire seið. Hwa se zemelesliche wir hire utre ehnen, þurh godes rihtwise dom ha ablinded iþe tnre. þ ha ne mei iseo godd mid gastelich sihðe. ... FOR þt mīne leoue sustren beoð wið ute blinde. as wes þe hali iacob 7 tobie þe gode. Ant godd wule as he 3ef ham, 3eouen ow liht wið tinnen. him to seon 7 cnawen. (AW ii.49, f.23b.28-24a.14).*

the more the senses spring outwards, the less they go inward. The more the recluse stares out, the less inner light she has from our Lord ... see what St. Gregory says: 'Whoever guards her outward eye carelessly is blinded, through God's just judgment, in her inner'—so that she may not see God with her spiritual sight ... Therefore, my dear sisters, be blind outwardly, as were the holy Jacob and Tobias the

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<sup>226</sup> Cp. S/W, AW iii, nn. 43 and 44, on the importance of vigilance and watchfulness and possible sources.

good. And, as he gave it to them, God will give you light within, to see him and to know him [S/W 82].<sup>227</sup>

The eyes of the heart must be guarded as carefully as the eye with which the anchoress looks out the window (AW iv.140-141 [S/W 148]). The eye of the heart can be blinded by the ashes of worldly wealth (AW iv.110-111 [S/W 127]), or the dust of light thoughts (AW v.162 [S/W 164]), the memory of old sins with which the devil pollutes the anchoress's thoughts when he cannot stir up new ones (AW iv.140-141 [S/W 148]). Particularly dangerous is the fire of lust which so blinds those within whom it burns that they no longer have eyes with which to guard themselves (SM 68-70 [S/W 299]). Those who succumb to the fire of lust will be condemned to the fire of hell, which is also associated with spiritual blindness:

*Se picke is þrinne þe þostemesse þet me hire mei grapin. For þet sur ne zeueð na liht, ah blent ham þe ehnen þe þer beoð wið a smorðrinde smoke, smeche forcuðest.* (SW 90.30-32).

The darkness is so thick there that you can take hold of it—for that fire gives no light, but blinds the eyes of those who are there with a smothering smoke, the foulest fog [S/W 213].

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<sup>227</sup> See Grayson, *Structure and Imagery*, pp. 50-51 for further discussion of the inner sight which results from turning the senses inward. This inner sight will enable the anchoress to truly love God. She will see spiritually the torments of hell and the joys of heaven (cp. *Sawles Warde*), and will experience spiritual comfort (AW ii.49-50 [S/W 82-83]). S/W point out that this is very close to medieval descriptions of contemplation, but that the language of contemplation is not really integrated with what is said elsewhere about the anchoritic life and that much of the passage could be read simply as "a description of the more elevated kinds of meditation" (AW ii, n. 64, pp. 355-356). See also p. 297, below.

The dust and ashes of sin can be prevented from blowing up into the eyes of the heart by sprinkling tears on them (AW v.162 [S/W 164]), and the fire of earthly love can be quenched with the water of tears and Christ's blood (AW iv.153 [S/W 157]).<sup>228</sup> The anchoress is thus urged to weep bitterly for her sins, lest her own tears boil her in hell (AW v.161 [S/W 163]; cp. AW iv.141-3 [S/W 149-150]; HM 38 [S/W 241-242]). Similarly, when the onlookers weep for St. Katherine as she is led to her death, she reproaches them, urging them to cry for themselves lest they weep eternally in hell (SK 122 [S/W 282]). St. Margaret tells those who weep for her death to rejoice instead, since she is going to join her heavenly spouse (SM 80 [S/W 304]).

To prevent the eyes of the heart from being blinded, the anchoress must blindfold her eyes on earth with tears, remembering that Christ was blindfolded on the cross, his weeping eyes shamefully covered so that the anchoress might have the bright sight of heaven (AW ii.T 56 [S/W 87]). The anchoress may also guard the eyes of her heart by holding the shield of the cross high above the head of her heart, over the eyes of her breast, through meditation upon Christ's passion (AW iv.151-2 [S/W 155]).

Meditation upon Christ's passion is particularly important in the defense of the senses: the best way for the anchoress to guard her own senses is to remember how

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<sup>228</sup> Cp. the three baths of baptism, the anchoress's tears, and Christ's blood in AW vii.201-202 [S/W 193]. On the other hand, Greek fire, a metaphor for the anchoress's love for Christ, is quenched by sin (AW vii.205-207 [S/W 195-197]). See pp. 307f. and 394f., below.



Christ suffered in his five senses (AW ii.56f. [S/W 87f.], AW ii.63 [S/W 92]).<sup>229</sup> The anchoress must see her own temptations and sufferings in the senses as a form of *imitatio Christi*, remembering that Christ suffered in his senses so that she could guard hers, to comfort her, and to turn her away from the pleasures of the flesh (AW ii.59-61 [S/W 89-91]). Grayson points out that meditation on the sufferings of Christ in his senses is intended to envelop the anchoress spiritually, an enclosure which is reflected in the structure of this section of *Ancrene Wisse*:<sup>230</sup>

His sense experiences actually enclose those of the anchoress structurally: within the descriptions of His suffering in each of the senses come precepts on the handling of her senses by the anchoress.<sup>231</sup>

The anchoress must be particularly careful to guard the sense of touch, the sense in which Christ suffered most, for this sense is in all the others and is found throughout the body (AW ii.60 [S/W 89]). The anchoress is reminded that Christ's sufferings in the flesh were greater than any she could possibly endure. His flesh was more alive than anyone else's, as it was taken from a tender maiden and was never even partially deadened by sin (AW ii.61 [S/W 90]).<sup>232</sup>

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<sup>229</sup> For the theme of Christ's suffering in the senses see S/W AW ii, n. 77, pp. 357-358, and R. Woolf, *The English Religious Lyric in the Middle Ages*, (Oxford, 1968), pp. 222-24.

<sup>230</sup> See Grayson, *Structure and Imagery*, pp. 54-55.

<sup>231</sup> *Structure and Imagery*, p. 54.

<sup>232</sup> Cp. HM 10-12 [S/W 229], where virginity is described as a healing balm which preserves the maiden's flesh without taint, guarding her limbs and her five senses.

If the anchoress is tempted to put her hand out to touch the hand of a visitor she should remember that Christ's hands were nailed to the cross. The author of *Ancrene Wisse* implores:

*Godes honden weren ineilet o rode. þurh þe ilke neiles ich halsi ow ances. ... Haldeþ ower honden inwið ower þurles. Hondlunge oðer ei felunge bitweone mon 7 ancre. is þing swa uncumelich. 7 dede se scheomelich 7 se naket sunne. to al þe world se eatelich 7 se mucche scandale, þ nis na need to speoken ne writen þer to ʒetnes. for al wið ut writunge þ ful is to etscene. ... nawt ane monglin honden. ah putten hond utward bute hit beo for nede, is wohunge efter grome. 7 tollunge of his eorre. hire seolf bihalden hire ahne hwite honden, deð hearm moni ancre. þe haueð ham to feire as þeo þe beoð for idlet. ha schulden schrapien euche dei þe eorðe up of hare put þ ha schulien rotien in. (AW ii.62, f.31b.6-14, 18-24).*

God's hands were nailed on the cross. By these same nails I implore you, anchoresses ... hold your hands within your windows. Handling or any other touch between a man and an anchoress is a thing so ugly and a deed so shameful and so naked a sin, to all the world so hateful and so great a scandal, that there is no need to speak or write against it, for it can be seen as foul without any writing. ... Not only joining hands but putting your hands out, unless it is necessary, is courting harm and asking for his anger; looking at her own white hands does harm to many anchoresses, who have them so fair because they are idle. They should be scraping the earth up every day out of the pit they must rot in! [S/W 91-92].

The anchoress's hands are to toil as Christ toiled on the cross, preparing her grave in the anchorhouse which encloses her as Christ was enclosed on the cross and in the sepulchre.<sup>233</sup>

Grayson notes that in this passage,

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<sup>233</sup> See below, pp. 240,246.

the outstretched hand that reaches after flesh ... becomes transformed radically into the nailed hands of Christ. ... The movement of images has been inward from the physical-literal outer image of the hands of the anchoress and the male to the spiritual-tropological inner figure of Christ's hands.<sup>234</sup>

The movement of images thus follows the movement of the anchoress's senses, as she withdraws from the outside world and turns her senses inward. Again, the images are dominated by contrasting patterns of inner and outer realities.

The anchoress's meditation on her own body and on the sins which she incurs through her five senses thus moves to meditation upon the body of Christ. Through meditation upon the sufferings of Christ in his senses, the anchoress can regulate her own senses, making them true and effective guardians of her heart. In addition, through her meditation and her own suffering, she imitates Christ's suffering, hanging with him on the cross in her enclosure. In this way, the anchoress avoids the leap into sin which results from undisciplined senses, and instead leaps with Christ into joy.

Thus, in *Wohunge* the anchoress exclaims:

*henge i wile wið þe 7 neuer mare of mi rode cume til þ i deie . For þenne schal i lepen fra rode in to reste . fra wa to wele 7 to eche blisse (WLd 36.593-597).*

I will hang with you and nevermore come from my cross until I die—for then shall I leap from the cross into rest, from grief into joy and eternal happiness [S/W 256].

Strict enclosure is essential for the prayer and meditation which the anchoress undertakes in order to preserve the purity of both her body and her soul. The

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<sup>234</sup> *Structure and Imagery*, p. 11.

anchoress turns from the distractions of the world to seek the solitude of the anchorhouse. The importance of solitude is stressed, for it is in solitude that the anchoritic life finds its meaning.<sup>235</sup> Like John the Baptist, who fled to a solitary place in the wilderness to maintain his purity (AW iii.T 82-83 [S/W 107]), the anchoress flees to the wilderness of the solitary life of the anchorhouse (AW iv.101 [S/W 119]).<sup>236</sup> Other examples of those who pursued the solitary life include Paul, Anthony, Hilarion, Benedict, Syncletica, Sarah, and the Virgin Mary, who lived her life solitary and shut in (AW iii.84 [S/W 108]; cp. SK 6-10 [S/W 263], and S/W SK n. 6, pp. 422-423). But above all, the anchoress is reminded that Christ went alone to the wilderness to fast, for one cannot do penance in a crowd. She is warned that he was also tempted alone, for the devil tempts solitaries greatly, but although the danger is real, the solitary life is essential to the goals of the anchoress.

The solitude of the anchoress is undertaken with a sense of solidarity with all those who have chosen such a life. She is to pray at times when mass is sung in religious houses and when secular priests sing mass (AW i.16 [S/W 56]):

the anchoresses, as they offer up prayers for the Church, are invited to reflect here that their solitary worship places them in community with religious houses where the Passion is also being commemorated through the Mass.<sup>237</sup>

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<sup>235</sup> For a discussion of solitude in *Ancrene Wisse* see Grayson, *Structure and Imagery*, pp. 74-78.

<sup>236</sup> See the discussion of the wilderness motif, below, pp. 145f.

<sup>237</sup> S/W AW i, n. 11, p. 345.

The anchoress is assured, moreover, that the solitude which she chooses for the love of Christ will be more than compensated for by a companionship which is greater than any she could hope to find in the world, for *Nan nis ane þe haueð godd to fere. ant þ is euch þ soð luue haueð in his heorte* ("no one is alone who has God for a companion—and that is everyone who has true love in their heart" AW iv.129, f.68b.7-8 [S/W 140]; cp. WLd 26.242-27.251 [S/W 251]).<sup>238</sup> In fact, the sixth reason for fleeing the world enumerated by the author of *Ancrene Wisse* is in order to be intimate with Christ. The anchoress withdraws into the solitude of her anchorhouse in order to hear the loving voice of Christ, the bashful lover who dislikes a crowd (AW ii.48-49 [S/W 82], iii.88 [S/W 110-111]).<sup>239</sup>

The solitude of the anchorhouse forces the anchoress to turn to God for the companionship and aid which she would otherwise seek from other men and women. Thus, the anchoress affirms in *On Lofsong of ure Louerde* 13.103-104 [S/W 327]: *þu hauest binume me fulst of monne. uor þu wult þin zeouen me* ("You have deprived me of human aid because you want to give me yours"). The anchoress is reminded that the angel appeared to the Virgin Mary when she was alone, for angels seldom appear in a crowd (AW iii.84 [S/W 108]). Similarly, the virgin martyrs whose Lives are included in the *Katherine Group* are most often visited by angels when they are alone

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<sup>238</sup> This passage is found in the context of a discussion of the importance of mutual love in a cloister.

<sup>239</sup> See below, pp. 310f.

(SK 36 [S/W 268], 94-96 [S/W 278] {but cp. SK 84 [S/W 276]}; SJ 31-33 [S/W 312-313]). St. Margaret is an exception, for her heavenly visitors are usually concerned with her public vindication, rather than the increase of her wisdom or comfort, and therefore often appear to her before witnesses.<sup>240</sup> This is consistent with the overall concern of *Seinte Margarete* with "sign and the visible manifestation of God" noted by Price.<sup>241</sup>

One of the advantages of solitude is to enforce silence, eliminating the danger of speech which would hinder prayer.<sup>242</sup> Thus, the anchoress is to be like the sparrow, dwelling alone.<sup>243</sup> Since, like some anchoresses, the sparrow is a chattering bird, it is not a bird with a mate but a bird alone, as the anchoress lives alone, without a human mate. So too, John the Baptist sought solitude in order to pursue silence, to avoid speech which might sully his pure life (AW iii.82-83 [S/W 107]). The Virgin Mary's solitude is also associated with her silence (AW iii.84 [S/W 108]); the anchoress is reminded that the New Testament records the Virgin Mary

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<sup>240</sup> See below, pp. 295f.

<sup>241</sup> "SJ and Hagiographic Convention," p. 39. See also J. Price "The Virgin and the Dragon: The Demonology of *Seinte Margarete*," *Leeds Studies in English* 16 (1985).

<sup>242</sup> For times when silence is to be kept, see AW i.15 [S/W 55] (and S/W AW i, n. 7, p. 344), ii.37-38 [S/W 74], viii.220 [S/W 206].

<sup>243</sup> The anchoress is compared to birds throughout AW iii. She is to be like the pelican who lives by itself (AW iii.T 63 [S/W 93], AW iii.T 67 [S/W 95]), like the sparrow alone under the roof (AW iii.T 80 [S/W 105]), the night-bird who flies by night while others sleep (AW iii.75 [S/W 101]).

speaking only four times, and thus when she did speak her words had much power (AW ii.42 [S/W 76]).

The anchoress thus turns from the world to sit in silence. If the anchoress sits alone in silence to watch for grace, as did Jeremiah, she will rise to heaven through sublimity of life above her nature (AW iii.81-82 [S/W 106]).<sup>244</sup> A long and well kept silence impels the thoughts towards heaven (AW ii.39 [S/W 75]):

it makes possible a prayerful self-containment and detachment that is as spiritually beneficial as its opposite—unrestrained speech—is dangerous.<sup>245</sup>

In such a state, the anchoress will be able to call with confidence upon God's grace.

God's grace must be sought in solitude, as Isaac went to a solitary place to meet with Rebecca, whose name, according to the author of *Ancrene Wisse*, means God's grace.<sup>246</sup> It is necessary to seek solitude in order to pray, for being among people hinders prayer (AW iii.81 [S/W 105]). Like the sparrow who chatters alone under the roof, *swa ah ancre hire ane in anlich stude as ha is chirmtn 7 chiterin eauer*

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<sup>244</sup> Here, as in the example of the chattering sparrow, the anchoress is assumed to be going against her own nature. This is a common theme, as the goals of the anchoritic life represent a "rowing against the current," a rejection of worldly hopes and comforts for spiritual gain. It therefore does not reflect an assumption on the part of the author concerning the weakness of the anchoress, but rather an acknowledgement of the difficulty of the anchoritic life.

<sup>245</sup> S/W AW ii, n. 22, p. 351. Cp. AW ii.42 [S/W 76], where the author asserts that silence brings forth the soul's eternal food through the cultivation of justice. For the dangers associated with speech, see above, pp. 85f.

<sup>246</sup> The anchoress is also reminded of the examples of Jacob, Moses and Elijah.

*hire bonen* ("so should an anchoress always chirp and chatter her prayers on her own in the lonely place she is in" AW iii.80, f.41b.21-22 [S/W 105]). As Christ went alone into the hills to pray, so too the anchoress should climb with him into the hills, turn by herself and leave earthly thoughts behind in prayer (AW iii.84 [S/W 108]).<sup>247</sup> Like the night-bird, the anchoress must gather food for her soul at night in solitary vigil, so that she might rise up to heaven with contemplation (AW iii.75 [S/W 101]).<sup>248</sup>

The prayers which the anchoress offers in her solitude are not only for herself, but also for others, as the anchoress intercedes for the church and its members. The author of *Ancrene Wisse* thus describes the anchoress as "a bedesman for others" (*opres beodes mon* AW vi.182 [S/W 179]), one who earns her living by praying for the souls of others.<sup>249</sup> The author of *Ancrene Wisse* reminds his readers that every

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<sup>247</sup> Thus, Price notes that St. Juliana always "finds a private place amid the bustling activity of her torturers to speak to God" ("SJ and Hagiographic Convention," p. 47).

<sup>248</sup> There has been much discussion as to whether or not the anchoritic life as envisioned by the author of *Ancrene Wisse* can properly be called a "mystical" or "contemplative" life (see, for example, Shepherd, pp. lvi-lviii, xxxvii, and Watson, "Methods and Objectives," pp. 134, 145f.). Yet, as this and other passages where the anchoress is compared to a bird in flight show, the language of mystical ascent is not entirely absent from *Ancrene Wisse* and the *Katherine Group*.

<sup>249</sup> S/W AW vi, n. 11, p. 394. S/W note that although Warren does not record any formal arrangements of this kind, "it would be bound to occur; indeed, perhaps most gifts of money and food to anchorites carried the implication that they were in return for prayers." In fact, in Warren's account it seems to be assumed. For example, Warren refers to the anchorite's intercessory role as a *raison d'être* for the anchoritic life, and specifically mentions an anchorite, William, who received support



anchoress enters into an agreement to perform this function through her title of anchoress and the fact of her dwelling under the eaves of the church (AW iii.74-75 [S/W 101]).

Like Esther, who saved her people from death through her intercession with the king, through her prayers the anchoress saves many who would otherwise be lost (AW iii.88-89 [S/W 111]). The anchoress is reminded that Esther's name means "hidden," and that she lived a solitary and secluded life (AW iii.88-89 [S/W 111]). Jeremiah, too, sought solitude in order to weep for his slain people, i.e., the whole world, spiritually slain with sin. Similarly, God will grant the prayers of the true anchoress who is properly hidden. The anchoress who wishes to seek the mercy and grace of God, weeping for her sins and those of others as she ought, must therefore seek the solitude of her anchorhouse. She enters into her anchorhouse in order to weep for her sins and for the sins of others (AW ii.57 [S/W 88], AW iii.81 [S/W 104-105]), and her tears guarantee the efficacy of her prayers (AW iv.125 [S/W 137]).

The hidden nature of the anchoress's life is also evident in the exhortation to conceal her good works in humility. Good deeds done in secret are pleasing to God, as Esther's "hiddenness" was pleasing to the king. The anchoress who reveals her good works is rewarded here on earth by the praise of men, but she is not rewarded in heaven for, like Moses' right hand which became leprous when withdrawn from his bosom, goodness which is exposed becomes ugly in God's eyes. Similarly, like the fig

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in return for prayers (*Anchorites and Their Patrons*, pp. 10, 16-17).

tree which dies when its bark is torn off, good works which are not defended by the bark of concealment dry up from the wind of worldly praise and lose the sweetness of God's grace. The anchoress must therefore beware of disclosing her good deeds through pride, for once exposed they become good only for the fire of hell (AW iii.76-79 [S/W 102-104]). Sin, on the other hand, must not be concealed, for the devil can make even a little sin which is hidden away grow enormously. However, when sin is revealed with repentance in confession, the devil runs away shuddering (SM 68 [S/W 298-299]).

The anchoress thus seeks her soul's heavenly food in solitary vigils at night, which is the time of secrecy. She is told that this kind of night can be hers any time of the day if her good is done in secret (AW iii.75 [S/W 101-102]). However, as Savage and Watson point out, the anchoress's vigils are a metaphor for secrecy, yet are conducted under the eaves of the church, in full view of those who pass by her anchorhouse.<sup>250</sup> This paradox is a reflection of the modelling of the hidden nature of the anchoress's life on the Incarnation, which both reveals and hides the glory of God:<sup>251</sup>

*for þi þet he is to ure sihðe i rusehelich in his ahne cunde, com ant creap  
in ure forto beon isehen þrin, ant nom blod ant ban of a meidenes bodi.  
þus he schrudde ant hudde him, alre þinge schuppent, wið ure fleschliche  
schrud (SK 48.334-338).*

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<sup>250</sup> AW iii, n. 39, p. 364.

<sup>251</sup> S/W SK n. 21, p. 425.

because he is invisible to our sight in his own nature, he came and crept into ours, to be seen in it, and took blood and bone from a maiden's body. So he shrouded and hid himself, the creator of all things, with our fleshly shroud [S/W 270].<sup>252</sup>

So too, the holiness of the anchoress is both hidden and yet highly visible as an example to others. Just as the outside world can never be completely banished from the anchoress's cell, so too the anchoress is never entirely absent from the outside world. She may withdraw into her cell, but she remains highly visible in her anchorhouse attached to the church, a symbol to the world of the high spiritual calling which she has undertaken.<sup>253</sup>

The anchoress is herself a model for emulation, an example to those who pass by her anchorhouse each day. The virgin, she is told, teaches the way of life of heaven by her way of life here on earth (HM 10 [S/W 229]), and the purity of the virgin anchoress is proclaimed for all to see by the white cross on the black curtain which covers the window of the anchorhouse (AW ii.30 [S/W 66]).<sup>254</sup> The window and its curtain thus perform the double function of concealing the anchoress who

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<sup>252</sup> Cp. SK 60-63 [S/W 272]. Just as Christ hid in human flesh, so too the anchoress may hide in his (see p. 142 below).

<sup>253</sup> For the symbolic value of the anchoress's paradoxical position of seeking the "wilderness" of solitude in the centre of the community and the significance of the saints' Lives as models for the anchoress's role, see Watson, "Methods and Objectives," p. 141-2 and n. 52.

<sup>254</sup> Cp. SK 128 [S/W 283], where Katherine's purity is suggested by her "snow-white neck" which is severed by the sword, and by the milk which flows mingled with her blood, bearing witness to her "white maidenhood."

lives her holy life hidden behind them within her anchorhouse, and revealing her holiness to the world.<sup>255</sup> For this reason, the mere preservation of physical and moral purity is not enough; physical chastity must be witnessed to by the *appearance* of chastity (AW ii.37 [S/W 74]). As Savage and Watson suggest, the need to avoid giving opportunity for scandal persists throughout *Ancrene Wisse* as part of the author's conviction that

absolute purity should be the hallmark of the anchoritic life. ... For all its near-total seclusion, the anchoritic life is meant as a manifestation of purity and holiness to the world beyond the cell; thus anything that threatens even the appearance of purity threatens one dimension of the anchoritic life itself.<sup>256</sup>

The author of *Ancrene Wisse* thus creates a dynamic opposition, in which the holiness of the anchoress gives stability to the whole Church, but must be concealed or it ceases to be holiness.<sup>257</sup> The anchoress, like the night bird, dwells under the eaves of the church, and in her holiness provides a buttress for the church, holding up Holy Church with her holy life and prayers. She must be so holy that all Christian people may lean on her and trust her. As well, like the anchor on a ship, the anchoress is anchored under the church, holding the ship of Holy Church with her

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<sup>255</sup> Similarly, St. Margaret's foster mother and "many others" watch through a window as Margaret prays, and witness the saint's contest with the dragon and confrontation with the demon (SM 58 [S/W 294]).

<sup>256</sup> AW ii, n. 27, p. 351-352.

<sup>257</sup> S/W AW iii, n. 39, p. 364.

holy life, so that it is not overturned by the storms of temptation (AW iii.74-75 [S/W 101]).<sup>258</sup>

Thus, as Savage and Watson note, the holiness of the anchoress

is not to be maintained for the sake only of gaining its practitioner salvation, but because it is vital to the health of the whole Church. ... The purpose of [the anchoresses'] lives is described ... in the most daunting and elevated terms: they are a storehouse of holiness, and, by their prayer and example, a buttress against sin.<sup>259</sup>

#### THE ACTIVE NATURE OF THE ENCLOSED LIFE

The anchoritic life, then, is a life dedicated to chastity and purity, characterized by the ultimate withdrawal from the world demanded by strict enclosure. However, the enclosed life is not merely a withdrawal from active life into a passive state. It is made clear that virginity is maintained only with great toil, and the perils of sin and the danger of ease are stressed (AW vi.188-189 [S/W 183-184]). The gift of chastity involves responsibility on the part of the recipient, and those who are not willing to

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<sup>258</sup> The author of *Ancrene Wisse* bases this analogy on a popular but rather doubtful etymology in which he ties the title " anchoress " to the word " anchor. " However weak the argument may be linguistically, the point is clear and well taken. For further discussion of the image of the anchoress as an anchor for the church, see Georgianna, *The Solitary Self*, pp. 52-3, and Grayson, *Structure and Imagery*, p. 72.

<sup>259</sup> AW iii, n. 39, p. 364.

toil for it and suffer the hardship which it entails are considered unworthy to keep it.

The virtues of the virgin life, which are at first glance extremely passive qualities, thus undergo a radical reversal at the hands of the authors of the anchoritic literature. Savage and Watson point out that in AW ii.58-9 [S/W 88-89] the author of *Ancrene Wisse* paradoxically combines the seemingly passive virtues of meekness and humility with the images of rowing against the stream of the world's wild water and digging upwards toward heaven to portray the eager seeking thought and constant yearning of the hungry heart. Savage and Watson's comments are worth quoting at length:

This magnificent passage, which vehemently commends meekness, then reinterprets this apparently passive ideal as part of the strenuous labour necessary to reach heaven, achieves its best effects by mixing metaphors ... . The image of a waning moon leads to that of a boat rowed against a (tidal?) current, then to that of a gold-digger. This third image is then inverted, so that gold must be dug for upwards (towards heaven, but also towards the moon)—a curious idea, explained in its turn by means of a transformation of the boat image. Rowing against the current is doing the opposite of what the world demands—seeking spiritual gold, not earthly wealth, and doing so where no earthly gold-digger would look. The strain which the language undergoes in conveying the urgency of spiritual aspiration involved here is itself an image for the strain under which the anchoress must place her whole physical nature in order to arrive at her spiritual destination.<sup>260</sup>

Similarly, the image of Christ as a clever wrestler who overcomes the devil through the "humility throw" depicts Christ's act of humility in the Incarnation as an

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<sup>260</sup> AW ii, n. 83, p. 358.

arduous wrestling match.<sup>261</sup> Elsewhere, the Incarnation and Passion are described as Christ's hard toil on earth, which the anchoress is to imitate in her ascetic life (AW ii.60 [S/W 90], AW iv.132 [S/W 142]).<sup>262</sup> The connection between toil and humility is also made in AW vi.181 [S/W 178], in the image of a ladder, the two sides of which are shame and pain, joined by the rungs of virtue. The image is tied to Psalm 24.18,<sup>263</sup> which the author cites to make the point that toil (experienced by the anchoress in her pain, suffering and sorrow) and humility (experienced in the wrongful humiliation of being accounted worthless) lead to heaven.

Thus, although humility is associated with seemingly passive virtues of the anchoritic life, such as silence, solitude and patience (AW iii.82 [S/W 106-107]), it is clear that the overall character of the anchoress's lot is not envisioned as simply passive. Humility, silence, and solitude are cultivated in order to create an environment which is conducive to the struggle which the anchoress must face in her cell.<sup>264</sup>

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<sup>261</sup> See above, p. 111.

<sup>262</sup> See the discussion of physical asceticism in Chapter Three, below.

<sup>263</sup> *Vide humilitatem: meam - laborem meum, ⁊ dimitte universa delicta mea*, "Behold my humility and my toil, and forgive my sins altogether."

<sup>264</sup> Thus Olsen states: "virginity is not passive in Christian literature but rather represents an 'active choice' made by both men and women" ("Cynewulf's Autonomous Women," p. 229). She cites Elizabeth Petroff, who characterizes virginity as "a vocation and an emblem of spiritual leadership." ("Eloquence and Heroic Virginity in Hrotsvit's Verso Legends," in *Hrotsvit of Gandersheim: Rara Avis in Saxonia?*, Medieval and Renaissance Monograph Series, vol. 7 [Ann Arbor, 1987],

That the virginal life endorsed by the texts of the *Katherine Group* is not essentially a passive one is also amply illustrated in the Lives of the virgin martyrs.<sup>265</sup> The authors of the saints' Lives frequently refer to the saintly maidens' mildness and humility: their behaviour, however, is most aggressive. For example, St. Katherine is described as a "mild, gentle maiden" who leaps to the defense of her faith inflamed with the Holy Spirit (SK 6-10 [S/W 264]). When she answers Maxentius, she does so with a gentle smile, prompting him to call her a "spitfire" (an appellation which is modified by the narrator to "proud spitfire" [*modi motild*] SK 20-22 [S/W 265]). St. Margaret is described as the "meekest of maidens" (SM 46 [S/W 289]), the Lord's lamb (SM 64 [S/W 296], 72 [S/W 300]), yet she overcomes a fearsome dragon, and grabs the demon who confronts her, throws him to the ground and places her foot on his neck (SM 63-64 [S/W 296]).<sup>266</sup> St. Juliana leaps on her demon and seizes him (SJ 33 [S/W 313]), beating him with her own bonds before dragging him out to the scorn of all (SJ 41-45 [S/W 315-316]). After the demon endures a second beating, the author notes: *þæt eadi wummon wergede sunhwet ant reat him wið þe raketehē unrudelihe swiðe, and weorp him forð from hire awei into a put of fulðe* ("that blessed woman grew a little weary, and dragged him with the

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p. 29. See Olsen, n. 46). See also Warren, *Anchorites and Their Patrons*, pp. 101-102. Georgianna, *The Solitary Self*, pp. 60-65, also recognizes the essentially active nature of the enclosed life (see p. 97 above).

<sup>265</sup> See Watson, "Methods and Objectives," pp. 141f.

<sup>266</sup> See below, p. 190.



chains most roughly, and threw him away from her into a pit of ordure" SJ 47 [S/W 316])—one would not like to think what she would have done if she were not "a little weary."

The virgin anchoress is thus depicted in her anchorhouse as the heroic ascetic, who enters into a life of hard labour, of struggle against temptation and sin, and of battle against all the forces of the devil. It is this heroic asceticism which will be the focus of Chapter Two.

## CHAPTER TWO

### THE SPIRITUAL COMBAT

The anchoritic life begins by withdrawing from the world in order to avoid its temptations and distractions. Isolated within her anchorhouse, the anchoress is free to pursue the purity of heart which she so ardently desires. The anchorhouse also protects and preserves the pure heart: it is a secure place in which the anchoress can guard the treasure of her soul from the devil who seeks to steal or murder it.

The anchoritic life is not, however, primarily an escape. Purity of heart is only achieved and maintained through vigorous struggle against enemies which are not confined to the world outside the anchorhouse. Physical chastity is both defended by this struggle and the prerequisite for it, as chastity empowers the anchoress to defeat her enemies. As Rudolph M. Bell points out:

the suppression of physical urges and basic feelings—fatigue, sexual desire, hunger, pain—frees the body to achieve heroic feats and the soul to commune with God.<sup>267</sup>

Thus, the virgin anchoress enters into her anchorhouse to wage a spiritual combat against the enemy within, armed with the weapons of a pure heart, a clean conscience and true faith. The anchorhouse is the battlefield on which the anchoress struggles with the enemies of her soul: it is the wilderness in which she battles sin and temptation and through which she travels in her journey to Jerusalem, the city of God; it is the hill on which she stands elevated, battling against the winds and

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<sup>267</sup> *Holy Anorexia*, (Chicago, 1985), p. 13.

storms of the devil; it is the tower in which she is besieged. But it is also the symbol of herself: the battle which is waged against sin takes place within her own heart, enclosed by the anchorhouse of her body. The castle under siege is the castle of her body where her five senses guard her unruly heart in an effort to prevent it from "leaping" out through the windows of her eyes and plunging into the pit of hell.

### THE BATTLEGROUND

#### THE CASTLE AND THE TOWER

The battle which the anchoress wages against sin is undertaken to ensure the defense of the high tower of virginity and the protection of the treasure of the soul. The virgin anchoress is depicted as the lady of romance besieged and surrounded in an earthen castle, which symbolizes both her anchorhouse and her human body (AW vii.198f. [S/W 190f.]). The virgin stands elevated in the high tower of virginity through the sublimity of her chaste life. The castle, or tower, also symbolizes the city of the soul, which the devil assaults with temptation or fleshly desire (AW iv.125-126 [S/W 137]).<sup>268</sup> As such, it represents virginity, the safeguard of the soul (HM 2

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<sup>268</sup> For the background of the image of the castle under siege, see Roberta D. Cornelius, *The Figurative Castle*, Diss. Bryn Mawr College, (1930), pp. 58-67.

[S/W 225]), the virginal body in which the soul dwells, and the anchorhouse to which the anchoress flees to guard her soul (AW ii Cleopatra, f.25v.11-20, p. 51 [S/W 70],<sup>269</sup> iii.89-91 [S/W 112-113], vi.193 [S/W 187]; SW *passim*).

In *Hali Meïðhad*, in an opening "exegesis" of Psalm 44.11<sup>270</sup> the maiden is told to forget her "father's house," her own human nature, marred by sin (HM 8 [S/W 228]).<sup>271</sup> She must leave this house of vice where lust has mastery, going out of it with the will of her heart to stand elevated on the high tower of maidenhood. In *Sawles Warde*, on the other hand, we find that the house of the body where Will has mastery is in chaos unless she is ruled by Wit, or reason. This is not inconsistent with *Hali Meïðhad*, where the virgin is told that her reason (wit) withstands and chastises her will, shielding it from the desire which would draw it back into fleshly ways (HM 12-14 [S/W 230]). In other words, the will must be ruled by reason so that through maidenhood the anchoress's body can be transformed from a house of vice into the high tower of virginity.

The castle or tower is thus the virgin body of the anchoress herself, besieged by temptation, which the anchoress threatens to give up if God does not send her

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<sup>269</sup> Cp. Nero, f.14v, pp. 26.31-27.6.

<sup>270</sup> *Avdi, filia, et uide, et inclina aurem tuam; et obliuiscere populum tuum et domum patris tui*, Listen, daughter, and behold, and incline your ear; and forget your people and your father's house" (M/W-B 2.1-2).

<sup>271</sup> Cp. the house of the soul in ruins through sin in AW i.20 [S/W 59] and LLo 13.95 [S/W 326]; cp. also UrG 7.90 [S/W 323].

help. At the same time, the castle to which the anchoress flees is also Christ. Images of the castle of virginity and the castle of Christ merge in *Ancrene Wisse* iv.135-137 [S/W 144-145], where the virgin anchoress is depicted as a battle weary warrior, encamped beside Christ who is *stan of help, tur of treowe succurs. castel of strengþe* ("the stone of help, the tower of true succour, the castle of strength" AW iv.135 f.72a.16-17 [S/W 144]).<sup>272</sup> The castle here is both Christ and the Church, from which the anchoress draws her strength.<sup>273</sup> Similarly, St. Margaret attributes her victory over the dragon to Christ who is, among other things, *sorþfule ant sari ant sunfule totum, ... castel of strengþe a zein þe stronge unwiht* ("refuge for the sorrowful and suffering and sinful; ... castle of strength against the strong devil" SM 62.14-16 [S/W 296]). The anchoress can flee into the refuge of the castle which is Christ just as she flees into the security of her anchorhouse. She is counselled:

*fliþ to his wunden. Muchel he huuede us þe lette makien swucche þurles in him forte huden us in. Creop in ham wið þi þoht. ne beoð ha al opene? ⁊ wið his deorewurþe blod biblodde þin heorte. ... He him seolf cleopeð þe toward teose wunded. Columba mea in foraminibus petre. in cauernis macerie. Mi culure he seið cum hud te i mine limen þurles. i þe hole of me side. Muche luue he cudde to his leoue culure þ he swuch hudles makede. (AW iv.151 f.79b.10-14, 22-26).*

Flee into his wounds. He loved us much who allowed such holes to be made in him for us to hide in. Creep into them with your thought—are they not entirely open?—and bloody your heart with his precious blood.

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<sup>272</sup> This is consistent with the pattern of meditation on the body established in *Ancrene Wisse*, as the anchoress's meditation on her own body and on the body of Christ merge in the image of the crucifixion. See below, pp. 322f.

<sup>273</sup> S/W AW iv, n. 99, p. 383.

... He himself calls you towards these wounds: *Columba mea in foraminibus petre, in cavernis macerie* (Canticles 2.14)—'My dove,' he says, 'come hide yourself in the openings in my limbs, in the hole in my side.' Much love he showed to his dear dove in making such hiding-places [S/W 155].<sup>274</sup>

Similarly, in *Hali Meidhad* 42 [S/W 243] the anchoress hides from the devil under God's wings. However, although she may flee sin, she is warned that she will never be free of temptation. She must therefore always be prepared for a bitter battle against the devil (AW vi.190 [S/W 185]).

Like the anchorhouse, the high tower of virginity is Sion, or Jerusalem, the high tower of heaven from which the maiden looks down on the widowed and the wedded (HM 2-4 [S/W 225-226]), for virginity is an approximation of the heavenly life which the anchoress leads on earth.<sup>275</sup> Jerusalem is thus also an image for the chaste body of the anchoress and the pure heart which it encloses and protects. Accordingly, St. Katherine tells Porphyrius and Queen Augusta to build a city "inwardly" (*inwið*) in their hearts, a city which is clearly meant as an earthly anticipation of the heavenly Jerusalem to which Katherine and the queen eventually ascend (SK 86-90 [S/W 276-277]).<sup>276</sup> The high tower of heaven is also the anchoress's goal; in *On Lofsong of Ure Lefdi* 18.76-82 [S/W 330], the anchoress seeks

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<sup>274</sup> Cp. LLo 9.163f. [S/W 324].

<sup>275</sup> See below, pp. 294f.

<sup>276</sup> S/W SK n. 32, p. 427 point out that this passage identifies Katherine as the mediator between heaven and earth, an identification which is strengthened by her association with wisdom and her burial on Mount Sinai.

to ascend higher and higher, as Christ did on the cross and in the resurrection and ascension, until she sees in Sion the high tower of heaven, and the Lord of light whom the angels behold.<sup>277</sup> Paradoxically, Jerusalem is both where the anchoress dwells now through her chastity, and the goal towards which she journeys through the wilderness of the world (AW iv.100-101 [S/W 119-120]; cp. AW iv.108 [S/W 124-125]). It is thus distinct from the world's city, where the pilgrims never become citizens, being always on the move towards God's city (AW vi.179 [S/W 177]). It is also contrasted with Babylon, the devil's city in which the sinful dwell (HM 4 [S/W 226]; cp. SM 72 [S/W 300]).<sup>278</sup>

The height, or sublimity, of maidenhood is also reflected in the image of the high hill. Virginity is both the high tower on which the anchoress stands elevated through the power of her chastity (HM 2 [S/W 225]), and a high hill near to heaven, which the anchoress has climbed in her chastity (HM 18 [S/W 232]). She also ascends this hill through prayer and meditation, as she climbs with Christ into the hills in prayer and leaves earthly thoughts behind (AW iii.84 [S/W 108]). As always, it is clear that while physical chastity is a prerequisite for the holy life of the anchoress, physical chastity alone is not sufficient.

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<sup>277</sup> Note that this is a contemplative ascent, achieved through the practice of virtue, meditation etc., and sought on earth, not after death. For further discussion of the allegorical tower, see Grayson, *Structure and Imagery*, p. 108.

<sup>278</sup> Concerning the question of citizenship, see p. 170, below.

## THE WILDERNESS

The anchoress thus stands elevated on the high hill of her holy life, battling the winds and storms of temptation.<sup>279</sup> This hill is found in the wilderness, the solitary life of the anchorhouse (AW iv.100-101 [S/W 119]). Like Christ and John the Baptist, who both went alone into the wilderness, the anchoress withdraws into the wilderness in solitude (AW iii.T 83-84 [S/W 107-108]). The anchoress faces temptation in the wilderness where she dwells alone, but she may take comfort from the fact that Christ endured temptation in the wilderness before her and stands by her in her trials (AW iii.83-84 [S/W 107-108]). As God led the people of Israel through the desert and wilderness where they suffered from hardship and wars, so too he will lead the anchoress through the wilderness of this world to her goal, the heavenly Jerusalem (AW iv.113 [S/W 128-129]; cp. AW vi.1&2-183 [S/W 179-180], vi.191 [S/W 185]; SJ 35 [S/W 313], 53-55 [S/W 317-318]).

The sins and temptations which beset the anchoress during her sojourn in the wilderness are likened to wild beasts which attack those who travel through the wilderness of the solitary life in an attempt to destroy them (AW iv.108 [S/W 124-125]).<sup>280</sup> The image of the wild beast is also applied to the anchoress, who is

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<sup>279</sup> For the imagery of the winds of temptation, see Grayson, *Structure and Imagery*, pp. 82-83.

<sup>280</sup> See also Grayson, *Structure and Imagery*, pp. 97f.



advised to be like the beast in the wilderness that flees when it hears people approaching. If the anchoress is wild in this way, she will seem sweet to Christ, who will seek her in an erotic hunt that he may devour her sweet, wild flesh (AW iv.101 [S/W 119]). However, the anchoress must not become like a wild beast through lust (HM 22 [S/W 234]), or ease and comfort of the flesh (AW iii.91 [S/W 113]; cp. AW iii.72 [S/W 99-100]).<sup>281</sup>

The image of the wilderness merges with the image of the strange land through which the anchoress journeys on her pilgrimage to her heavenly home. The flesh is at home in this world, but the soul is not; the earth is a strange land where the soul, although of noble birth, is unknown and suffers pain and humiliation. The anchoress must remember her noble origin and take comfort in the knowledge that in her own land she will be rewarded with a double share of joy for all her sorrow on earth, gaining the honour and recognition she deserves (AW iii.74 [S/W 100-101], vi.18<sup>o</sup>-183 [S/W 179-180]).<sup>282</sup> She must therefore guard her virginity well, for it is for her chastity that she will be honoured; in this world, the land of unlikeness, she must keep her nature in the likeness of the heavenly nature, even though she is exiled from heaven in a body of clay (HM 12 [S/W 229]).<sup>283</sup> Here, the strange land is

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<sup>281</sup> For the image of the wild beast in *Ancrene Wisse*, see Grayson, *Structure and Imagery*, pp. 43-44.

<sup>282</sup> In this passage, the earth is also described as a prison, or a torture chamber, an image which will be dealt with below.

<sup>283</sup> Cp. Millett, *Hali Meïðhad*, note to 6/15-16.

not only the earth, but the body which is moulded from it.<sup>284</sup> As in the image of the castle or tower, the image of the wilderness or strange land merges into a complex pattern as the dichotomy between inner and outer fuses the world, the anchorhold and the anchoress's body into one single wilderness in which the anchoress and her soul live in exile.

Warren correctly points out that the life of the anchorite (or in this case, anchoress) symbolizes the desert ideal of early Christianity. The wilderness or desert accordingly becomes an important symbol of the anchorhouse:

It was a version of the desert home of the first Christian anchorites, the arena of spiritual warfare, a place for contemplation, a representation of the prison of the early martyrs, a penitential prison, a refuge, a way station. Like in a dream, these many images condensed into a single vision. ... By a process of internalization, both the physical martyrdom of the earliest Christian centuries and the search for the desert that had followed in its wake ... became mental states. What had been actual became symbolic. ... Thus the virgin, the martyr, the repentant sinner, the ascetic and would-be mystic, the pilgrim, the soldier—all found a desert retreat as well as a deserved or necessary prison in the anchorite's cell of the Middle Ages. ... The anchorite's cell would be both the site of the devil's attack as well as the mountain of contemplation. It was a new version of the desert cave.<sup>285</sup>

The anchoress is thus depicted as a stranger in a world of which she never becomes a citizen, for she is in this world as a pilgrim, travelling by means of a good life towards the kingdom of heaven where her true citizenship lies. She is therefore

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<sup>284</sup> Cp. AW v.155 [S/W 159], where the sinful self is described as the devil's land.

<sup>285</sup> *Anchorites and Their Patrons*, pp. 8-9. For a full discussion of the desert ideal, see pp. 8-14.

urged not to stop and seek a dwelling place here, as fools do, but to keep to her route and hurry towards the lodging which she seeks in heaven (AW vi.177-179 [S/W 176-177]).<sup>286</sup> The anchoress is not to be like the worldly fools who go along a green road to the gallows and death of hell; her life is depicted as a laborious journey along a difficult road which leads to the great feast of heaven (AW iv.98 [S/W 118]). Similarly, in *Hali Meidhad* 42 [S/W 243] the virginal life is described as a path climbing to heaven (cp. SM 50 [S/W 290]; SJ 29 [S/W 312], and in SK 122 [S/W 282] martyrdom is described as a journey which will end in eternal rest in heaven.<sup>287</sup>

Although her journey is usually described as a solitary one, the anchoress is told that, when going along the path which is slippery with the strong winds and streams of temptation, she should join in her heart with other solitaries through prayer and love, for people who go together on a slippery path with joined hands, each supporting the other, do not slip. She is also reminded that she is never truly alone as long as she has God for a companion (AW iv.128-129 [S/W 139-140]).<sup>288</sup>

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<sup>286</sup> The lodging towards which the anchoress journeys is the inn of St. Julian, the patron saint of wayfarers and innkeepers (S/W AW vi, r. 5, p. 393). S/W note that in this particular passage the image of the pilgrim is applied primarily to those in active life, who are nonetheless holy (AW vi, n. 4, p. 393). However, the image is also applied to the anchoress who, as the chapter develops, takes on the ascending roles of the pilgrim, the dead, and the one who hangs with Christ on the cross (see S/W AW vi, n. 7, p. 393).

<sup>287</sup> Contrast the demon's paths, above in the winds, described in SM 72 [S/W 300].

<sup>288</sup> This passage is one which applies both to anchoresses living in isolation and those who dwell with or near other anchoresses.

## THE STRUGGLE

The anchoress's journey is an arduous one, characterized by the vigorous spiritual struggle which is a vital feature of the ascetic life.<sup>289</sup> Like the early desert hermits, the anchoress is invited to see herself as a warrior and spiritual athlete, striving for perfection.<sup>290</sup> As Savage and Watson point out, the spiritual struggle of the solitary life is a necessary condition of spiritual progress in the writings of the desert fathers, Gregory, and, especially, Cassian.<sup>291</sup> It is thus an important part of the journey which depicts the progress of the anchoress as she seeks to ascend the spiritual heights.

The struggle which typifies the anchoress's life is often depicted as a wrestling match. The anchoress must wrestle with temptation as she fights the world, her own fleshly desires, and the devil (AW iv.122 [S/W 135]).<sup>292</sup> This wrestling or struggling against temptation is one of the three bitteresses represented by the three Marys in *Anticrete Wisse* vi.190 [S/W 184-185]. The second Mary is the mother of Jacob,

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<sup>289</sup> Cp. S/W AW iv, n. 1, p. 368. S/W point out that AW iv is primarily an account of this spiritual struggle which leads to spiritual reward.

<sup>290</sup> S/W AW iv, n. 68, p. 379.

<sup>291</sup> AW iv, n. 18, p. 372.

<sup>292</sup> For the image of the wrestling match with the devil in the Lives of the virgin martyrs whom the anchoress is encouraged to emulate, see SK 106 [S/W 279], and the physical battles of St. Juliana and St. Margaret with their respective demons (SM 62-64 [S/W 296-297]; SJ 33-47 [S/W 313-316]).

whose name means "wrestler."<sup>293</sup> In Genesis 32.24f., Jacob wrestles with an angel and his thigh is put out of joint. The hip, or thigh, is a euphemism for sexuality, and is associated in *Ancrene Wisse* with lechery. So, for example, in *Ancrene Wisse* iv.144-145 [S/W 150] the devil catches those with whom he wrestles on the hip and throws them with a hip-throw into lechery. Similarly, in *Seinte Margarete* the devil describes his assault through lechery as a wrestling match in which those whom he assaults must struggle with themselves (SM 66 [S/W 298]).

The second Mary thus represents the anchoress's struggle against sin, especially sexual sin. This wrestling is very bitter to many who are far along the way to heaven, yet are still shaken by temptations and must wrestle with them in a mighty struggle. The anchoress is reminded that the good person is never free from temptation and is referred back to part iv where this is discussed fully. She is encouraged to keep hope in her heart, for it is the hope of her high reward which will enable her to endure temptation and wrestle against the devil with a stout heart (AW ii.43 [S/W 77-78]).

The anchoress's struggle is not only against the devil, however, but also against herself, as she wrestles with her own tendency to sin. As the demon tells St. Margaret:

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<sup>293</sup> The three Marys are identified in Mark 16.1. The second Mary is, in fact, the mother of James (the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew Jacob). Jacob's mother is Rebecca. The author of *Ancrene Wisse* plays with the biblical text, as the anchoress (figured by Mary, not Jacob) becomes the wrestler.

*3ef ha edstonden wulleð mine unwreste wrenches ant mine swikele swenges, wreasilin ha moten ant wiðerin wið hamseoluen; ne me akeasten ha ne mahen ear ha hamseoluen ouercumen. (SM 66.28-30).*

If they [holy people] want to withstand my evil tricks and my treacherous blows, they have to wrestle and struggle with themselves; they can't throw me off before they overcome themselves [S/W 298].

Thus, when the devil makes war on the anchoress through temptation, she is told to stand up to him:

*For as Seinte Pawel seið, ne bið nan icrunet bute hwa se treoweliche i þulli feht fehte, ant wið strong cokkunge ouercome hire seolf. For þenne is þe deofel wið his ahne turn scheomeliche awarpen (HM 42.9-12).*

For as St. Paul says, no one is crowned unless she fights truly in this same fight, and overcomes herself with a mighty struggle; for then the devil is shamefully overthrown with his own trick [S/W 243].

Like the clever wrestler who defeats his opponent with a move that he does not know, the anchoress must trick the devil, and beat him at his own game. Following the example of Christ, who overcame the proud devil with the "humility throw" of the Incarnation (AW iv.144-145 [S/W 150-151]), the anchoress must lead a humble life, free from sin.<sup>294</sup> In her ascetic life, which is itself a form of *imitatio Christi*, the efficacy of the Incarnation against the wrestler of hell is available to the anchoress. She may also draw upon the power of the Incarnation through the eucharist, which is especially potent against the devil. The incarnate Christ, present in the eucharist, brings all the devil's wiles to nothing, not just his force and mighty wrestling, but also

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<sup>294</sup> See above, pp. 111f.

his frauds and deceits. The eucharist taken with firm faith thus uncovers his tricks and breaks his strengths (AW iv.138-139 [S/W 146-147]).

The Incarnation, itself a trick which deceives the devil, uncovers the devil's own deceits. Thus is the beguiler beguiled, and the virgin who is threatened by the thief of hell can "get her own back." As the demon who accosts St. Margaret laments, *purh þe mihte of meidhad wes moncun iborhen, binumen ant bireauct us al þet we ahten* ("through the power of maidenhood humanity was reborn and all we owned taken away and robbed from us" SM 72.13-14 [S/W 300]). This was accomplished through the Incarnation, when Christ was born of a maiden. Thus, the author of *Hali Meidhad* asserts, through the Virgin Mary's maidenhood the devil lost lordship of humanity on earth. Thus, through maidenhood hell was robbed and heaven will be filled (HM 12 [S/W 230]; cp. WLd 24.142-148 [S/W 250]). The devil may steal the human soul, but in his Incarnation and the harrowing of hell, Christ steals it back again.

The image of the devil as a skilful wrestler for souls is thus part of the imagery describing the spiritual struggle undertaken by the anchoress, merging with the spiritual battle which the anchoress wages against the devil in her anchorhouse, which is both castle and wilderness.<sup>295</sup> It is this battle to which we now turn.

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<sup>295</sup> S/W note that this link is drawn, at least in part, from the *Lives of the Fathers* (AW iv, n. 47, p. 376).

## THE BATTLE

The battle lines in the confrontation between the forces of heaven and hell are clearly drawn.<sup>296</sup> On the one side is the devil's army, the lust of the flesh and temptations (HM 2 [S/W 225]; AW iv.135 [S/W 144]). In *Ancrene Wisse* the images applied to the seven deadly sins against which the anchoress struggles blend two distinct traditions: the penitential tradition of the tabulation of sins, describing the sins themselves, merges with the desert fathers' use of the seven deadly sins to describe the forces arrayed against them in their spiritual battle with temptation.<sup>297</sup> Thus, in *Ancrene Wisse* the seven deadly sins are described as the devil's court (outlining the nature of the sins), the devil's army which attacks the castle of the virgin anchoress, and the beasts which assail her in the wilderness.<sup>298</sup> These are arrayed against the army of maidens (SW 102 [S/W 218]; SJ 45 [S/W 315]) and the army of God (i.e. the virtues), led by Confession, the standard bearer (AW v.155 [S/W 158-159]). Thus, in *Sawles Warde* the soul is protected from the attack of the devil and his allies, the viccs, by the four cardinal virtues (SW 88 [S/W 212], 98 [S/W 217]). Savage and Watson point out that all four virtues are necessary, for each

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<sup>296</sup> The battle imagery in *Ancrene Wisse* is also discussed by Grayson, *Structure and Imagery*, Ch.4 *passim*.

<sup>297</sup> S/W AW iv, n. 18, pp. 372-373.

<sup>298</sup> See Grayson, *Structure and Imagery*, pp. 103f. for a discussion of the image of the devil's court.



without the others cannot defend the soul from attack.<sup>299</sup> Again, virginity alone is insufficient to guard the soul. Similarly, in *Ancrene Wisse* iv.128 [S/W 139] (a passage written for a group of anchoresses living together) the anchoress is reminded that when men fight in powerful armies, those who keep together cannot be beaten. Thus, when the devil attacks, his intent is to separate hearts which are bound together in love, for when love dies the devil can come in and kill on every side.

Throughout the anchoritic literature it is made clear that the devil has a special enmity towards virgins, surpassing that which he holds for the rest of mankind (e.g. AW iv.135 [S/W 144]).<sup>300</sup> Maidenhood is most hateful to him, since it was through the maidenhood of the Virgin Mary that he lost power over humankind on earth. He is therefore envious of those who climb towards heaven through the power of maidenhood (HM 12 [S/W 229-230]; cp. SM 48 [S/W 289]). The demons which accost St. Juliana and St. Margaret both attest to the particular malice which they feel towards virgins, citing similar reasons: maiden; cause them the most grief because Christ was born of a maiden and enthroned in the power of maidenhood; through the power of maidenhood humanity was reborn; and through maidenhood all the demons own was taken from them (SM 72 [S/W 300], 72 [S/W 299]; SJ 45 [S/W 315]). The

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<sup>299</sup> SW n. 14, p. 408.

<sup>300</sup> In a discussion of *Hali Meïðhad* and Margery Kempe, Bosse points out that this idea persists throughout the following centuries ("Female Sexual Behaviour," p. 22).

devil and his army therefore wage a bitter war against maidenhood and those who have chosen it as a way of life.

The anchoress is thus assured that a spiritual battle is to be expected, and even welcomed. The warrior of hell assails her with temptation only when her castle is not won. He therefore attacks the highest tower, the tower of virginity, in order to bring the castle down (AW iv.117 [S/W 131]). The anchoress is warned that the higher she stands, the more likely she is to be tempted, for the devil is envious of those who climb so high through virginity (HM 12 [S/W 229-230]). Thus the author of *Ancrene Wisse* begins his treatment of temptation with this admonition:

*Ne wene nan of heh lif þæt ha ne beo itemptet. mare beoð þe gode þe beoð iclumben hehe, itemptet þen þe wake. ant þæt is reisun. for se þe hul is herre, se þe wind is mare þron. Se þe hul is herre of hali lif ⁊ of heh, se þe feondes puffes þe windes of fondunges beoð :trengre þron ⁊ mare. (AW iv.92 f.47b.20-27).*

Let no one who lives the life of sublimity imagine that she will not be tempted. The good, who have climbed up high, are more tempted than the weak; and this is natural, for the higher the hill, the stronger the wind on it. Since the hill of sublime and holy life is higher, the enemy's blasts, the winds of temptations, are greater and stronger on it [S/W 114].

The author of *Ancrene Wisse* later tells his readers that at first the Lord spares the young and feeble. Then, when they are tougher and have climbed higher, wars arise through which he teaches them to fight and suffer woe (AW iv.113 [S/W 129]; cp. AW iv.113-114 [S/W 128-129]). This spiritual struggle is a vital part of the ascetic

life. It is for this reason that the author of *Ancrene Wisse* presents such an elaborate battle plan against sin and temptation.<sup>301</sup>

Thus the author of *Hali Meiodhad* explains that not all can keep themselves on the heights of maidenhood, and therefore marriage was hallowed as a bed for the sick, to catch the married so they do not fall all the way into hell (HM 18 [S/W 232]; cp. HM 20 [S/W 233]).<sup>302</sup> However, the virgin is warned that, although she looks down upon the widowed and the wedded from the high tower of maidenhood, she must not succumb to pride, for the higher the stair, the worse the fall (HM 12 [S/W 229]).

In fact, the time to worry is when the anchoress feels no temptation, for that is likely when she is most under attack (AW iv.92 [S/W 114]). When the devil sees the banners of ease and comfort of the flesh raised, he knows that the castle is won and boldly enters. In the ascetic life of the anchoress, however, he sees God's banners (i.e. hardship of life, AW vi.185 [S/W 181]). The anchoress is reminded that it is only the foolish soldier who looks for rest while fighting or ease on the battlefield (AW vi.182-183 [S/W 179-180]).

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<sup>301</sup> S/W AW iv, n. 1, pp. 368-369.

<sup>302</sup> For a fascinating discussion of the image of the marriage bed and its relation to thirteenth century life, see Unrue, "HM and other Virginité Treatises," pp. 160-162.

## THE DEVIL'S ARSENAL

The weapons of the devil take the form of temptations and lusts of the flesh: the arrows from his bow are the secret temptations which he shoots from afar, and his sword is the keen and cutting temptations which come from near at hand (AW iv.128 [S/W 139]). The weapons of lust are wielded with the aid of the five senses (HM 14 [S/W 230-231]), and must therefore be defended against through the five senses.

The arrows of the eyes are the first weapons in lust's attack,<sup>303</sup> and the anchoress is warned to be especially careful of these (AW ii Cleopatra, f.25.12-25v.20, pp. 50-51 [S/W 70]).<sup>304</sup> The arrows of the eyes are, in fact, the arrows of lust (HM 12-14 [S/W 230]; cp. HM 4 [S/W 225]). Thus, Eleusius sees Juliana and is wounded by the "darts of love" (SJ 5 [S/W 306]), which are really a parody of the romantic image, as his subsequent behaviour makes clear that what has wounded him is really lust.

The author of *Ancrene Wisse* thus warns his readers to guard their eyes most carefully. It is only the foolhardy anchoress who would hold her head out boldly over exposed battlements when the castle is attacked from without. The battlements of

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<sup>303</sup> See the discussion of the need to guard the eyes, pp.91f. above.

<sup>304</sup> Cp. Nero, f.14-14v, pp. 26.14-27.6. This passage is found in the excerpt supplied by Savage and Watson from Cleopatra where two leaves are missing from the Corpus ms. (see S/W AW ii, n. 14, pp. 349-350).

her castle are her windows, and if she leans out she may get the devil's bolts in her eyes, blinding her heart and bringing her to the ground through sin (AW ii Cleopatra, f.25v.19-20, p. 51 [S/W 70]).<sup>305</sup> Even the wise and strong anchoress should remain securely within, for when the old peep out they set a bad example to the young, and give them a shield to guard themselves with against all good advice: "But sir, she does it too" (AW ii.31 [S/W 67]).

When, however, the eyes are properly guarded they become a weapon against attacks of the devil. St. Juliana has only to open her eyes and look at Belial, to make him cower as though hiding from a shot arrow (SJ 65 [S/W 320]). In addition, eyes which flow with tears defend the besieged castle as the anchoress throws down the scalding water of her tears upon the enemy, scalding the dragon's head and causing him to flee (AW iv.125 [S/W 137]).

The anchoress must also beware of the point of the devil's spear (wounding romantic words) and the edge of his sword (deadly handling), as these are potent weapons in the battle between the whore of lechery and the lady's chastity (AW ii Cleopatra, f.25.14-21, pp. 50-51 [S/W 70]).<sup>306</sup> The connection between words and touch is intimate; in fact, the erotic image of the sword is used for both. The reason

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<sup>305</sup> Cp. Nero, f.14v, pp. 26.36-27.6.

<sup>306</sup> Cp. Nero f.14, p. 26.16-21. Note that the weapons in lust's attack occur in the same order in the more detailed description of the devil's strategy in SM 66 [S/W 297-298], and again in the senses' alliance with lechery in HM 14 [S/W 230-231], with the exception that in *Hali Meidhad* "vulgar touching" (*unhende felunge*) is preceded by the kiss.

is made clear in *Hali Meidhad* 14 [S/W 230-231]: lustful words lead to lecherous acts. This is true even of the righteous, for the devil's strategy is to allow holy men and women to be lulled into a false sense of security as they sit together speaking pure words which lead to a pure love. Once this has occurred, the devil shoots secretly with the poisoned arrows of light looks, which lead to loving looks and, eventually, burning glances. These in turn lead to playful talk and thoughts of love, which end in a fall into the mire of lechery (SM 66 [S/W 297-298]).

The author of *Ancrene Wisse* thus warns that words kill more than the sword, and that, according to Solomon, life and death are in the tongue's hands (AW ii.39 [S/W 75]; cp. Proverbs 18.21). The phrase "Life and death are in the tongue's hands" (*Mors ⁊ uita in manibus lingue. lif ⁊ deað ... is i tunge honden* f.18b.5-6) contains a marvellous confused metaphor which is not reflected in the RSV, which translates "Life and death are in the power of the tongue." Although the RSV's translation accurately reflects the meaning of the phrase, the author of *Ancrene Wisse* treats the passage literally, as it is found in the Vulgate, emphasizing the sensual nature of the metaphor. The Vulgate follows the Hebrew and the Greek, both of which place life and death in the *hands* of the tongue. Again, the mixed metaphor emphasizes the subtle connection between speech, the province of the tongue, and touch, the domain of the hands.

The image of the sword is applied not only to lustful words but also to words of anger. Angry words are swords and cutting words are knives with which the angry

person becomes the devil's knife thrower (AW iv.110 [S/W 126]). The punishment for anger will fit the crime, however, for the angry person will be pierced with hell-swords (i.e. hideous and cutting torments) as devils play with him or her with sharp hooks. The connection between anger and lust pervades the Lives of the virgin martyrs, as the virgins' persecutors are goaded into anger by their frustrated desire, which simply serves to fuel their lust further.<sup>307</sup>

Unconfessed sin is also described as a sword held over the anchoress's head by her deadly enemy (AW v.166 [S/W 167]). Confession, however, provides the anchoress with a sword which she can wield against the devil, hacking off his head and driving him away (AW v.154 [S/W 158]). The author of *Ancrene Wisse* illustrates how confession is to be used as a weapon against the devil with the story of Judith, whose name means "confession."<sup>308</sup> Judith slew Holofernes, the enemy from hell, and hacked off his head to bring to the priests. So too the anchoress crushes the enemy within when she exposes his wickedness in confession: his head is hacked off and he is slain within her as soon as she is truly sorry for her sin and makes confession in her heart. However, the importance of *verbal* confession is stressed, for

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<sup>307</sup> Both anger and lust are associated with fire and madness (e.g. fire: SM 70 [S/W 299], 72 [S/W 300], 76 [S/W 302]; SJ 19 [S/W 309], 23 [S/W 310], 25 [S/W 310]; and madness: SM 74 [S/W 300-301], 76 [S/W 302]; SJ 59 [S/W 318], 63 [S/W 319]; SK 66 [S/W 273]), 70 [S/W 274], 80 [S/W 275], 105-106 [S/W 279], 108 [S/W 280]). Contrast St. Katherine, who is inflamed with righteous anger nearly to the point of madness when she hears of Maxentius' heathen practices (SK 10 [S/W 263]).

<sup>308</sup> See AW iii.72 [S/W 99]. Savage and Watson cite pseudo-Jerome, *De Nominibus* (PL 23, col. 1286) as the author's source for this etymology (n.34, p.364).

the enemy is not actually destroyed until his head is exposed, as Judith displayed the head of Holofernes before the priests. Thus, the anchoress must expose mortal sin with her mouth in confession. In this way, confession becomes a sword which is wielded by the repentant tongue, counteracting the sword of the sinful tongue.<sup>309</sup>

Words are thus both weapons in the arsenal of the devil and weapons which can be used against the devil. Although the mouth which is always open in idle chatter is a gate through which the devil and his army can enter into the heart (AW ii.40 [S/W 75]), words which are well chosen are a defense against the devil and enable the mouth to guard the heart. For example, the contest between St. Katherine and the scholars gathered by Maxentius is described in a sustained

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<sup>309</sup> See S/W AW v, n. 2, pp. 387-388, for a discussion of this passage in light of medieval ideas concerning confession. They point out that the passage describes "contrition of heart" and "confession of mouth," two of the three parts of confession (the third part, "satisfaction of deed" is discussed in part vi). Although the debate over whether oral confession was necessary or whether contrition was sufficient was decided in favour of those who maintained that oral confession was essential at the Fourth Lateran Council, Savage and Watson point out that the fact that the devil is beheaded when one has true contrition leaves this question ambiguous. If contrition can "behead" the devil, i.e. undo the effects of mortal sin, why then is it necessary to show the head, i.e. expose sin through oral confession, in order to truly destroy the devil? As Savage and Watson suggest, however, "the most interesting thing is that the author is evidently not concerned to clarify this important theoretical matter, but proceeds to give detailed instructions as to the practice of oral confession without having first given any real account of its sacramental status." This is typical of the author's regard for the practical concerns of the anchoress's life, and his willingness to modify or overlook issues which are not immediately relevant to the discussion at hand. For a review of confession in *Ancrene Wisse*, see Georgianna, *The Solitary Self*, pp. 102ff., and Grayson, *Structure and Imagery*, Ch. 5. For a discussion of confession in the Middle Ages see T.N. Tentler, *Sin and Confession on the Eve of the Reformation*, (Princeton, 1977).



metaphor as a fierce verbal battle against fearsome fighters (SK 36-44 [S/W 268-269]).<sup>310</sup> The scholars face Katherine with immoderate pride and silent scorn. Katherine immediately turns their silence to her advantage, describing it as a shameful shivering behind shields. She invites them, *scheoteð forð sum word* ("shoot out some words") and challenges them:

*Þe meast kemppe is icud ant kenest of ow alle of þe creft, þe þet  
nometcudest is ant meast con, cume, cuðe þrof; ant þet he hæueð in heorte  
... take ut of his tunge, ant teueli wið me. (SK 44.301-304).*

whoever is known as the greatest champion among you and the keenest in skill of all of you, whoever is the most famous and best-known, come, prove it; and what he has in his heart ... let him unpack with his tongue, and debate with me [S/W 269].

The scholars still refuse to speak, a tactic which, as Savage and Watson point out, would in theory be to their advantage. However, "Katherine has held the initiative so totally up to this point ... that letting her speak first is evidently a major, and telltale, tactical blunder."<sup>311</sup> This is borne out by Katherine's first words as, relying on the angel's promise that Christ will fill her mouth with words which will put her enemies to flight, she renounces "the weapons of secular eloquence" and so

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<sup>310</sup> S/W note that the emphasis in the English text on the "doughtiness of the opposition" stresses Katherine's heroism (SK n. 17, p. 424), as does the sense of a heroic Christian past evoked by the historical setting and the words which the author puts into her mouth (SK n. 20, p. 425). For elements of the "heroic" in the anchoritic literature, see Watson, "Methods and Objectives," pp. 141f.; S/W General Introduction, pp. 18-20, 23 and SK n. 17, p. 424 and n. 20, p. 425; Price "SJ and Hagiographic Convention"; and Olsen, "Cynewulf's Autonomous Women."

<sup>311</sup> S/W SK n. 18, p. 424.

"deprives her opponents of their main weapon and shifts the debate onto her own ground, where the power of Christ is to be manifested: a shrewd and aggressive tactical manoeuvre."<sup>312</sup> After Katherine's speech, the scholars admit defeat without "shooting out" a single word, confessing that they do not know how to throw a word against her in war, and that even if they did, they would not dare (SK 70 [S/W 273]).<sup>313</sup>

The sword of the tongue, used as a symbol of words, is also a symbol of lust or lechery. In St. Margaret's confrontation with the devil in the form of a dragon, the dragon's tongue is described as a sharp sword with which he seeks to devour her (SM 58 [S/W 294]). The dragon's tongue is also described as flaming with fire, an archetypal symbol of lust. Similarly, Olibrius has previously threatened Margaret, vowing that if she will not give in to his desires voluntarily his sword will destroy and

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<sup>312</sup> S/W, SK n. 19, p. 424-425. Katherine appeals to Isaiah 29.4, "I will destroy the wisdom of these wise worldly men and cast down the cleverness of the worldly-wise." As S/W point out, this appeal is found in the context of St. Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 1.17, 25, where Paul rejects "eloquent wisdom," stating that "the foolishness of God is wiser than men." See the discussion of "wit" in *Sainte Katerine*, below pp. 199f.

<sup>313</sup> For a further discussion of the power of words, see below, pp. 194, 202f. The image of words as a spear or a sword, as well as the image of the sword of the tongue, ultimately derives from Ephesians 6.17, where the sword of the Spirit is identified as the word of God. This image is particularly appropriate to St. Katherine, who defeats her opponents in a verbal battle with the words supplied by God. Her tongue thus becomes the sword which is identified in Ephesians as the word of God.

devour her flesh (SM 50 [S/W 291]).<sup>314</sup> In this erotic combination of images, the sword of the tongue is transformed into a phallic sword which will violate the virgin in a symbolic rape.<sup>315</sup>

In a marvellously erotic scene, the dragon reaches out with his tongue to the bottom of Margaret's feet, and swallows her into his "huge belly" (*wide wombe*), symbolic of his limitless appetite or lust. Margaret, however, is armed with the sign of the cross, and his body bursts in two, enabling her to walk out of his belly unscathed by his lust, which is no match for her chastity (SM 60 [S/W 295]).

The erotic overtones of this passage are heightened by the imagery of feet and the belly, both of which are associated with lust. In the Bible, the feet are often found as a euphemism for sexual organs or for lechery. For example, in Ruth 3.4, Naomi counsels Ruth to uncover the feet of Boaz and lie with him in order to win him; as a husband (cp. Ruth 3.14); in 2 Samuel 11.8, David tells Uriah to go and wash his feet, i.e. to have intercourse with Bathsheba (cp. 2 Samuel 11.11); in Exodus 4.25 Zipporah touches Moses' feet with the foreskin of their firstborn son in a symbolic consummation through which Moses becomes a "bridegroom of blood" to her. This

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<sup>314</sup> This passage can be compared with the passage in *Ancrene Wisse* vii, where, in a completely different context, Christ threatens the anchoress with an equally phallic sword in order to compel her love. See below, p.388.

<sup>315</sup> The term "symbolic rape" is used in the discussion that follows to describe the sexual nature of the attack on the virgin martyrs. However, it is important to note that this is an *attempted* rape only, as no adversary ever succeeds in violating the virgins' chastity, either physical or spiritual.

latter passage seems to reflect a tradition in which circumcision was a fertility or pubic rite.<sup>316</sup> In *Ancrene Wisse* lust is described as a foot wound (AW iv.141-142 [S/W 148-149]; cp. AW iv.99-100 [S/W 119]),<sup>317</sup> and the fleshly anchoress is compared to an ostrich whose feet (i.e. lusts) drag her down (AW iii.70 [S/W 97-98]). Again, in *Ancrene Wisse* iii.72 [S/W 99], the flesh which goes wild and has its way kicks and strikes at Christ with its heel. This passage occurs in the context of a discussion of fleshly comfort, but, as the author later queries, who can be chaste in fleshly comfort (AW vi.188 [S/W 183])? A further example of this association between feet and lust is found in the episode where St. Margaret stamps with her heel on the demon who attacks her and her chastity. While the immediate reference here is to Genesis 3.15, the sexual overtones of Margaret's recent confrontation with the dragon are not absent.

The belly is also associated with the sexual organs in *Ancrene Wisse*. For example, *Ancrene Wisse* asserts:

*þe wombe pot þe walleð of metes. ⁊ of drunches. is se neh nehbur to þ  
fulrohe lim. þ ha dealeð þerwið þe brune of hire heate. (AW vi.188  
f.100a.1-3).*

the belly, a pot that boils with food and drink, is so near a neighbour to that ill-disciplined part that it shares with it the burning of its heat [S/W 183].

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<sup>316</sup> See the note to this passage in the *New Oxford Annotated Bible*, (New York, 1973); see also Isaiah 7.20.

<sup>317</sup> See below, pp. 213f.

The association of lechery and gluttony or eating is a medieval commonplace upon which the author of *Ancrene Wisse* does not hesitate to draw (AW ii.53-55 [S/W 85-86], iv.148 [S/W 153]); cp. AW iv.100-101 [S/W 119]). Gluttony thus becomes a symbol of sexual appetite and desire. The medieval kitchen is a symbol of both gluttony and lechery (cp. AW iv.111 [S/W 127]); as Locke points out, the cook is associated with the devil, and the kitchen with hell.<sup>318</sup>

The dragon's reaching out with his phallic sword-tongue to the bottom of Margaret's feet in order to swallow her into his belly is thus clearly a depiction of a symbolic rape of the virgin, as the dragon attempts to impose his lust upon her and consume her with it. However, the belly is also the womb, and as Margaret emerges from the belly (*wombe*) of the dragon unblemished, the sexual threat of the dragon who seeks to devour her is transformed into an image of rebirth. Elizabeth Robertson suggests that in this scene, the text "feminizes" temptation, transforming the virgin saint's confrontation with lust into an image of birth as Margaret symbolically gives birth to her own spirituality.<sup>319</sup> The dragon's voracious belly, which consumes Margaret's body in a scene symbolic of his sexual appetite, is destroyed as its body bursts "in the middle" (*omidhepes*) at the site of the belly. As Margaret emerges with her chastity intact, she transforms the lustful belly of the dragon into the virgin womb which gives birth to unblemished purity.

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<sup>318</sup> "Ganelon and the Cooks," *Symposium* 20 (1966), pp. 144-149.

<sup>319</sup> *Early English Devotional Prose*, p. 112.

In addition, the association of the belly/womb with the protection offered by the cross upon which Christ rested recalls the incarnation in which the anchoress participates through her imitation of the Virgin Mary in her chastity and in the eucharist.<sup>320</sup> Thus, Margaret immediately praises Christ, who was born from a maiden's womb, thanking him for her victory.

The protection afforded by the cross is also associated with the blazing light of chastity which overpowers the blinding fire of lust. The demon which appears immediately following the destruction of the dragon admits that his tactics, aimed at blinding the unwary with the fire of lust (SM 68-70 [S/W 299]), are overcome by the light which emanates from St. Margaret's body, especially the fingers which trace the sign of the cross:

*'Ne nawt nart tu, wummon, opre wummen ilich. Me þuncheð þet tu schinest schevre þen þe sunne; ah ouer alle þine limen þe leitið of leome, þe fingres se freoliche me þuncheð, ant se feire, ant se briht blikinde, þet tu þe wið blescedest ant makedest te merke of þe mihti rode þe reauede me mi broðer, ant me wið bale bondes bitterliche bindest, þet Ich lokin ne mei, swa þet liht leomeð ant leiteð, me þuncheð.'* (SM 64.34-66.3).

Woman, you're not at all like other women. It seems to me that you shine brighter than the sun—but especially your body, which blazes with light. They seem so lively to me, so beautifully lovely, and so brightly shining—the fingers that you blessed yourself with and made the mark of the mighty cross, which took my brother from me, and which bind me bitterly with terrible bonds—that I cannot look at them, the light seems to me so blazing and brilliant [S/W 297].

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<sup>320</sup> See below, pp. 338, 341f.

Here, the defeat of the dragon (the demon's "brother") is specifically associated with the blazing light from Margaret's fingers which traced the sign of the cross as the dragon rushed at her. Margaret shines "brighter than the sun," and therefore is "not like other women." This image, combined with the suggestion of Margaret's encounter with the dragon as a form of rebirth, recalls the "woman clothed in the sun" of Revelation 12.1-17. The woman is in pain, labouring in childbirth, when a dragon appears ready to devour her child. The dragon in Revelation is specifically identified as Satan, and the child is clearly a type of Christ. The woman flees into the wilderness, where she is protected and nourished by angels. Margaret, in her encounter with the dragon, is clothed in the sun of chastity and the cross as she labours to give birth to her own spirituality, a spirituality which is presented as a form of *imitatio Christi*. Just as the woman of Revelation finds protection and nourishment in the wilderness to which she flees, Margaret is protected and nurtured in the wilderness of her temptation and imprisonment.

The phallic threat of Olibrius' sword is thwarted as conclusively as that of the dragon's sword-tongue. Olibrius attempts to fulfil his threat through torture as Margaret is stripped and beaten, and her flesh is torn with iron hooks. The onlookers lament the beauty she is losing and the happiness and wealth which she is forgoing in her refusal to love Olibrius, not realizing the spiritual beauty, happiness and wealth that she would forfeit by giving in to his desires (52 [S/W 292]). They do not know that the iron hooks with which she is torn on earth foreshadow the iron

hooks which will tear at her persecutors in hell. After Margaret's victory over the dragon, she is tortured further as she is stripped and burned with torches and immersed in a vat of water. However, she emerges unscathed from all of these torments. Margaret, even more than the other virgin martyrs, takes complete control over her persecutions:

Margaret's physical power extends even to the inanimate world. She is able to transform potentially dangerous elements, fire and water, into spiritual experiences; she transforms fire into the fire of the love of God, and water into the water of baptism.<sup>321</sup>

Thus, her torment is transformed into a personal Pentecost.<sup>322</sup>

Finally, with a hot heart, crazed with anger and lust, Olibrius orders Margaret's death by the sword in a last attempt to defeat the virgin whose chastity has overcome all his efforts to violate it (SM 76 [S/W 302]). Ironically, however, her beheading, which Olibrius threatens as the ultimate triumph of lust, the decisive and irrevocable rape of the virgin who has thwarted the man who seeks to control her by defiling her maidenhood, is in fact an acknowledgement that her chastity has defeated Olibrius' lust. Far from being her defeat, her death becomes the means by which she triumphs.

Similarly, Katherine is promised by the angel that she will escape the violence of her battle on earth by a brave death (SK 38 [S/W 268]), a promise which is

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<sup>321</sup> Robertson, *Early English Devotional Prose*, p. 114.

<sup>322</sup> See below, pp. 263 and 393.



fulfilled as she is beheaded. In the context, her beheading is also a bestowal of citizenship, as she is received into the heavenly Jerusalem, prefigured by the city built in the heart.<sup>323</sup> Heffernan notes that a common feature of the Lives of female saints is the renunciation of citizenship, or the rejection of the state, in favour of a new citizenship in the city of God.<sup>324</sup> This is part and parcel of the texts' emphasis on the fact that in turning to Christ, the maiden must first turn from "totemic figures" of power: father, lover/husband, state/emperor. The conflict between the saint and her male antagonists thus becomes a complex allegory exemplifying the contrast between the two cities of Jerusalem and Babylon, identified in *Hali Meidhad* as the conflict between chastity and lust, between the virgin and the devil.<sup>325</sup> The maiden's autonomy and choice are stressed: in choosing virginity, the maiden chooses Christ over an earthly husband or lover, and proclaims her allegiance to Jerusalem over Babylon. In so doing, she asserts her independence from conventional figures of worldly power. This theme of choice runs throughout the saints' Lives. Ironically, it is the phallic sword with which the virgins' adversaries attempt to remove their choice which becomes the means of the virgins' affirmation of their right to choose.

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<sup>323</sup> Cp. the execution of Paul, who, according to tradition, was beheaded. Under Roman law as a Roman citizen he had the right to death by the sword rather than crucifixion.

<sup>324</sup> *Sacred Biography*, pp. 267-272.

<sup>325</sup> Heffernan, *Sacred Biography*, p. 267.

In the story of St. Juliana as well, the sword which is intended to be the maiden's doom ironically becomes her deliverance. As Olsen points out, for Juliana virginity is a form of personal autonomy as she asserts her independence from father and husband/lover. Juliana rejects not only marriage but the control which Eleusius and her father attempt to exert by forcing her into marriage. Her death thus becomes the final affirmation of her control over her own body and soul: "She views virginity ... as an ideal she can attain by goading her father and suitor into killing her."<sup>326</sup> Thus, when Eleusius orders Juliana's death she is glad, for, as the narrator tells us, this is what she wanted (SJ 63 [S/W 319]; cp. SJ 17 [S/W 309]).

The torture of St. Juliana is presented as a sexual attack, as Juliana is stripped and beaten, spread-eagled upon the earth. Indeed, the exhibition of the naked female body of the saint and her exposure to the gaze of the onlookers and the reader becomes a kind of "gang rape" as the torment which is prompted by Eleusius' lust becomes an expression of the lust of the men who are "spurred" (*spurede*) on by the devil to turn the wheel (SJ 51 [S/W 317]).<sup>327</sup>

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<sup>326</sup> Olsen, "Cynewulf's Autonomous Women," p. 229. Olsen points out that Juliana's victory, like Katherine's, is achieved through word, albeit in a different way. See below, pp. 194, 202f.

<sup>327</sup> Cp. the anchoress who allows the devil to ride her and is spurred into lust (HM 12 [S/W 229]). Wogan-Browne raises the related questions of the culpability of both the narrator and the reader in their seemingly voyeuristic participation in the senseless infliction of violence upon the exposed female body, and the extent to which the saints' Lives "encode gender-specific violence." She points out the need for further study of the extent to which these texts offer an alternative for women (i.e. in their presentation of a female "voice" backed by the miraculous authority of God),

The attempted "rape" of Juliana is as much an exertion of control as an expression of lust. As they beat her, Eleusius' men demand that Juliana "submit to and obey our will" (*to ure wil buhen ant beien* SJ 23 [S/W 310]).<sup>328</sup> This is consistent with the suggestion made by Olsen that Juliana's rejection of Eleusius' offer of marriage is also a rejection of his (and Africanus') "heroic" values, i.e. his view that a woman must be ruled by a man. When Africanus fails to persuade Juliana by threats or by torture, he states that he will "surrender" (*biteache*) her body to Eleusius so that he might destroy her "just as he wants" (*as his ahne wil is* SJ 15 [S/W 309]). Here, Juliana is passed over from the control of her father to the control of her suitor, in an attempt to subdue her physically. In preserving her virginity, therefore, Juliana also asserts her personal autonomy.<sup>329</sup>

Symbolic rapes abound in the Lives of the virgin martyrs, where the maidens' sexuality is attacked as they are spread-eagled naked on the ground and beaten, or tied naked to a pillar and scourged. Like St. Margaret, St. Katherine is stripped and beaten (SK 80 [S/W 275]). The threats of St. Juliana's adversaries are also presented as a phallic threat, issuing in a symbolic rape of the virgin saint in order to subdue her bid for independence by violating her chastity. The symbols used to describe

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and how far they embody or defy traditional generic limitations ("The Virgin's Tale").

<sup>328</sup> Cp. the anchoress who bows (*buhed*) to the devil through lust and allows him to leap on her and ride her (AW iv.137-138 [S/W 145-146]), and spur her on to do his will (HM 12 [S/W 229]), discussed above, pp. 101f.

<sup>329</sup> Olsen, "Cynewulf's Autonomous Women," pp. 227,229.

both threats and torture are thus symbols associated with lust. In *Seine Juliene* 11 [S/W 308], Africanus warns Juliana that if she does not give in and marry Eleusius, *ich schal leute wilde deor toluken ant toteore þe ant zeoue þi flesch fode to fuheles of þe luftu* ("I will let wild beasts rend you and tear you to pieces, and give your flesh as food for the birds of the air."<sup>330</sup> Africanus swears by *þe drihtfulu godd Appolo, mi lauere, ant mi deore leafdi, þe deorewurde Diane, þet ich muche luuie* ("the worshipful god Apollo, my Lord, and my dear Lady the precious Diana whom I greatly love") in a parody of Juliana's commitment to Christ and the Virgin Mary, on whom her maidenhood is patterned. The appeal to Diana, the pagan virgin huntress, in support of Eleusius' lustful pursuit of Juliana again combines images of virginity and eroticism as it emphasizes the central issue of paganism's challenge to chastity and the faith which chastity exemplifies.

Africanus' threat is fulfilled, as he submits Juliana's naked body to a severe beating and then turns Juliana over to the "heathen hound," Eleusius, who has her stripped naked, stretched on the earth, and beaten (SJ 15-23 [S/W 308-310]). Her flesh is torn further as she is tortured by the wheel which drags at her limbs and crushes her bones.<sup>331</sup> As Juliana's tortures increase in violence, so too does the

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<sup>330</sup> Cp. Maxentius' threats to his queen (SK 108-110 [S/W 280]) and Porphirius (SK 116-118 [S/W 281]), and Olibrius' threat to Margaret (SM 50 [S/W 291]).

<sup>331</sup> Cp. SK 102-104 [S/W 279], where a similar wheel is prepared for St. Katherine, but is destroyed by an angel with a clap of thunder before she can be placed in it. It is from this account that the wheel has come to be known as the "Katherine wheel," an iconographical symbol of St. Katherine. For a discussion of the

characterization of Eleusius become increasingly bestial. However, the physical rending of Juliana's flesh by wild beasts, with which Africanus threatens her, and which is realized in her torture, is far preferable to the spiritual rending to which she would be condemned if she gave in to Africanus' demands and Eleusius' desire, which can be paralleled to the wild beasts which threaten the anchoress in the wilderness (i.e. sins and temptation). Like the anchoress who is torn in her ascetic life, through her defense of her chastity in the face of torture Juliana avoids the fate of the lustful Eleusius, who ironically reaps the reward for the violence he inflicts upon the body of St. Juliana by being torn apart by wild beasts in the wilderness, in a literal prefiguration of his punishment in hell (SJ 69-71 [S/W 321]).

The forcible "disrobing" of the virgin martyr is identified by Heffernan as part of the convention female saint's life, and is central to the "eroticising" of the narrative.<sup>332</sup> Although the typological paradigm for the stripping of the virgin martyr is Christ's disrobing before the crucifixion, the image of the naked female body contains erotic overtones which are entirely absent in Christ's nakedness on the cross. Heffernan argues that conventional disrobing scenes combine images of

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relationship between the wheels of *Seinte Katerine* and *Seinte Juliene*, see d'Ardenne and Dobson, *Seinte Katerine*, pp. xxxix-xl.

<sup>332</sup> *Sacred Biography*, pp. 278f. Wogan-Browne suggests that Heffernan's use of the detached term "disrobing" is an example of "modern hagiographic scholarship's intellectual 'neutrality' or 'objectivity' (amounting to a 'tacit acceptance of patriarchal power politics')" ("The Virgin's Tale"). The term "disrobing" is certainly a rather tame way to describe the forced and public stripping and degradation of the female body.

subordination and physical attraction, calling attention to the beauty of the maiden's naked body as an object of sexual arousal which spurs the appetite of the torturers. The physical abuse of the naked body is part of the equation between subordination and physical attraction which typically characterizes such narratives. The torture of the maiden is presented as a struggle for sexual dominance as the disrobing challenges her commitment to her virginity and her nakedness emphasizes her vulnerability. Thus, not only is the virgin's death an admission of defeat on the part of her torturers, but each separate incident of torture and abuse becomes a triumph of the maiden's chastity, which is preserved unblemished.<sup>333</sup>

A second element which Heffernan identifies as part of the conventional "eroticizing" of the female saint's life is the torture of the breasts. This convention is implicit in *Seinte Juliene*, when Africanus threatens Juliana with a beating which will make her wish that she "never had the misfortune to be born into this world a woman, with a woman's breasts" (*were wummon of wummonne bosum to wraþer heale eauer iboren i þe world* SJ 15 [S/W 308]). It is in *Seinte Katerine*, however, that this motif becomes explicit, as Maxentius' queen is tortured in a symbolic rape, in which Katherine is vicariously attacked through her protegee.<sup>334</sup> After Queen Augusta witnesses the miraculous destruction of wheel which was to have been Katherine's doom, she publicly proclaims her faith and asserts her independence from Maxentius,

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<sup>333</sup> Heffernan, *Sacred Biography*, pp. 279-282.

<sup>334</sup> See Wogan-Browne, "The Virgin's Tale."

inspiring many of the onlookers to acknowledge the "maiden's God" (SK 106-108 [S/W 279-280]). Augusta's rejection of Maxentius as a husband implies that she now aspires to the chaste condition of the widow, and her desire for chastity becomes a public affirmation of her faith, just as Katherine's virginity is a public symbol of her commitment to her heavenly spouse. Maxentius' response is insane rage, and he consigns Augusta to death by the sword. First, however, in order to make her suffer cruelly, he orders her breasts to be torn off (SK 110 [S/W 280]).

The choice of this particular punishment combines the imagery of chastity and fertility found, for example, in the legend of St. Agatha, to which the anchoress is referred in *Ancrene Wisse* vi.185 [S/W 181], and vi.188 [S/W 183]. Travormine points out that the imagery contained in the *Acts of St. Agatha* suggests fertility and nourishment, characterizing Agatha as a *virgo mater*.<sup>335</sup> She proposes that the use of chants drawn from the Breviary offices of St. Agatha (among others) in the ceremony of the solemn consecration of virgins, in which nuns made their vows of perpetual virginity, presents St. Agatha as a particularly appropriate model for the virgin to imitate.<sup>336</sup>

Augusta is thus attacked in the part of her body which symbolizes both chastity and motherhood, purity and feeding. Heffernan notes that this association of chastity

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<sup>335</sup> "Of Maidenhood and Maternity: Liturgical Hagiography and the Medieval Ideal of Virginity," *ABR* 31 (1980) p. 391.

<sup>336</sup> "Of Maidenhood and Maternity," pp. 384-386.

and motherhood is an important theme in the Lives of female virgins, part of a *topos* of transformation from virgin to bride to mother. The attack on the breast is thus not only an erotic appeal to male sexual aggression, but also a sign of election, underscoring the miraculous metamorphosis of the virgin into nurturing mother:<sup>337</sup>

the convention works by juxtaposing apparent opposites, virgin and mother, and the clash of opposites proposes that there is a profound identity which, although not apparent, does unite them.<sup>338</sup>

Thus, for example, the story of St. Margaret, the chaste virgin *par excellence*, is characterized by images of rebirth, and the lustful dragon's belly is transformed into a womb. Margaret is the patron saint of childbirth, and prays at her death that Christ will help any woman in labour who recalls his name and her (Margaret's) pain (SM 78 [S/W 303]).

This identity between virginity and images of motherhood is manifest in *Seinte Katerine* through another conventional device identified by Heffernan, the miraculous flow of milk from the maiden's wounds.<sup>339</sup> After Katherine's death milk flows from her severed head, bearing witness to her "white maidenhood" (SK 128 [S/W 284]). The connection between the woman's body as food and erotic spirituality is made by Bynum, who suggests in addition that fasting, like virginity, was an assertion

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<sup>337</sup> Heffernan, *Sacred Biography*, p. 283.

<sup>338</sup> Heffernan, *Sacred Biography*, p. 285.

<sup>339</sup> Heffernan notes that the miraculous flow of milk from the maiden's wounds, while not a common motif, is found in the South English Legendary account of Christina of Markyate (*Sacred Biography*, p. 288).



of personal autonomy for medieval women.<sup>340</sup> Thus Queen Augusta's declaration of her independence from Maxentius and her challenge to his authority as both husband and ruler is punished by an assault on that part of her body which represents her autonomous role as nurturer, as well as female convert.

In addition, the association of chastity and motherhood recalls the incarnation, effected by a virgin, through which the transformation of human nature is achieved. The maiden and the mother both bear children, one spiritually and one biologically.<sup>341</sup> The spiritual offspring of the maiden in the anchoritic texts are identified as virtues. However, the virgin anchoress also re-enacts the incarnation as she is spiritually impregnated with Christ in the eucharist.<sup>342</sup> The virgin thus emulates the Virgin Mary, the archetypal virgin-mother.

The maiden's imitation of Mary also recalls the Virgin's role as mediatrix, a role which is explicitly associated with her motherhood and is symbolized by her bared breast. In medieval iconography, Mary is often represented exposing her breast as she intercedes for mankind, just as Christ is pictured displaying his wounded side as he pleads for sinners.<sup>343</sup> The role of mediatrix is taken on by the virgin

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<sup>340</sup> *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women*, (Los Angeles, 1987), pp. 189-194, 219ff., 269ff.

<sup>341</sup> Heffernan, *Sacred Biography*, p. 285.

<sup>342</sup> See below, Chapter Five.

<sup>343</sup> See Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, pp.270-272, and plates 23-30. See especially plate 28, a mid-fifteenth century miniature from the Turin-Milan Book of

saints as they become examples of the salvation and Christian heroism open to all Christians.<sup>344</sup> This is especially evident in *Seinte Katerine*, which consistently presents Katherine as a mediator between heaven and earth.<sup>345</sup> At her death, the author describes two related miracles: one the miraculous flow of milk from her severed head, and the other the burial of her body by angels on Mount Sinai, where Moses, the mediator *par excellence* and paradigmatic type of Christ, received the law.

The virgin martyrs thus provide the anchoress with examples of virginity assailed yet triumphant, transforming spiritual assault into spiritual regeneration. Like the anchoress, the virgin martyrs are attacked and besieged. St. Juliana is cast into prison, alone in the darkness, "entirely besieged and surrounded" (*bisteæbet an/ bistonden* SJ 27 [S/W 311]), as the anchoress is besieged in the tower of her virginity and in her anchorhouse (HM 2-4 [S/W 225-226]; AW vii.199f. [S/W 190f.]; LLe 16.10-14 [S/W 329]). Both Juliana and Margaret are attacked by fearful demons, and Katherine is drawn into a violent battle of words. As Savage and Watson note, the military imagery which pervades *Seinte Katerine* is an important link between Katherine's fight with the scholars and the anchoress's own battles with the devil and

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Hours depicting the "Double Intercession," with God in the center enthroned as ruler and judge. On His left is Christ exposing his wounded side, and on His right Mary lifts her bared breast.

<sup>344</sup> Heffernan, *Sacred Biography*, p. 286.

<sup>345</sup> See S/W SK n. 32, p. 427.

her own sinful impulses in *Ancrene Wisse* and *Hali Meidhad* (SK n. 8, p. 423), an observation which is equally true of the other saints' Lives in the *Katherine Group*.

The human adversaries faced by the virgin martyrs represent the devil, and it is made clear that the devil is the real threat.<sup>346</sup> Sexual sin and the threat it poses to the virgin martyrs and, by implication, the anchoress, become symbolic of anything which threatens the purity of body and heart. The devil thus attacks the virgin anchoress through temptation, lust, and sin. The anchoress is told to expect such attacks and is upheld by the examples of the virgin martyrs who act out the advice which she is given in *Ancrene Wisse* concerning the defense of her chastity.<sup>347</sup> The anchoress is thus inspired by the examples of the virgin martyrs and draws upon their experience as well as the advice found in *Ancrene Wisse*, *Hali Meidhad*, and *Sawles Warde*.

#### EXCURSUS: SEXUAL VIOLENCE AND THE FEMALE READER

The issue of the way in which the female body is presented in these texts written for a female audience is critical and is only recently beginning to attract attention. The question of how far the saints' Lives, with their tacit approval of

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<sup>346</sup> See Olsen, "Cynewulf's Autonomous Women," p. 229 and Bugge, *Virginitas*, pp. 52f. Olsen and Bugge's observations occur in discussions of Cynewulf's *Juliana*, but are equally applicable to the story of *Seinte Juliene* found in the *Katherine Group*.

<sup>347</sup> See S/W, Appendix, p. 1, and Watson, "Methods and Objectives."

violence to women and voyeuristic treatment of women's bodies, can offer a valid alternative to women has been raised by Wogan-Browne.<sup>348</sup> Does their affirmation of the power of the woman's voice and the confirmation of the saints' choice of a heavenly bridegroom over an earthly one by the hand and voice of God offset the violence which is inflicted upon the female body and the treatment of the saints as objects by their tormentors?

The erotic scenes of extreme violence to the female body in the saints' Lives may seem to modern readers to reflect a kind of medieval voyeurism, but as Savage and Watson suggest, the original context must be taken into account. The saints' Lives provide a graphic illustration of the triumph of Christian faith over lust and paganism, giving the audience confidence in the saints' power as intercessors. As well, they provide their readers with an account not only of the power of the forces arrayed against the saints (and therefore also against the anchoress), but of the weakness of the forces of the devil in the face of physical and moral chastity. The saints' Lives thus offer encouragement to the embattled anchoress, assailed by sin and temptation. Finally, these texts elevate the anchoritic life, with their vivid portrayal of its struggle and its power.<sup>349</sup>

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<sup>348</sup> See "Saints' Lives and the Female Reader," *Forum for Modern Language Studies* 27.4 (1991) 314-332, and "The Virgin's Tale."

<sup>349</sup> See S/W Appendix, Ed. Note, pp. 285-286.

Heffernan suggests that the physical abuse which forms the central testing of the virgin is part of the pre-requisite for the transformation from virgin to bride to mother which characterizes so many Lives of female saints in the middle ages. He argues that the connection between salvation and suffering is directly connected with female sexuality:<sup>350</sup>

The attainment of the chaste bridal veil is accomplished only if the maid continually places her virginity at risk. Her sanctity is not achieved by virtue of her virginity, but at the risk of it; it is only a beleaguered virginity that is able to gain the crown.<sup>351</sup>

Thus, the saints' Lives emphasize the jeopardy in which female sexuality is placed through erotic depictions of symbolic sexual attack. Further, he argues that the presentation of the virgin's progression to bride and mother offers a view of the virginal life which is potentially as fulfilling as that of wife and mother.<sup>352</sup>

Wogan-Browne points out that in spite of the extreme physical violence in the saints' Lives, they do affirm the female voice, as the chaste saints are repeatedly and publicly vindicated by hand and voice of God:

these texts, with their heroines' supernaturally underwritten insistence that when women say no, no is what they mean, can offer serious encouragement to female readers.<sup>353</sup>

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<sup>350</sup> Heffernan, *Sacred Biography*, p. 277.

<sup>351</sup> Heffernan, *Sacred Biography*, p. 278.

<sup>352</sup> *Sacred Biography*, p. 286.

<sup>353</sup> "The Virgin's Tale."

In addition, the inadequacies of the virgins' suitors makes them look foolish, reinforcing the strength and wisdom of the virgins themselves. The virgin martyrs' affirmation of their independence and their worth in the sight of God can be appropriated by their female readers in their own struggles against sin and temptation. The same is true for *Hali Meidhad's* presentation of the contrast between the "violence and sexual harassment" of secular marriage and the peace and freedom of the virgin who is free of a husband's demands and does no housework.<sup>354</sup>

In addition, the saints' Lives affirm the choice which the anchoress has made between the anchorhouse and the world, between Christ and an earthly husband. They validate the anchoress's right to choose, even in the face of extreme opposition, both spiritual and physical. The violent opposition on the part of family and officialdom faced by the virgin martyrs is not without its counterpart in twelfth century England, as the Life of Christina of Markyate attests. The saints' Lives of the *Katherine Group* thus unmask contemporary social conventions, asserting that women do not have to subscribe to the treatment of themselves and their bodies as objects, that women have the right to choose if and to whom they will be subject.

Wogan-Browne suggests:

To the potential objection that saints' lives merely replace patriarchal constraint by a figurative patriarchy of God the Father and his Bridegroom son, it needs to be said that to problematise the choice for

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<sup>354</sup> "The Virgin's Tale."

women *at all* is already to do as much as can be done. Choice metaphorically and allegorically conceived within patriarchal structures still makes choice explicit.<sup>355</sup>

However, Wogan-Browne also raises the difficult question of how far these texts, which so graphically depict physical violence against women, can speak to women in any authentic way.<sup>356</sup> It is important to note that the sexual violence which is presented in *Hali Meidhad* as an alternative to the virgin lifestyle is depicted in the saints' Lives as an integral part of the choice which the virgin has made. Heffernan notes that the erotic overtones of the testing of the saint's chastity grows out of her torture, which is inseparable from the debasement of her sexuality.<sup>357</sup> In a modern context, such scenes could only be described as pornographic. The question of how far this degradation of female sexuality can be redeemed for the female reader is a crucial one.

Heffernan deals with the question from the point of view of the lay reader, both male and female. He points out that these texts exemplify the medieval polarity between flesh and spirit, since female sexuality is presented as a liability, the embodiment of woman's potential for sin.<sup>358</sup> He raises the reasonable question:

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<sup>355</sup> "Saints' Lives and the Female Reader," *Forum for Modern Language Studies* 27 (1991), p. 323.

<sup>356</sup> "The Virgin's Tale."

<sup>357</sup> *Sacred Biography*, p. 277.

<sup>358</sup> Heffernan, *Sacred Biography*, p. 282.

"if the body is the locus of such 'muck,' why did it take centre stage in these biographies?" The answer Heffernan proposes is that in the titillation rendered by the erotic tortures of their heroines, these texts provided an outlet for sexuality, while at the same time producing a religiosity of shame concerning sexuality.<sup>359</sup> The main difficulty with Heffernan's argument in the case of the Lives of the *Katherine Group* is that nowhere in these texts is there any sense of shame on the part of the virgin martyrs, with whom the audience would most readily identify. The exposure of their naked bodies to public gaze is met with defiance, as each incident of sexual aggression on the part of their persecutors becomes a triumph of the virgins' chastity and the faith which that chastity denotes.

Wogan-Browne suggests that the intellectual "neutrality" displayed by modern scholarship (as in Heffernan) amounts to a tacit acceptance of the extreme violence presented in these texts, a begging of this critical question which must be addressed.<sup>360</sup> Can this violence be understood in a way which reduces the devaluation of female sexuality and affirms the female body, or are these texts simply a reflection of patriarchal power structures which relegate the female body to the status of an object to be desired and mistreated at whim?

In the case of the saints' Lives of the *Katherine Group*, it is important to consider the presentation of female sexuality in the texts with which they circulated.

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<sup>359</sup> Heffernan, *Sacred Biography*, p. 282.

<sup>360</sup> "The Virgin's Tale."



The body which is so despised as the source of sin, particularly sexual sin, is at the same time the body which symbolizes the anchoress's participation in the paradox of the Incarnation, in which sinful human flesh becomes the vehicle for the redemption of the world. In addition, the context of the trend of erotic spirituality which became prevalent in mystical writing (especially by women) in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries must be taken into account. The erotic imagery which seems so crude in the stories of the virgin martyrs becomes elevated to sublime heights as these women contemplate their mystical union with the heavenly Bridegroom. The tortures of all three virgin martyrs are seen as a form of *imitatio Christi*, an identification with Christ who was also stripped and bound to a pillar where he was beaten with knotted whips, his body torn and bleeding (WLd 33.472-481 [S/W 254]).<sup>361</sup> Their identification with Christ in his suffering becomes the vehicle for union with him in love, a union which is profoundly rooted in the body. The female body thus becomes not only the focus of lechery's attack on virginity, but also the locus of the virgin's union with Christ.<sup>362</sup>

In addition, the scenes of violence in the Saints' Lives must be read in their literary context, in terms of the themes and motifs which they portray. The Lives of

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<sup>361</sup> Cp. also SM 78 [S/W 302], where Margaret is bound so tightly that blood bursts from her nails, as it did from Christ's (WLd 32.467-469 [S/W 254]; LLe 18.62-64 [S/W 330]). Juliana, however, binds the demon who accosts her until his nails bleed (SJ 41-43 [S/W 315]).

<sup>362</sup> See Chapter Five, below.

the virgin martyrs use the descriptions of the torture of the maidens' bodies to introduce images which reinforce the themes of the narrative as a whole. The symbolic "rapes" of the virgin martyrs are used to present the unique power of maidenhood, as each saint repeatedly and consistently vanquishes her opponents. In the process, each Life explores its own particular themes and images. St. Juliana's triumphs stress the maiden's personal autonomy, as she goads her torturers into killing her and thus releasing her from their demands. St. Margaret's manipulation of her adversaries and their torments highlights the themes of transformation and rebirth, as the instruments of torture are transformed into images of spiritual renewal. The devil himself is forced to serve the maiden's cause, as the voracious belly of the dragon becomes the womb which gives birth to Margaret's confidence in her own invincibility. The story of St. Katherine combines the image of the virgin with images of motherhood, with a special emphasis on the dispensation of wisdom and nurture through the image of the maternal breast.

While one must beware of imposing a twentieth century "raised consciousness" on thirteenth century women readers, the question of the message which these texts transmit is still a crucial one. It is clear that these texts reflect a very realistic sense of the danger into which women placed themselves by asserting their independence from father, lover, husband, and, in some cases (for example Christina of Markyate), church. It is not enough simply to maintain that these texts conform to a literary convention, and that the violence which they present is stylized. Nonetheless, it is

apparent that throughout the saints' Lives, it is the virgin "victim" who is in control, as she transforms the instruments of her torture into the vehicles of her redemption. In addition, the saints' Lives affirm the choice which the maiden has made between Christ and an earthly lover, between the anchorhouse and the world. They validate the woman's right to choose, even in the face of extreme opposition, both spiritual and physical. The saints' Lives of the *Katherine Group* thus recognize the potential for violence as a fact of women's existence and offer a mechanism for coping with it, affirming for the female anchoritic reader that her choice is vindicated by God, and that in maintaining her chastity she takes control over a body which is used and abused by others as a "right," as well as over her own soul.

#### THE MAIDEN'S ARSENAL

##### THE POWER OF VIRGINITY

Just as the weapons wielded by the senses must be controlled by the senses, so the most effective defense against the devil's assault on the anchoress's chastity is chastity itself. Virginity is thus both what is attacked and the means by which the anchoress repels the attack. The power of maidenhood is the implicit subject of much of the anchoritic literature, and frequently the explicit subject (e.g. in the Lives

of the virgin martyrs). Maidenhood is ranked as the power above all powers, through which the world is redeemed (HM 10 [S/W 228]): humanity is reborn through the power of maidenhood in Christ's birth from a maiden (SM 72 [S/W 300]). Virginité thus has the power to transform: it can make an earthly man or woman into an angel, an oppressor into a servant, an enemy into a friend. For example, the flesh, often the anchoress's worst enemy, becomes the instrument of her elevation when, by keeping it pure and unbroken, she becomes equal with an angel (HM 12 [S/W 229]).<sup>363</sup> Above all, maidenhood is the power most beloved by Christ (SM 44 [S/W 288]).

Virginité thus confers enormous power on the anchoress. The virgin martyrs whom the anchoress is encouraged to emulate are victorious in their battles with human and demonic adversaries by virtue of their extreme dedication to the preservation of their physical virginité, and it is that physical chastity which their persecutors seek to destroy.<sup>364</sup> For example, St. Margaret bases her plea for strength on the virtue of her chastity: she prays that she might keep her maidenhood unstained and that Christ will manifest his power in her so that she might overcome the devil as an example to future maidens to put their trust in Christ. Likewise,

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<sup>363</sup> See the discussion of the angelic life, below, pp. 294f.

<sup>364</sup> For a discussion of the connection between chastity and a heroic portrayal of women in history, literature and, more specifically, saints' lives, from the eighth to the twelfth century, see Jane Chance Nitzsche, "The Anglo-Saxon Woman as Hero: the Chaste Queen and the Masculine Woman Saint," *Allegorica* 5(1981 for 1980) 139-48.

Margaret's persecutor, Olibrius, plots not how to convert or persuade Margaret, but how to defile her maidenhood. In violating her virginity, he intends to destroy her and neutralize her amazing power.

*Seinte Margarete* is perhaps the crudest account of the "holy spitfire" who defeats the devil with a physical strength granted to her by virtue of her physical chastity. Although she makes brief mention of the preservation of wit and wisdom (SM 48 [S/W 289])<sup>365</sup> and loyalty to her heavenly spouse (SM 50 [S/W 290-291], 56 [S/W 293]), it is her physical virginity which is stressed, and its power is manifested in a physical way. The author of *Seinte Margarete* graphically describes how the "mild" maiden grabs the demon by the hair, throws him to the ground and sets her right foot on his neck. She proceeds to interrogate him, emphasizing her victory periodically by stamping on him (SM 62-64 [S/W 296]). The demon who is overcome by St. Juliana finds himself in a similar fix, and appeals to her: *Ne beoð cristene men ... merciabe ant milzfule? Ant tu art bute reowde* ("Aren't Christian people ... merciful and mild? And you're pitiless!" SJ 47 [S/W 316]).

St. Margaret's demon acknowledges that no one has been able to overcome him except Margaret, affirming that she is able to do so because Christ lives in her (SM 64 [S/W 297], 70 [S/W 300]). Margaret specifically identifies her physical chastity as the source of Christ's presence in her, and thus of her enormous strength

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<sup>365</sup> Cp. *Seinte Katerine*, where the question of wisdom dominates Katherine's conflict with Maxentius and his minions.

(SM 70-72 [S/W 300]). Her assessment of the situation is confirmed by the demon, who attests that Margaret has overcome the dragon with the might of maidenhood and with the cross. The power of the cross binds and blinds the demons of hell; the sign of the cross which Margaret makes ruins him completely (SM 62 [S/W 296], 64-66 [S/W 297], 70 [S/W 299]). The power of the virgin is based, at least in part, upon this power of the cross and the victory of the incarnation which the cross symbolizes. Thus, Margaret prays that Christ will manifest his power in her to preserve her virginity.

Margaret's attitude after overcoming the dragon is interesting. Although when she defeats the dragon she pays lip service to orthodoxy by attributing her might to Christ, she does so in a triumphant victory song where she crows: *Ich habbe adun þe drake idust ... Ich am kempe* ("I have thrown down the dragon ... I am champion" SM 60-62 [S/W 294-295], emph. mine). This is quite a contrast to Juliana, who stresses that it is Christ who has overcome the demon: *He, kempene king, haueð to-dei ouercumen helles bule, Belial* ("he, king of champions, has today overcome Belial, the bull of hell" SJ 49 [S/W 316], emph. mine).<sup>366</sup>

St. Juliana also defeats a demon in a physical contest, triumphing over him in a wrestling match. When a demon appears in her prison cell, she beats him with her

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<sup>366</sup> Cp. also the depiction of St. Sarah in AW iv.121 [S/W 134], discussed above, p. 106. The author of *Ancrene Wisse*, concerned with the sin of pride, is very careful to portray Sarah as resisting the temptation to pride by attributing her whole victory to God's strength.

own bonds and binds his hands until his nails run blood before dragging him out for all to see (SJ 41-43 [S/W 315]).<sup>367</sup> Juliana stresses the importance of trusting in Christ for her victory, as does Margaret (SM 54 [S/W 292]; SJ 49 [S/W 316]; cp. 41 [S/W 314]). However, Juliana is much more self-effacing than Margaret. Juliana's prayers are more a plea for help than Margaret's, which seem to be a demand for personal vindication; where Margaret asks publicly for the power to overcome the devil as an example to future generations (SM 54 [S/W 292]), Juliana is instructed to seize the demon by an angelic voice which assures her that God will give her the strength she requires, after she prays silently in her heart (SJ 31-33 [S/W 312-313]). Thus, as Price notes, Juliana's prayer is more a quiet prayer for strength than a request for an Amazonian triumph such as Margaret seeks.<sup>368</sup>

The indwelling of Christ which is the source of Margaret's strength is given more attention in the story of Juliana, who focuses on interior virtues.<sup>369</sup> Margaret

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<sup>367</sup> For the image of nails running blood from tight binding see SM 78 [S/W 302]; WLd 32.467-469 [S/W 254]; and *below*, n. 361.

<sup>368</sup> "SJ and Hagiographic Convention," p. 47.

<sup>369</sup> See Price, "SJ and Hagiographic Convention," *passim*. For example, Juliana goes each day to church to study God's teaching (SJ 7 [S/W 307]); she agrees to marry Eleusius if he will convert to Christianity (SJ 9, 21 [S/W 307, 310]); and she prays in private, not only for the preservation of her virginity, which is mentioned only briefly (SJ 7 [S/W 307]), but in a more elaborate prayer she seeks affirmation of her faith, guidance, strength, wisdom and the indwelling of Christ (SJ 27-29 [S/W 311-312]). The demon who accosts her stresses, not physical chastity, but purity of heart, true belief and sincere prayer, especially in the context of the eucharist (SJ 39 [S/W 314]), and describes maidenhood as a virtue to be kept truly in the heart, rather than as a physical virtue (SJ 45 [S/W 315]).

attributes the power of Christ's presence within her to the gift of physical chastity (SM 70-72 [S/W 300]). Juliana, on the other hand, stresses that the might she gains from Christ is through keeping him in her mind, and her demon asserts that Christ guards those who keep virginity in their hearts, if they are "mild and meek as a maiden ought to be" (*milde ant meoke ... as meiden deh to beonne* SJ 45 [S/W 315]). As in *Seinte Margarete*, however, there is quite a contrast between the description of the "mild and meek" maiden and her behaviour, reflected as well in the paradox suggested by the demon of the mild and meek maidens who are "armed to make war on us" (*iwepnet to weorin a 3ein us* SJ 45 [S/W 315]).

The demon which accosts Juliana is defeated by true belief, prayer, and the eucharist, Christ's body which he took from the maiden (SJ 31 [S/W 312], 39 [S/W 314]). While both the demons (in *Seinte Juliene* and *Seinte Margarete*) are defeated by symbols of the incarnation, the symbols themselves exemplify the increased emphasis on the indwelling of Christ in *Seinte Juliene*. The cross which Margaret traces with her fingers is an outward, physical action, however spiritual the reality which it represents. The eucharist is something which Juliana (or the anchoress) may receive within herself, as a physical manifestation of Christ dwelling within her body.<sup>370</sup> Juliana, and by implication the anchoress, thus becomes a vessel which

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<sup>370</sup> In AW iv.135 [S/W 144], the eucharist is the symbol of the continuing presence of Christ with the anchoress, even when she is not herself partaking of it. The anchoress is assured that through the mere sight of the eucharistic bread, which she may see as often as the priest says mass, Christ descends in the flesh to take up his dwelling place within her (AW iv.138 [S/W 146]; cp. AW i.21 [S/W 59]). See



contains Christ, just as the brittle flesh is the vessel which contains virginity. This is contrasted in *Seinte Juliene* with the idols which are vessels of devils (SJ 15 [S/W 309]). One must choose whether Christ or the devil will dwell within one's heart.<sup>371</sup>

St. Katherine is another "mighty maiden" who draws power from calling on Christ's name, defeating her opponents by appealing to the strength of Christ's sublimity (*mihetes of his hehnesse*) and his death on the cross (SK 70 [S/W 273]).<sup>372</sup> Katherine's power, however, is exhibited not physically, but verbally: she prays, not for physical strength to overthrow her demonic adversary and preserve her chastity, but for power and strength of speech (SK 34-36 [S/W 267-268]). Robertson points out that the references to Katherine's physical beauty in the English text are "far fewer than those in the Latin source," and are subordinated to her wisdom:

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Chapter Five, below.

<sup>371</sup> Cp. 1 Corinthians 10.14-22, where Paul asserts that participation in Christ and participation with demons are mutually exclusive. Paul makes this statement in the context of a discussion concerning eating meat offered to idols, where consuming meat that has been offered to idols is considered a participation in idolatry, just as consuming the body of Christ in the eucharist is considered to be a participation in Christ himself. This same argument is also applied to sexual immorality in 1 Corinthians 6.15-20, where the body is either a member of Christ or of a prostitute.

<sup>372</sup> It is perhaps appropriate that Katherine, who relies on high theological argument, should call upon the strength of Christ's sublimity. It is also significant that the power of maidenhood is associated with height, or sublimity. The virgin's power enables her to stand on a high hill near heaven (HM 18 [S/W 232]). But the author of *Ancrene Wisse* points out that this height is not only an honour. At the top of a high hill one is buffeted by the winds of the devil; in her high tower the virgin is attacked.

the English version first emphasizes her beauty and then focuses immediately on her mouth. Her true beauty lies in the words she speaks.<sup>373</sup>

This stress is due to the fact that, unlike Margaret and Juliana, Katherine is not, at first, seeking to avoid an earthly marriage, but to defend the Christian faith against the heathen Maxentius, who is waging war on Holy Church (SK 4-12 [S/W 262-264]). The foe which she must conquer is spiritual, not physical.

Katherine's persecutor therefore attempts to subdue her through argument before he attacks her physically. Misjudging her strength, Maxentius arrogantly asserts that he could overpower her easily through terror but thinks it better if she be overcome in argument first, since her words have mastered all (SK 30 [S/W 267]). However, he vastly underestimates her strength and, just as Margaret and Juliana physically defeat and bind their respective demons, Katherine verbally defeats and ties the tongues of the scholars who are sent to subdue her (SK 66-70 [S/W 273]).

Katherine's wisdom, like the physical and moral strength of Margaret and Juliana, is attributed to her virginity and her virtue which she guards in seclusion (SK 6-8 [S/W 262-263]). Ironically, in SK 76 [S/W 274], Maxentius addresses Katherine as "mighty maiden" (*mihiti meiden*) and "wise woman" (*witti wummon*), not realizing that both her might and her wisdom are directly attributable to the faith her maidenhood exemplifies. Katherine attributes her victory to Christ, her wisdom to

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<sup>373</sup> *Early English Devotional Prose*, p. 100.

his indwelling presence. It is Christ who lives with her and speaks through her, subduing her opponents with his great power and wisdom (SK 34-36 [S/W 267-268]).

The virgin martyrs thus draw much of their strength from their virginity and the indwelling of the heavenly spouse for whom that virginity is preserved. As Bugge points out, virginity therefore acquires a profound metaphysical significance: "it becomes far more than bodily integrity, but a symbol, in some way, of the invincibility of the soul."<sup>374</sup>

But the power of maidenhood is a paradoxical power: it confers a strength which finds its fullest expression in weakness, the weakness of a maiden and of humility.<sup>375</sup> The virgin martyrs' victories over their opponents through the humility and weakness of maidenhood reenact Christ's victory over the devil through the humility of the incarnation. In the incarnation, Christ hides his strength in human flesh. By thus assuming a guise of weakness, Christ deceives the devil and is thus able to overcome him. As Katherine tells her interlocutors: *he þet ouercom mon were akeast þurh mon wið meokelec ant liste, nawi wið luðer strengðe* ("he who overcame humanity was cast down through humanity, with meekness and skill, not with brute strength" SK 64.451-453 [S/W 272-273]; cp. AW iv.144-145 [S/W 150-151]).

This apparent contradiction is highlighted by the reactions of the maidens' defeated opponents. The might and power of the virgins' adversaries are stressed:

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<sup>374</sup> Bugge, *Virginitas*, p. 54.

<sup>375</sup> See above, pp. 111.

Katherine is opposed by fifty scholars who represent the best that can be assembled against her; Juliana is opposed by a demon who is powerful enough to appear as an angel of light in an attempt to deceive her; Margaret is confronted by a fearful dragon and a black demon. Both Juliana's and Margaret's demonic antagonists brag about their ability to destroy the majority of humans they assail and the means by which they do so, while Maxentius boasts of the ease by which he could overcome Katherine through terror.

It is all the more amazing and shameful, then, that these powerful adversaries are overcome by mere maidens. Margaret's demon wails that his pride is defeated by a mere girl (SM 70 [S/W 299]); Juliana's demon beseeches the "mighty maiden" to release him and not to make him a laughing stock (SJ 45-47 [S/W 316]). As the author of *Hali Meidhad* tells the anchoress:

*swa muche þe hokerluker him þuncheð to beon ouercumen, þet þing se feble as flesh is, ant nomeliche of wummon, schal him ouerstihen.* (HM 12.28-30).

it seems to him [the devil] all the more shameful to be overcome—that a thing so feeble as flesh is, and especially women's, shall climb over him [S/W 230].

Accordingly, Maxentius berates the scholars who are defeated in argument by

Katherine:

*Is nu se storliche unstrengret ower strengðe, ant ower wit awealt swa, þet te mihte and te mot of a se meoke meiden schal meistren ow alle? Me, 3ef fifti wimmen, and þah þer ma weren, hefden wið wordes ower an awarpen, nere hit schendlac inoh ant schir scheome to alle þet 3elpeð 3f*

*lare? Nu is alre scheomene meast, þet anlepi meiden wið hire anes muð  
haued swa biteuelet, itemet, ant ietiet alle (SK 66.465-68.471).*

Is your strength now so much subdued and your minds so overcome that the might and arguments of so meek a maiden can overmaster you all? Ah, if fifty women—or even more!—had thrown one of you with words, would not this be a great humiliation and sheer shame to all who boast of learning? Now is the greatest of all shames: that a single maiden out of her own mouth has so out-argued, tamed and tied all of you [S/W 273].<sup>376</sup>

Similarly, Margaret tells Olibrius:

*þe schulde scheomien, þe scheomelese schucke—þef þu scheo:ne cuðest—þe  
þulli mot haldest wið a zung meiden; and spillest al þi hwile, and ne  
spedest nawiht. (SM 56.6-9).*

You should be ashamed, you shameless devil—if you knew how to be ashamed—to argue with one young girl like this, and waste all your time and not succeed at all [S/W 293].

The fate of being bound and humiliated by the virgin martyrs is not, however, the worst that the demons could face. Margaret's demon pleads with her to bind him on earth, for there he will still have hope—after all, Solomon had sealed him in a barrel and the men of Babylon (the devil's army; cp. HM 2-4 [S/W 225-226]) had opened the barrel and released him. Margaret refuses, however, and sends him tumbling into the pit of hell where, according to Juliana's demon, the devils who fail in their crusade of temptation are beaten and bound by those who succeed (SJ 37 [S/W 314]).

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<sup>376</sup> The image of "throwing" with words recalls the theme of the anchoress's spiritual struggle and the incarnation as a wrestling match (pp. 111f. above). Cp. also St. Juliana and St. Margaret who throw demons down physically (above, pp. 190f.).

## WIT

Thus, although the devil's arsenal is vast, the anchoress is not without weapons of her own. In addition to chastity itself, virtue and God's grace may be wielded as weapons against vice and sin (SW 94-96 [S/W 215-216]; SM 66-68 [S/W 298]). Against the arrows of desire she may raise the shield of reason to guard her soul. By controlling the will, reason prevents the arrows of lust from sticking in the anchoress long enough to want to act out her desire. As long as reason withstands the will, desire cannot harm or soil her soul; thus, the enemy's arrows are deflected by the shield of reason and fly back on himself (HM 12-14 [S/W 230]).

As Savage and Watson note, reason here is "wit," who controls Will in *Sawles Warde*.<sup>377</sup> Robertson points out that at the centre of the conflict between Katherine and Maxentius is the question of the kind of "wit," or knowledge, needed for salvation.<sup>378</sup> Although Katherine is well-trained in secular wisdom, she rejects it for the paradoxical wisdom of God which destroys worldly wisdom (1 Corinthians 1.19). Katherine's "wit," with which she expounds the paradox of the Incarnation, defeats the "wit" of the philosophers. In addition, Robertson points out that in *Seinte Katerine*:

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<sup>377</sup> HM n. 19, p. 413.

<sup>378</sup> Robertson's discussion of the significance of "wit" in *Seinte Katerine*, summarized in the following paragraph, is found in *Early English Devotional Prose*, pp. 100-105,

the essence of sinfulness seems to be lack of the right kind of intelligence or ... 'wit'. ... Sinfulness is a deliberate denial of true wit, and the fiend tries to draw men to sin by disrupting knowledge and obscuring the true wit of men.<sup>379</sup>

Maxentius is commonly described as "mad" (*wod*) or "out of his wits" (*ut of his witte*). Worship of idols is also described as "witless," violating the "wit" given to mankind by God.

The importance of "wit" in *Seinte Katerine* is also reflected in the text's emphasis on the power of words. Maxentius flatters Katherine, promising her great honours. Katherine, however, recognizes Maxentius' fair speech as music which has the potential to draw her to her death (SK 78 [S/W 275]).<sup>380</sup> Robertson points out that the emphasis on Maxentius' fair speech is absent from the Latin text, and that the addition of this material "reinforces the idea that words are only powerful when guided by Christ."<sup>381</sup> Katherine's words, on the other hand, bear witness to the power of words when they are spoken in faith and inspired by the paradoxical wisdom of Christ. Thus,

the persuasive potential of women's persuasive speech, so dangerous in Eve, is transformed into a Christian force. ... The female saint is

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<sup>379</sup> *Early English Devotional Prose*, pp. 102-103.

<sup>380</sup> The music of Maxentius' flattery is in distinct contrast to the music of the maidens' song in heaven, a contrast which is reinforced by the context, as Maxentius' words are, in fact, an offer of honours which parody the maiden's reward in heaven.

<sup>381</sup> *Early English Devotional Prose*, p. 202.

urged to abandon her own intellectual powers in favour of the power of Christ speaking within her.<sup>382</sup>

*Seinte Katerine* thus bears witness to the emptiness of worldly wisdom and the power of the wit and wisdom which is associated with God. As Robertson points out:

given the age's association of men with wit and women with will [amply illustrated by *Sawles Warde*], this deconstruction of worldly wit is especially powerful for the female reader.<sup>383</sup>

Robertson, however, attributes much of the force of the discussion of wit to misogynist assumptions about women's passivity and dependence on the part of the author. She argues that the voice of the female ascetic reflected in *Seinte Katerine* simply reflects a transference of that dependence from men to Christ. Thus, the power of the female saint is, at least in part, based on her feminine nature: "Men, partly because of their 'wit,' have forgotten their dependence on God, a dependence that women, by nature, never forget."<sup>384</sup>

The dependence upon God exhibited by the female saints is, however, a *positive* element in their stories, affording them an exceptional *independence* from men. While it is true that the treatment of wit in *Seinte Katerine* is particularly relevant to female readers, Robertson's insistence on the feminine passivity and dependence which she sees in the text is misleading. Katherine is anything but

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<sup>382</sup> *Early English Devotional Prose*, pp. 101-102.

<sup>383</sup> *Early English Devotional Prose*, p. 103.

<sup>384</sup> *Early English Devotional Prose*, p. 103.



passive, and is, in fact, presented in the text as extraordinarily independent, living on her own after her parents' death and running her household both wisely and prudently without the need of male guidance (SK 6 [S/W 262-263]). Her dependence upon Christ is, ultimately, what gives her the freedom and autonomy which she demonstrates by standing up to Maxentius and his minions.<sup>385</sup>

#### THE POWER OF PRAYER

The potency of words displayed by St. Katherine is also reflected in the stress on the efficacy of prayer and confession.<sup>386</sup> The power of prayer to defeat and bind the devil is amply illustrated in the Lives of the virgin martyrs, who pray unceasingly for aid in their trials.<sup>387</sup> When confronted by the prospect of a verbal battle with fifty scholars, St. Katherine prays that Christ will grant her the wisdom to defeat them. St. Margaret calls out (*clepien*) to Christ for protection when soldiers come to take her (SM 46-48 [S/W 289-290]), and prays for help when tortured (SM 52 [S/W 291]). St. Juliana, when she is betrothed to Eleusius, goes every day to

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<sup>385</sup> See above, p. 171, and the discussion of the active nature of the anchoritic life, above, pp. 134f.

<sup>386</sup> For a discussion of the efficacy of prayer and meditation, see Grayson, *Structure and Imagery*, pp. 109-113, 118. See also the discussion of the power of verbal confession, above, pp. 160f.

<sup>387</sup> See for example SM 56-58 [S/W 293]; SJ 7 [S/W 307], 27 [S/W 310-311], 31 [S/W 312], and others.

church and prays with pitiful cries that Christ will show her how to keep her maidenhood unstained by sex (SJ 7 [S/W 307]). As she is tortured, she cries out (*zeide*) to God, desiring to give her spirit into his hands, upon which an angel appears and miraculously destroys the wheel which has torn her flesh. The reaction of the onlookers is to cry out (*zeiden*) in a loud voice and convert (SJ 53, 57 [S/W 317-318]). Finally, as she is about to die, Juliana leaves her audience with this advice:

*zeieð<sup>388</sup> zeome to godd in hali chirche þet he zeoue ow wit wel forte donne ant strengre ow wið his strengðe a zein þe strong unwiht þet sele secheð eauer ant dá ow to forswolhen.* (SJ 65-67).

Cry sincerely to God in holy Church that he may give you the sense to do well, and strengthen you with his strength against the strong demon who seeks occasion, ever and always, to swallow you up [S/W 320].

*Ancrene Wisse* picks up this theme, asserting that not only do prayers draw down God's help, but prayers also bind and burn the devil. Among the examples given is St. Margaret, who binds the devil through prayer (AW iv.125 [S/W 137]). When the demon appears to Margaret in the form of a black man after she has defeated the dragon, he is seated with his two hands bound to his knees, a symbol of his defeat (SM 60 [S/W 295]). He admits that he has been bound by Margaret's fingers which make the sign of the cross in prayer (SM 64-66 [S/W 297]).<sup>389</sup>

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<sup>388</sup> Ms. Royal 17Axxvii reads *cleopeð*.

<sup>389</sup> See the discussion of the cross as a weapon, below, pp. 207f. Margaret also beats and binds the devil by choosing Christ as lover and Lord.

Not only can prayer bind the devil, it can also break the bonds which bind the virgins themselves. When Juliana prays after being tortured by the wheel, her bonds burst (SJ 53 [S/W 317]). In a similar vein, Katherine asserts that the power of the incarnation frees us from our enemies' chains (SK 50 [S/W 270]).

Prayer substitutes a new spiritual bond with Christ for the physical binding which represents sin's attempt to bind the virgin's soul. When Margaret is about to be immersed in a vat of water she prays that this might become a baptism which will bind her soul to Christ.<sup>390</sup> A dove appears, her bonds break, and she comes out of the water singing (SM 76 [S/W 302]). Here a wonderful word play shows the physical bonds being broken by a spiritual bond. The play on "binding" is continued as Christ is portrayed as a member of the Trinity, which is bound and enclosed (*iteit ant itunet*) in one divine image (SM 80 [S/W 304]).

Just as the virgin martyrs are freed from their bonds through prayer, so too, the anchoress who is bound by the chains of sin (AW i.16 [S/W 56]) can be freed through prayer. Not only is the anchoress bound by sin, she is also bound by Fear to prevent further sin: *Ancrene Wisse* presents an allegory of the judgement where Fear combats temptation by binding the soul. He binds the limbs which have sinned so that they will not sin more: *Fearlac haueð ibunden him, hwen he ne deor for*

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<sup>390</sup> It is interesting to compare this with the torture of St. Juliana in a vat of boiling pitch, which cools to a tepid bath when she calls upon Christ (SJ 63 [S/W 319]). Cp. also WLd 21.39-44 [S/W 248] and below, pp. 252f.

*fearlac sturie toward sunne* ("Fear has bound him when he dare not move towards sin for fear" AW v.158 f.83b.16-18 [S/W 161]).<sup>391</sup>

In the anchoress's battle with temptation, prayer is the messenger which she sends to God, threatening to give up her castle unless he sends help soon (AW iv.136-137 [S/W 145]).<sup>392</sup> The author of *Ancrene Wisse* counsels the anchoress to pray continually, to cry out to God and demand his aid in her struggles against the devil. In fact, the anchoress is encouraged to badger God until he gives her the help she requires. The author of *Ancrene Wisse* asserts that sincere prayer with tears gives the anchoress power not only to defeat the devil, but also to prevail upon Christ, who will do all that she wants (AW iv.125 [S/W 137]). If she has a need, he states, she should first reveal it sweetly to Christ's sweet ears. If he does not come, she is urged to cry out (*geieð*) louder and continually with a fervent heart (AW iv.137 [S/W 145], iv.150 [S/W 154]).<sup>393</sup>

The author of *Ancrene Wisse* explains to the anchoress why God might, at times, delay his response to her prayer. He points out that God bears temptation with us. Sometimes, however, he leaves us alone so that we can see how heavy it

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<sup>391</sup> Compare the role of Fear in *Sawles Warde*, where he prevents sin by recounting the terrors of hell by which it will be punished.

<sup>392</sup> Cp. St. Margaret who prays for the messenger of a dove (SM 54 [S/W 296]), and St. Juliana whose prayers are answered by a heavenly messenger (SJ 31-33 [S/W 312-313]).

<sup>393</sup> After all, even Christ cried out to God on the cross (AW vi.186 [S/W 182]).

truly is and understand our own feebleness. Then, in humility, we will call for his help (AW iv.120 [S/W 133]). *Ancrene Wisse* stresses the importance of humility and generosity; if the anchoress's heart is not inclined this way, again she must cry to God with sorrowful sighing, never giving him peace until he has changed her heart (AW iv.146 [S/W 152]). If he is too long in granting his aid, she must simply call louder, stressing the urgency of our need; we must seek him eagerly, calling and weeping (AW iv.120 [S/W 133]).

Here, as elsewhere, tears are seen as lending efficacy to the anchoress's prayers, for *hwa se mei þurh godes zeoue i beoden habbe teares, ha mei don wið godd al þet ha eauer wule* ("whoever can have God's gift of tears in prayer may do with God all that she wants" AW iv.1:5 f.66a.22-24 [S/W 137]; cp. AW ii.60 [S/W 90]). The weeping of the anchoress in prayer is in stark contrast to the weeping of the devil, who cries out and howls in shame when Margaret defeats him (SM 70 [S/W 299]). Again, in *Hali Meðhad* 42 [S/W 243], the crying out and groaning in the horror of hell is contrasted with the angel's song of the maiden, which is the anchoress's compensation for her crying on earth.

The power of humble prayer, like the power of virginity, is a paradoxical power based on the presence of Christ within the heart. Humility, so small and meek, is the strongest of all, for where humility is, Christ is, and *strengðe beo þer as he is þurh his inwuniende grace* ("strength is where he is through his indwelling grace" (AW iv.144 [S/W 150]). Prayer in humility thus humbly beguiles Christ, hiding its

good and showing only its poverty, weeping and groaning, begging for help with stubborn crying (AW v.168-169 [S/W 169]). The deception practised by humility is patterned upon Christ's deception of the devil in the Incarnation.<sup>394</sup>

#### MEDITATION ON THE PASSION

Lust is thus combatted, and virginity maintained, through prayer and holy thoughts (AW iv.123f. [S/W 135f.]; SM 66-68 [S/W 298]). The anchoritic texts treat at length the kinds of prayer and meditation which aid the virgin anchoress in preserving her chastity. As seen above, one theme which emerges is that virginity is upheld by thoughts of the joys of heaven and the pains of hell (AW iv.124 [S/W 136]; SM 68 [S/W 298]).<sup>395</sup> However, the most effective form of prayer is meditation on the passion of Christ and the cross. The anchoress is told to arm herself in the battle against lechery with thoughts of Christ's tortures in the flesh; when she is weary in the fight against the devil she is to think of how Christ denied the flesh's desire and to resist her own desire (AW iv.135 [S/W 144]). In this way, her own physical suffering becomes a weapon she can use to defend herself from the wounds of lust as she meditates on the suffering of Christ.

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<sup>394</sup> See above, pp. 111, 151f., and 196f.

<sup>395</sup> See pp. 116f.

In her meditation upon the passion, the cross of Christ becomes a shield for the anchoress (AW vii.199-200 [S/W 191-192]), as Christ's passion deflects the devil's weapons (AW iv.151-152 [S/W 155-156]). The anchoress is warned that she must not carry this shield behind her but must lift it high above the head of her heart over the eyes of her breast. She must show it clearly to her enemy, for he is terrified of it, and the mere sight of it will put him to flight. Savage and Watson note that a medieval knight would carry his shield on his back until the time came to use it but "to fight with it still there is to be unprepared."<sup>396</sup> Since the anchoress's entire existence is one constant battle, she must therefore always carry the shield of the cross before her. One would assume that this would be a very potent image, reminding the anchoress of the cross lying on her breast (if she had one) or hanging continually before her eyes on the wall of her anchorhouse or above the altar of the church (AW vii.200 [S/W 192], iii.72 [S/W 99]).

The image of the shield of the cross becomes transformed into the shield of Christ's flesh. This image occurs fairly frequently (eg. LLo 11.54 [S/W 326]; SJ 61 [S/W 319]; SW 94 [S/W 215]), but receives its fullest treatment in the allegory of Christ as the lover knight (AW vii.199-200 [S/W 191-192]), and will therefore be dealt with below.<sup>397</sup>

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<sup>396</sup> AW iv, n. 128, p. 385.

<sup>397</sup> See pp. 382f.

The cross itself is thus the anchoress's most potent weapon. The anchoress is instructed to seize the staff of the cross and wage a vigorous defense against the lecherous dog of hell:

*ne sei þu nawt slepinde. ame dogge ga her ut. hwet wult tu nu her inne? þis tolleð him inward. Ah nīm anan þe rode steaf mid nempunge i þi muð. mid te mearke in þin hond. mid þoht i þin heorte. ⁊ hat him ut heterliche þe fule cur dogge. ⁊ liðere to him luðerliche mid te hali rode steaf stronge bac dantes. þ is. Rung up sture þe. hald up ehnen on heh ⁊ honden toward heouene. (AW iv.149-150 f.79a.7-13).*

Do not say sleepily, "Here, dog! Get out of here! What do you want now in here?" This draws him in. But seize the staff of the cross right away, by nē ning it with your mouth, by drawing it with your hand, by thinking of it with your heart, and order him out sternly, the foul cur. And lay into him with hard blows fiercely on the back with the staff of the holy cross; that is, stand up, stir yourself, hold your eyes and your hands up high towards heaven [S/W 154].<sup>398</sup>

As Savage and Watson point out, here:

We see the anchoress transformed into a warrior swinging Christ's cross as a weapon and shield, spitting in the devil's beard, driving him out like a dog ... The best way for her to drive out carnal thoughts is to enact as vigorous and bodily a sense of resistance as possible and to think of herself as engaged in an especially dramatic way in the cosmic battle between good and evil, as though she is one of the early Christian heroines like Katherine, Margaret, or one of the Desert Fathers.<sup>399</sup>

The efficacy of this advice is amply illustrated in St. Katherine, who, when she hears of the heathen depredations of the "heathen hound" Maxentius, sees them as

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<sup>398</sup> Cp. AW v.167-168 [S/W 168], where the anchoress is told to take the stick of her tongue and beat the dog of hell with confession, and SK 10-12 [S/W 263-264].

<sup>399</sup> AW iv, n. 129, pp. 385-386.



a form of personal attack. Her heart is "wounded within" (*iwundet inwið*) and she becomes so inflamed with righteous anger that she is nearly out of her mind (SK 10 [S/W 263]). She therefore *wepnede hire wið soðe bileaue, ant wrat on hire breoste ant biforen hire teð ant te tunge of hire muð þe hali rode-taken* ("armed herself with true belief, and drew the holy sign of the cross on her breast, and in front of her teeth and tongue") before leaping forth to the defense of the Church, inflamed with the Holy Spirit (SK 12 [S/W 263]).<sup>400</sup> So too, St. Margaret defeats both the dragon and the demon who subsequently confronts her by tracing the sign of the cross with fingers that blaze with light and blind the devil (SM 62 [S/W 296], 64-66 [S/W 297]; cp. SM 70 [S/W 299]).

The weapons of the eye, hand and mouth are combatted with the staff of the cross, as the eye sees and meditates upon the cross, the hand draws the sign of the cross, and the mouth names the cross in defense of chastity (AW iv.149-150 [S/W 154]). Similarly, the author of *Ancrene Wisse* advises the anchoress that when she is called to the window, she should first defend herself: *crossið ful zeome muð. ehen 7 earen. 7 te breoste mid al. 7 gað forð mid godes dred* ("cross yourself fervently on mouth, eyes and ears, and breast as well, and go out in fear of God" AW ii.35 f.15b.22-23 [S/W 72]).

The anchoress in her cell is thus depicted as a heroic warrior, battling the forces of sin and hell with the weapons of chastity, prayer, and true faith. Like the

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<sup>400</sup> See Robertson, *Early English Devotional Prose*, p. 100.

virgin martyrs, her chaste, ascetic life gives her the power to resist sin and temptation and to defeat the devil in the cosmic battle for her soul. However, the heroic anchoress battling the army of hell does not always escape unscathed; her heart may be wounded by sin. We therefore turn now to a discussion of the wounds of the soul.

## CHAPTER THREE

### THE WOUNDS OF THE SOUL

The anchoress is wounded by sin when she fails to guard her senses well and allows the devil to penetrate the defenses of her castle. Thus, the anchoress in *On Lofsong of Ure Lefdi* confesses:

*ich habbe imaked zetes of alle mine fif wittes . to sunfulu unþeawes . mis i loked Mis ihercned . Mis ifeled . mis ispeken . iloued swote smelles . prude 7 wilnunge of pris, me habbeð sore iwunded . ase wreððe . 7 onde . lesunge . mis sware . vuele iholden treouðe . cursunge . bacbitunbe . 7 fikelunge . sume tide . ... ich habbe isuneged ine mete . 7 ine drunche boðe . 7 mid flesches fulðe ifuled me . þus ich am lodliche i hurt ine licame . 7 ine soule, wið alles cunnes sunnen . for þauh þet werc nere i þe bodie, þe wil was in þe heorte . (LLe 16.18-25, 17.29-34).*

I have made all my five senses into gateways for evil vices; looked sinfully, listened sinfully, touched sinfully, spoken sinfully, loved sweet smells sinfully. Pride and desire for fame have sorely wounded me; also anger and envy, lying, wrongful swearing, failure to keep faith, cursing, backbiting and sometimes flattery ... I have sinned both in eating and in drinking, and have befouled myself with the flesh's filth. Thus I am loathsomely hurt in body and in soul with every kind of sin—for even if the body did not do the deed, the desire for it was in the heart [S/W 329].

When this occurs, the walls which are meant to keep sin out become walls of sin between the anchoress and Christ (UrG 7.90 [S/W 323]).

The arrows of the eyes, the spear of words and the sword of lecherous handling wound the anchoress's chastity (AW ii Cleopatra f.25.12-25v.20 [S/W 70]).<sup>401</sup> The danger from lechery is thus greatly to be feared. The real danger,

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<sup>401</sup> Cp. Nero, f.14-14v, pp. 26.15-27.6.

however, lies in the possibility that the wounds inflicted by lechery will endanger not only the body but the soul:

*flesches lust is fotes wunde ... Ant þis is þe reisun. As ure fet beoreð us. alswa ure lustes beoreð us ofte to þing þ us luste efter. Nu þenne þah þi va hurte þe o þe vet. þ is to seggen. fondeð wið flesches lustes. for se lah wunde ne dred tu nawt to sare. bute hit to swiðe swelle þurh skiles zettunge wið to muchel delit up toward te heorte. (AW iv.141-142, f.75a.13-20).*

The flesh's lust is a foot-wound ... and this is the reason: as our feet carry us, just in the same way our lust often carries us to the thing that we lust after.

Now then, though your enemy hurts you in the feet, that is to say, tempts you with the lust of the flesh, do not fear so low a wound too sorely, unless it swells greatly with too much delight up towards the heart, through the mind's consent [S/W 148-149].

Lechery is a wound which can deepen into the soul, and the anchoress must beware of giving in to it (AW iv.149 [S/W 153]). Thus the anchoress is warned that the arrows of the eyes, associated with lust, are most to be feared, for these blind the heart and fell her with sin (AW ii Nero f.14v, pp. 26.29-27.6 [S/W 70]). The devil shoots his darts soaked in deadly poison to wound the heart and make the maiden fall from where she stands so high through her virginity (HM 12 [S/W 230]; cp. AW iv.107-108 [S/W 124]; SM 66 [S/W 298]).

The lust which spurs the persecutors of the virgin martyrs is described as the devil's poison and is compared to intoxication (SK 120 [S/W 283]; cp. SM 56 [S/W 293]). The image of the devil's poison is also applied to speech, which can persuade the heart to sin (AW ii.43 [S/W 78]). Similarly, the devil is described as a poisonous

serpent of which the anchoress must beware. She is advised to tread on his head (AW iv.153 [S/W 156]), just as St. Margaret stamps on the head of the demon who accosts her (SM 62-64 [S/W 296]). While the immediate reference here is to Genesis 3.15,<sup>402</sup> the portrayal of lechery as the devil's poison and lust as a foot wound lend erotic overtones to the image of the virgin anchoress attacking the serpent from hell with her feet.<sup>403</sup>

The anchoress must be aware that there are two types of wounds which may result from two types of temptation:

*flesches fondunge mei beon ieuenet to fot wunde. Gastelich fondunge þ is mare dred of, mei beon for þe peril icleopet breost wunde. ah us þuncheð greatre flesliche temptatiuns for þt þ heo beoð eð fele. þe oþre þah we habben ham, ofte nute we hit nawt. 7 beoð þah greate 7 grisliche i godes ehe. 7 beoð muchel for þt to drede þe mare. for þe oþre þe me feleð wel. secheð leche 7 salue. þe gasteliche hurtes ne þuncheð nawt sare. ne ne saluið ham wið schrift ne wið penitence. 7 draheð to eche deað ear me leaþ wene. (AW iv.99-100, f.51b.10-18).*

Bodily temptation can be compared to a foot-wound; spiritual temptation, which is more to be feared, can be called a chest-wound, on account of its danger. Yet bodily temptations seem greater to us because they are easily sensed. Though we often do not even know that we have the others, yet they are great and terrible in God's eye, and are therefore more greatly to be feared. For the others, which one easily feels, one seeks a doctor and remedy. The spiritual hurts do not seem at all painful, nor does one remedy them with confession and

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<sup>402</sup> "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel!" (RSV). Margaret removes even the suggestion that the devil will bruise the heel of mankind (Eve's "seed") by stamping on the demon with her heel and remaining completely unharmed. Her mastery is absolute.

<sup>403</sup> See also pp. 164f., above.

penitence; and they draw us to eternal death when we least expect it [S/W 119].

The wounds of the soul are also described as an illness.<sup>404</sup> Just as the wounds which one does not easily feel are the most dangerous because the anchoress may not seek healing, so too the illness of the soul which goes unrecognized is of great concern. The author of *Ancrene W<sup>ise</sup>* warns the anchoress that when one becomes sick, one may encounter two very alarming conditions: the first occurs when one is not aware of one's own sickness and seeks no doctor or medicine. Such a person may suddenly die when she least expects it. This is the anchoress who does not know what temptation is. For her, as we have seen, the author has a great deal to say concerning the subject of temptation, especially in part iv. The second condition occurs when the pain of one's wounds or illness becomes so great that one cannot endure anyone handling the sore place, even to heal it. This is the condition of the anchoress who is so frightened by temptation that no spiritual comfort can help her (AW iv.92-93 [S/W 114]).

In order to help the anchoress avoid the second of these conditions, the texts of the *Katherine Group* suggest many remedies for the wounds and illness of the soul.<sup>405</sup> The first and most obvious of these is virginity itself. Virginity is a balm which preserves the maiden without taint, guarding her limbs and her five senses

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<sup>404</sup> Cp. S/W AW iv, n. 19, p. 372.

<sup>405</sup> For further discussion of wounds, illness and healing, see Grayson, *Structure and Imagery*, pp. 83-89 and *passim*.

against sin (HM 10-12 [S/W 229]; cp. AW iii.85-86 [S/W 109]). The virgin anchoress who does fall into sin, through will if not through deed, can call upon the virginity of the Virgin Mary, through which Christ was born for the healing of mankind. Thus, in her daily devotions, the anchoress prays:

*Leafdi seinte maria for þe ilke muchele blisse þet tu hefdest þa þu sehe  
þe ilke blisfule beam iboren of þi cleane bodi to moncunne heale. wið  
uten eauer euch bruche. wið ihal meiohad 7 meidenes menske. heal me  
þ am þurh wil tobroken as ich drede hwet se beo of dede. (AW i.23,  
f.9b.11-16).*

O Lady St. Mary, for the same great joy that you had when you saw that joyful child born from your pure body for the healing of mankind, without any breach, with whole maidenhood and maidenly honour, heal me, who (I fear) am broken through my will, whatever I am in deed [S/W 61].

Similarly, *On Lofsong of Ure Lefdi* addresses the Virgin:

*Mine widerwines habbeð biset me on euche half abuten, 7 secheð mine  
soule deað . luðre men and deoflen . heo habbeð monie wunden on me  
ifsteded, þet acwelleð mine soule . bute þu beo mi leche (LLe 16.10-15).*

My enemies have surrounded me on every side and seek to kill my soul; evil people and devils have laid many wounds on me which will destroy my soul unless you are my healer [S/W 329].

Virginity is also a balm for physical illness. After her death, healing oil flows from the bones of the virgin body of St. Katherine, whose wounds were anointed by angels when she was alive (SK 130 [S/W 284], 84 [S/W 276]). The virginal body and bones of St. Margaret also have the power to heal the sick in both body and soul, as does the book of her passion (SM 78-80 [S/W 303]). The anchoress can thus turn to the Lives of the virgin martyrs for encouragement and spiritual healing.

The virtues of the virginal life are also effective in healing spiritual wounds or illness. If the anchoress loves the good that others do, her love and their goodness are remedies against the wounds of her soul (AW iv.146 [S/W 151]). By the same token, the anchoress is warned that if she is envious of the good of others, she poisons herself with medicine, wounding herself with a remedy. The image of wounding and healing is also applied to the anchoress's responsibility to reprove her servants or another anchoress if she sees them doing wrong (AW iv.131-132 [S/W 141-142], viii.220 [S/W 206]).<sup>406</sup>

Faith is also an effective means of healing the illness caused by sin (AW iv.126-127 [S/W 138], iv.132 [S/W 142]), and confession made in faith is a potent remedy against the wounds of the soul. The virgin who has fallen into sin through lustful desires can restore herself through confession and penance (SM 68 [S/W 298-299]). Sin is a wound which will only grow worse if it is not confessed, and the anchoress is therefore advised to hurry to confession as soon as she becomes aware of sin in her heart (AW v.166-167 [S/W 167-168]). Like the pelican who draws blood from her breast to restore the chicks which she has killed, the anchoress must draw the blood of sin out of her heart through confession and restore her slain chicks, the good works which she has slain through sin (AW iii.63 [S/W 93]). The anchoress is thus encouraged to cry out to God for mercy and grace through confession (which spiritually kills the devil from hell), and through sincere prayer.

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<sup>406</sup> Cp. S/W AW iv, nn. 87, p. 381 and 94, p. 382.



However, the author of *Ancrene Wisse* reminds the anchoress that even the scar of an old wound which has been healed through penitence can begin to fester if the wound of sin is reopened through the memory of old sins (AW iv.140 [S/W 147-148]).<sup>407</sup> He reminds the anchoress that when the devil sees that her reason is asleep, he will set the memory of old sins before the eyes of her heart in order to defile her with old sins if he cannot make her commit new ones. The anchoress must therefore not allow her mind to be idle, for an idle mind gives the devil an opportunity to enter and disturb it through the recollection of old sins.

Confession, therefore, must be made in humility, ever mindful of the continuous danger of sin. The virtue of humility is particularly efficacious against the wounds of the soul, for through humble confession the anchoress can draw upon the aid of Christ:

*Eadmodnesse is .i.lich þeose cotnre heariȝ. hare gute feastre. hare flowinde cweise þ̅ ha putteð eauer forð. ⁊ ȝef hiȝ is eatelich, ha schawið hiȝ ȝet eateliker i riche monnes ehnen. þ̅ ha habben reowðe of ham ⁊ ȝeouen ham god þe reaðere. hudeð hare hale c'lað ⁊ doð on alre uuemest fiterokes al toforene. O þis ilke wise eadmodnesse eadmodliche bigileð ure lauerd. ⁊ biȝet of his god wið seli muandise. hudeð eauer hire god, schaweð forð hire pouerte. put forð hire cancre. wepinde ⁊ graninde biuore godes ehnen. ... wið þus anewil ropunge halseð efter sum help to þe wrecche meoeseise. to lechni wið þe seke. to healen hire cancre. (AW v.168-169, f.89a.26-89b.7, 12-14).*

Humility is like those clever beggars who always display their festering woun's and their running sores, and if it is horrible they make it still

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<sup>407</sup> Here the author quotes a long passage from Gregory, *Epistolae* IX.ii.52 (PL 75, col. 549). However, as S/W point out, his translations are extremely loose (AW iv, n. 106, p. 383). As always, the author's use of his sources is highly original.

more horrible in the eyes of rich people, so that they will have pity on them and give them alms the more readily; they hide their good clothes and put on top of everything torn rags. In this way humility humbly beguiles our Lord and profits from his goodness with blessed trickery; she constantly hides her good and shows her poverty, holds out her sores, weeping and groaning in God's eyes ... With this stubborn crying, beg for some help for the miserable one in pain, for a doctor in her sickness to heal her sores [S/W 168-169].

The anchoress therefore cultivates the "falling sickness" of humility, falling to the earth through illness and physical suffering, lest she fall in pride, and become more seriously ill in her soul. In humility, she must discipline her flesh, for otherwise it would go wild, making her soul sick if it were not tamed with physical illness or the illness of sin. If neither body nor spirit were ill, the anchoress would become proud of her high spiritual calling (AW iii.91 [S/W 113]; cp. AW iii.72 [S/W 99]).

Physical illness is thus also a remedy for the illness or wounds of the soul. The author of *Ancrene Wisse* tells the anchoress not to fear fleshly disease so much that she develops a disease of the soul. He tells the story of three holy men, one of whom was concerned about his health, taking hot spices and taking care what he ate, while the others never noticed what was healthy or unhealthy to eat or drink. The latter two were healed by the Virgin Mary, but the first was passed by, for he was his own doctor (AW vi.188-189 [S/W 183-184]). In a similar vein, the sufferings which the anchoress endures in her ascetic life are described as a bitter tonic which will heal the disease which besets her soul. Illness is also described as a shield against the wounds

of the soul (AW iv.95 [S/W 115]), as the anchoress's ascetic life provides her with protective armour against the spears and arrows of the devil.

In a similar vein, the author of *Ancrene Wisse* draws a comparison between the spiritual life that has turned fleshly and gold that has darkened in an exegesis of Lamentations 4.1<sup>408</sup> (AW ii.57-58 [S/W 88]). The brightness of the gold can, however, be regained, even as gold can be refined or cleansed or filed. The gold of the soul is refined by illness and adversity (AW iv.94-95 [S/W 115-116]; cp. AW iv.121 [S/W 134], iv.147 [S/W 152]). Illness is the goldsmith who gilds the virgin's crown as his refining fire cleanses the gold of her soul; persecution is the file which makes the gold of the soul smooth and bright by filing away the rust and roughness of sin. Illness is thus one means by which the anchoress cultivates the pure, smooth heart which is the goal of her enclosed life and the object of the Inner Rule (AW I.5 [S/W 47]).

The author of *Ancrene Wisse* illustrates this point with a further anecdote, giving the example of two men, both of whom are sick. One man goes without the food and drink he loves and drinks a bitter tonic. This man soon recovers his health. The other man, however, follows his own wishes and soon dies. The anchoress is reminded that we are all sick through sin. To heal our suffering, Christ drank a bitter drink upon the cross, and yet we will not taste bitterness for ourselves. The

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<sup>408</sup> *Qomodo obscuratum est aurum optimum ⁊ cetera*, which the author translates: *O weilawei weilawei. hu is gold iþeostret hu is feherest heow biturnd ⁊ forweolewet* ("O alas, alas, how the gold has darkened, how the fairest color has changed and faded").

anchoress is urged to follow Christ's suffering in her own (AW vi.186 [S/W 181-182]). However, the anchoress is also warned that when Christ tasted the bitter drink on the cross he drew back quickly and would not drink it even though he was thirsty, for it was poisoned with gall:

*Heo is þe swa deð wið godd on his rode. þah hire þurste i þe lust. ⁊ te deouel beot hire his healewi to drincken, Vnderstonde ⁊ þenche þah þ ter is galle under. Ant tah hit beo a þrne, betere is forte þolien þurst, þen to beon iattret. (AW iv.122-123, f.64b.20-24).*

She who does this is with God on his cross, though she thirsts with desire when the devil offers her his medicine to drink. Understand and consider, though, that there is gall in it; and though it is a torment, it is better to suffer thirst than to be poisoned [S/W 135].<sup>409</sup>

Penance, bodily suffering, fasting, and other features of the ascetic life of the anchoress are also considered to be payment for sin.<sup>410</sup> In her anchorhouse the anchoress atones for her sin through her ascetic life; it is a place of discomfort where she may weep for her own sins and for the sins of others (AW ii.57 [S/W 88]).<sup>411</sup>

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<sup>409</sup> Cp. AW iv.97 [S/W 117].

<sup>410</sup> For a discussion of penance in *Ancrene Wisse*, see Georgianna, *The Solitary Self*, pp. 93f., 118f.; Grayson, *Structure and Imagery*, ch.6; Price "'Inner' and 'Outer,'" p. 205; and C. Kirchberger, "Some Notes on the *Ancrene Riwe*," *Dominican Studies* 7 (1954), pp. 230-231.

<sup>411</sup> Cp. AW i.19 [S/W 58] where the anchoress is urged to pray for prisoners' pains and suffering. Dobson (*Origins*, pp. 243-250) notes that the Deerfold chapel was dedicated to St. Leonard, patron saint of prisoners and of the sick, and argues that this passage would therefore have had special meaning for the three sisters for whom he suggests that *Ancrene Wisse* was originally written. Since Dobson's theory concerning the Deerfold as the site of the original anchorhouse of *Ancrene Wisse* has been cast into doubt (see Thompson, *Women Religious*, p. 34), this argument loses much of its force.

## THE ASCETIC LIFE

In the conclusion to *Ancrene Wisse* v, on penance, the author states that the anchoress need not have extensive penance imposed upon her by her confessor, for her entire life is itself a continual penance (AW v.176 [S/W 174-175]; cp. AW vi.177 [S/W 176]). In the opening of part vi, he expands on this idea, outlining the positive place of suffering in the life of the anchoress and depicting the anchoritic life as "an exercise in meaningful suffering."<sup>412</sup> Suffering makes the heart pure and clear-sighted, in contrast to a heart confused through vice and earthly love of worldly things. The wounds which the anchoress incurs in the physical and emotional suffering of her ascetic lifestyle prevent the far more serious spiritual wounds of the heart made crooked by sin. The anchoress is therefore urged to choose heavenly comfort over earthly, for in mingling the two she will never achieve purity of heart.

However, suffering is valued only as it purifies the heart, and love outweighs even the hardest lives. Love not only purifies and brightens the heart; love proceeds from a pure heart. The anchoress must set her love on God and the things of heaven, for the pure heart, in the end, is the heart ruled by love (AW vii.197 [S/W 190], vii.208 [S/W 197]).<sup>413</sup>

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<sup>412</sup> S/W AW vi, n. 19, pp. 394-395, and n. 1, pp. 392-393.

<sup>413</sup> Ultimately, the pure heart is defined as love of God alone (AW vii.197 [S/W 190]). Here the author refers to St. Bernard's teaching that a pure heart causes one to do all for the love of God alone or for the good of another. Cp. S/W AW vii, n.

The physical asceticism which is the anchoress's toil here on earth is taken for granted in *Ancrene Wisse*. The author assumes some sort of physical discipline as a matter of course (AW viii.210 [S/W 199]). The anchoress is warned that her flesh will run wild through ease and comfort, and she must therefore tame it with a harsh life (AW iii.72 [S/W 99-100]; cp. AW iii.91 [S/W 113]). The good anchoress is to be lean like the pelican, enclosed like Judith who led a hard life of fasts, vigils, hard work and harsh discipline.<sup>414</sup> The anchoress can also refer to the examples of the virgin martyrs. St. Katherine was enclosed in prison with no food or drink for twelve days (SK 80 [S/W 275]). We are later told, however, that she was fed by angels with "heavenly food" during her imprisonment, an event which can give the anchoress hope for comfort in her own harsh imprisonment (SK 94 [S/W 278]). Similarly, when St. Margaret is in prison she is brought bread for food and spring water to drink (SM 58 [S/W 294]): her "fast" is thus transformed into a spiritual feeding recalling the manna and water supplied by God to the people of Israel when they fasted in the wilderness, and the sacraments of eucharist and baptism which they prefigure.

Physical asceticism is a remedy for the sickness caused by sin, a bitter tonic which the anchoress takes to recover her spiritual health (AW vi.186 [S/W 181-182]). Lust is combatted through an ascetic life which avoids idleness, and through

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1, pp. 397-398.

<sup>414</sup> But cp. also AW viii. 211 [S/W 199], where the anchoress is told not to fast on bread and water unless she has permission. As always, the author of *Ancrene Wisse* urges moderation. See below, pp. 227f.

moderation in food and drink (SM 66-68 [S/W 298]). Following Aelred (*RR* 17-21), *Ancrene Wisse* suggests that virginity is preserved through the development of the heart's virtues and mortification of the flesh (AW vi.187-188 [S/W 183]).<sup>415</sup> This is consistent with the association of virginity with purity of heart, discussed above.

#### TORN FLESH

Physical suffering is also a remedy for the poisonous darts of the devil which penetrate the anchoress's defenses. The anchoress is told that if she cannot hold her shield against the devil's arrows she must take out "St. Benedict's remedy." Just as St. Benedict rolled in thorns, so she must give herself sharp disciplines, to drive sweet pleasure into pain and prevent herself from sinning through the consent of her reason to her flesh's foul desire (AW iv.152 [S/W 155-156]). It is important to note, however, that this is seen as a last resort, after prayer and meditation have failed, for the anchoress who is weak. In addition, the author of *Ancrene Wisse* stresses moderation as he tells the anchoress that she need not be as extreme as St. Benedict was.

The mortifications of the flesh which are described as "rolling in thorns" protect the anchoress from the lecherous beast of hell as thorns protect young saplings:

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<sup>415</sup> See S/W AW vi, n. 24, p. 395.

*zunge impen me bigurd wið þornes leste beastes fretten ham hwil ha beoð mearewe. ze beoð zunge impen iset i godes orchard. þornes beoð þe hearschipes þ ich habbe ispeken of. 7 ow is neoð þ ze beon biset wið ham abuten. þ te beast of helle hwen he snakereð toward ow forte biten on ow, hurte him o þe scharpschipe 7 schunche a zetnwardes (AW vi.193, f.102b.16-22).*

one surrounds young saplings with thorns in case beasts chew them while they are tender. You are young saplings planted in God's orchard; thorns are the hardships I have spoken of, and you need to be surrounded by them so that the beast of hell, when he comes sneaking towards you to bite you, may hurt himself on the sharpness and shrink back again [S/W 187].<sup>416</sup>

The thorns of sharp disciplines surround the anchoress's heart and keep it soft and tender, like the nest which is soft on the inside, but prickly on the outside (AW viii.214-215 [S/W 202]; cp. AW iii.71 [S/W 98]).

The flesh which is torn by the thorns of asceticism is far preferable to the flesh which is torn through sin. The backbiter, for example, is described as the devil's crow out of hell, who tears living flesh through his evil words (AW ii.45 [S/W 79]).

Similarly, those who fall into lechery are torn by sin:

*For hwa se swa falleð of meiohades menske þet wedlakes heuel bedd nawt ham ne ihente, se ferliche ha driueð dun to þer eorðe þet al ham is tolimet, lið ba ant lire. (HM 18.17-19).*

For whoever so falls from maidenhood's honour that marriage's woven bed does not catch them, they plunge down to the earth so rapidly that they are all torn apart, both flesh and limb [S/W 232].

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<sup>416</sup> The erotic overtones of the wild beast who draws the anchoress into lust by chewing on her young and tender flesh is paralleled by the erotic hunt in which Christ devours the anchoress, whose flesh is sweet and tender like that of a wild beast. See the discussion of metaphors of eating in the anchoritic texts, below, pp. 329f.



Even those who are caught by the marriage bed do not entirely escape. The physical suffering which the anchoress undergoes seems like luxury in comparison to the alternative of the married woman as described in *Hali Meiohad*. What if, the author asks, one lacks either love or wealth in a marriage and must

*grenin godles inwið westi wahes, and te breades wone brede þi beam-  
team; ant teke þis, ligger under laðest mon, þet þah þu hefdest alle weole,  
he went hit te to weane? ... Hwil he bið ei hame, alle þine wide wanes  
þuncheð þe to nearewe. ... Þine banes akeð þe ant ti flesch smeorteð þe,  
þin heorte wiðinne þe swelleð of sar grome, ant ti neb utewið tendreð ut  
of teone. (HM 26.32-33, 28.1-2, 6-7).*

groan in poverty within broken-down walls, and breed your children to want of bread, and besides, lie under the most repellent man, who, even if you had all wealth, would turn it into misery for you? ... While he is at home, all your wide house seems too small [lit. narrow] ... Your bones ache and your flesh pains you, your heart swells in bitter anger within you, and outwardly your face is inflamed with fury [S/W 236-237].

Thus, in the anchoritic texts, one function of asceticism is to combat lust. Physical desire is combatted physically, first through the bodily sense of resistance created in the imagery of the heroic anchoress swinging the cross as a weapon and shield, and spitting in the devil's beard, and then through physical asceticism, fasting and harsh discipline.<sup>417</sup> As Savage and Watson state:

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<sup>417</sup> Cp. S/W AW vi, n. 42, p. 397, where they point out that the anchoress's asceticism is itself the literal realization of the commandment to put on the whole armour of God. See also Shepherd, n. to 18.11f., p. 51. Shepherd notes that descriptions of ascetic austerities include the wearing of a habergeon or chain mail.

When prayer, meditation and fantasy couched in the most forceful and physical language fails to work, the physical remedy is all that is left.<sup>418</sup>

However, the anchoress is counselled to perform physical discipline wisely and carefully, according to her own capacity, for discipline which is overdone is as harmful as the sin for which it is intended to atone (AW iii.67-72 [S/W 95-100]; cp. AW iii.71 [S/W 98], iv.152 [S/W 156], vi.189 [S/W 184], viii.214-215 [S/W 202]).<sup>419</sup> This moderation may in part be due to an awareness on the part of the author that extreme asceticism often stimulates the lust which it is intended to eliminate; that just as asceticism can drive sweet pleasure into pain, so too can pain become sweet pleasure. So great an authority as Jerome describes the erotic visions to which he was subjected during his sojourn in the desert:

How often, when I was established in the desert and in that vast solitude which is scorched by the sun's heat and affords a savage habitation for monks, did I think myself amid the delights of Rome! ... My face was pale from fasting, and my mind was hot with desire in a body cold as ice. Though my flesh, before its tenant, was already as good as dead, the fires of the passions kept boiling within me.<sup>420</sup>

Although Jerome describes his experience in order to warn his female reader that she, who has not tamed her body with harsh physical discipline as he has, will be

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<sup>418</sup> AW iv, n. 130, p. 386.

<sup>419</sup> Savage and Watson point out that *Ancrene Wisse* iii gives a balanced and practical treatment of the subject of asceticism before the author moves on to a more theological discussion in part iv (AW iii, n. 18, p. 36<sup>o</sup>).

<sup>420</sup> Letter 22, *The Letters of St. Jerome*, trans. Charles Christopher Mierow [New York, 1963], Vol. I, pp. 139-140.

even more susceptible to such lusts, the passage is an illuminating description of the psychological effects of extreme asceticism. As Peter Brown points out, this experience was not unique to Jerome.<sup>421</sup> A twelfth century example can be found in the account of Edmund, the monk of Eynsham, who describes a dream in which harsh physical discipline produces erotic sensations:

I desired to confess again and again and to be flogged repeatedly. For at each stroke, instead of pain, an incredible sweetness and inestimable pleasure overwhelmed me.<sup>422</sup>

The sufferings of the saints and martyrs are a model for the ascetic anchoress.<sup>423</sup> In *Ancrene Wisse* vi.185 [S/W 181] they are compared to the cunning children of rich parents who tear their old clothes (the flesh which we inherit from Adam) to get new ones (the transformed body of the resurrection, which will shine more brightly than the sun if the flesh is torn here by adversity and woe).<sup>424</sup> Those

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<sup>421</sup> *The Body and Society*, (New York, 1988). p. 375, n. 43.

<sup>422</sup> Quoted by Peter Dinzelbacher, "The Beginnings of Mysticism Experienced in Twelfth-Century England," in Glasscoe (ed.) *The Medieval Mystical Tradition in England* (Cambridge, 1987), p. 115.

<sup>423</sup> Just as the martyrs are an example to the anchoress, so too the suffering of the anchoress is an example to others around her, by which the whole church suffers vicariously and is healed (S/W AW iii, n. 39, p. 364). See above, pp. 132f.

<sup>424</sup> The image of the flesh as a garment inherited from Adam is a medieval commonplace. This flesh is contrasted with the torn garment of Christ's flesh (for example, LLe 17.48-49 [S/W 330]), which is also commonplace (Shepherd, *AW Six and Seven*, 9/28n., p. 40). For a discussion of the garment of torn flesh in *Ancrene Wisse*, see Grayson, *Structure and Imagery*, pp. 158-159; and Price, "'Inner' and 'Outer,'" p. 205.

who tear their flesh through a severe way of life are like the people of Isaiah 18.6-7,<sup>425</sup> mutilated and torn by wild beasts and birds of prey. These are a fearsome people, from whom the devil will flee (AW vi.185 [S/W 181]).

#### BITTERNESS

The anchoress who suffers harsh discipline on earth is like the virgin martyrs, who suffer extreme physical torment in order to preserve their chastity so that their flesh will not be torn in hell (cp. AW iv.110 [S/W 127]). However, just as Christ's body was anointed with spices, so the tortured bodies of the virgin martyrs are anointed and healed (SK 84 [S/W 276]; cp. SJ 27 [S/W 310], 53 [S/W 317]; SM 52 [S/W 291], 76 [S/W 301]).<sup>426</sup> In the same way, the physical mortification of the anchoress is compared to the bitter spices with which Nicodemus anointed Christ's body, spices which preserve and perfect the anchoress in body and soul (AW vi.189

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<sup>425</sup> *Deferetur munus domino exercituum a populo ditulso ⁊ dilacerato, a populo terribili*, which the author translates: *A folc tolaimet ⁊ toteren. A folc...fearlich. schal makien to ure lauerd present of him seoluen* ("A people mutilated and torn, a fearsome people...will make a present of themselves to our Lord").

<sup>426</sup> Note, however, that rather than receiving a physical anointing after her tortures, Margaret is miraculously healed in the sight of all. This continues the emphasis on the public vindication of Margaret, noted above, pp.189, 192.

[S/W 184]).<sup>427</sup> Her ascetic life is like a bitter tonic which she takes to cure the illness caused by sin:

*Ant hwa nis sec of sunne? Godd for ure secnesse dronc attri drunch o rode. ant we nulleð nawt bitres biten for us seoluen. ... Sikerliche his folhere mot wið pine of his flesch folhin his pine. (AW vi.186, f.98b.17-20).*

And who is not sick with sin? God, for our sickness, drank a bitter drink upon the cross, and we will not taste bitterness for ourselves. ... Certainly his follower must follow his suffering with his own fleshly suffering [S/W 181-182].

The bitterness of the anchoress's ascetic life is part of the *imitatio Christi* which she undertakes when she enters into her anchorhouse. She is told that two things belong to the anchoress, narrowness and bitterness. She is a recluse as Christ was a recluse on the cross and in Mary's womb. The name Mary means "bitterness," and thus Christ's enclosure in the confines of Mary's womb symbolizes the anchoress's enclosure in a narrow cell to lead a bitter ascetic life (AW vi.192-193 [S/W 186]). As Christ suffered bitter hurts and torments on the cross, the anchoress suffers bitterness in her cell (WLD 35.584-595 [S/W 256]).

If the anchoress is not willing to suffer bitterness on earth, she will surely do so in hell, the *bold of eaureuch biternesse* ("abode of every bitterness" SW 94.3 [S/W 215]; cp. HM 22 [S/W 234]; SJ 17 [S/W 309], 21 [S/W 310]). The flesh which incites her to sweetness, ease and softness is her enemy (AW iv.100 [S/W 119]), for what is

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<sup>427</sup> Cp. the image of virginity as a healing and preserving balm (HM 10-12 [S/W 229]).

sweet to the flesh is in reality sin. The bitterness which she suffers in her cell prevents the bitterness of poisonous sin from becoming a wall between the anchoress and Christ, a wall which will deny her the sweetness of his love because what pleases the flesh is not bitter to her (UrG 7.77f. [S/W 323]).<sup>428</sup>

The author of *Ancrene Wisse* outlines three kinds of bitterness which the anchoress will suffer in her enclosure, corresponding to the three Marys and representing the different stages of the anchoress's life (AW vi.190-191 [S/W 184-185]). First is the bitterness of repentance for sin, represented by Mary Magdalene, who left her sins and turned to the Lord with great repentance and bitterness of heart.<sup>429</sup> This represents the early stages of the anchoress's enclosure, when she turns from the world and begins her ascetic life. To prevent despair from too much bitterness, "Magdalene," which according to *Ancrene Wisse* means "height of the tower," is joined to her name, signifying the anchoress's hope for high mercy and heavenly joy.<sup>430</sup>

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<sup>428</sup> Cp. the image of licking honey from thorns in HM 6 [S/W 227], where the sweetness of sin is bought with a double share of bitterness (above, p. 69, 70). For sin as bitterness which quenches the anchoress's love for Christ, see also AW vii.205-206 [S/W 195-196].

<sup>429</sup> Thus confession too is bitter, atoning for the sin which once seemed sweet. The bitterness of confession is linked with the name "Merari," a cognate of "Mary" (AW v.159 [S/W 161-162]).

<sup>430</sup> Cp. AW ii.42-43 [S/W 76-77], where hope is compared to a sweet spice in the heart which sweetens the bitterness that the body drinks.

The second bitterness is the anchoress's wrestling and struggling with temptation, represented by the second Mary, the mother of Jacob whose name, the author tells us, means "wrestler."<sup>431</sup> Temptation is very bitter for those who are a long way along the road to heaven but are still shaken by temptation. As seen above, however, elsewhere the anchoress is assured that this kind of temptation is really a sign of her holy life. The third bitterness, then, is the longing for heaven and weariness of this world which is experienced by those who are so high that they have their heart's ease in the war against sin and all worldly things seem bitter. This bitterness is represented by Mary Salome, whose second name means "peace." In her the peace of a clean conscience is joined with bitterness in the heart because of this life which holds her back from heaven.

Thus, at each stage of the anchoress's existence bitterness rules, for there is no ease or pleasure in this world. However, the author assures the anchoresses that the bitterness which she suffers here will turn to sweetness:

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<sup>431</sup> The source for this etymology seems to be the context of the story of Jacob's wrestling with the angel in Genesis 32.24f. The Hebrew  $\text{קָרַע}$  is generally understood to mean "supplanter" (see Genesis 27.36). In Hebrew folk etymology, the name is derived from the Hebrew word for "heel" ( $\text{קָעָל}$ ; see Genesis 25.26). In reality, however, the name  $\text{קָרַע}$  stems from the Semitic root of the verb "to protect" ( $\text{קָרַע}$ ) combined with the divine name to produce the meaning "may God protect" (see Nahum M. Sarna, *The JPS Torah Commentary: Genesis*  $\text{ל' וְיָחַדְךָ}$ , [Philadelphia, 1989], p. 180). Much of the confusion arises from the fact that in unpointed Hebrew, the tri-literal roots are identical. As seen above (n. 293), however, Mary is actually the mother of James (the Greek form of Jacob). The author of *Ancrene Wisse* plays with both the reference to the three Marys in Mark and the story of Jacob's wrestling with the angel in Genesis to make his point about the anchoress's wrestling with sin.

*Ah neomeð nu zeme míne leoue sustren hu efter bitternesse kimeð swetnesse. bitternesse buð hi. for as þ godspel teleð. þeose þreo maries bohten swote smeallinde aromaz to smirien ure lauerd. Þurh aromaz þe beoð swote, is understanden swotnesse of deuot heorte. þeos maries hit buggeð. þ is. þurh bitternesse me kimeð to swotnesse. (AW vi.191, f.101b.12-18).*

But now take note, my dear sisters, of how after bitterness comes sweetness. Bitterness buys it, for as the gospel tells, these three Marys bought sweet-smelling spices to anoint our Lord. By spices that are sweet the sweetness of a devout heart is to be understood; these Marys buy it—that is through bitterness one comes to sweetness [S/W 185].

Just as water turned into wine at the wedding through Mary's prayer, so too through the prayer of the bitterness the anchoress suffers for God her watery heart will turn to wine, as she finds in him a taste sweeter than any wine (AW vi.191 [S/W 185-186]).<sup>432</sup> The bitterness the anchoress suffers on earth thus buys her sweetness, not only in heaven, but also on earth, here in this world, through her communion with God in her heart through prayer, for the author assures the anchoress that those who battle with temptation will find sweet rest *her ... i þis world ear ha cumen to heouene* ("here ... in this world, before they come to heaven" AW iv.113-114 [S/W 129]).<sup>433</sup>

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<sup>432</sup> Contrast the heart soured by spite or envy, which is compared to vinegar (AW vii.206 [S/W 196]).

<sup>433</sup> The virgin's reward, both in heaven and on earth, is discussed in Chapter Four, below. For an excellent discussion of the motif of bitterness in *Ancrene Wisse* see Grayson, *Structure and Imagery*, pp. 161-167.



## POVERTY

The author of *Ancrene Wisse* thus compares the anchoress travelling along her laborious road to the feast of heaven with the worldly fools who go along a green road to the gallows and death of hell and declares: *Betere is ga sec to heouene þen hal to helle. to murhðe wið mæoseise, þen to wa wið eise.* ("it is better to go sick to heaven than healthy to hell, to mirth in misery than to sorrow in comfort" AW iv.98, f.50b.22-23 [S/W 118]). As *Wohunge* states so eloquently, the bliss of heaven is granted by Christ to all who willingly suffer hardship and poverty for his love: *for wið pouerte 7 wið wa schal mon wele buggen* ("for wealth must be bought with poverty and with grief" WLd 30.363-364 [S/W 253]).<sup>434</sup>

The association of the virginal anchoritic life with poverty is described in *Wohunge* 28.317-30.364 [S/W 252-253] as a kind of *imitatio Christi*; the anchoress vows to be poor as Christ was poor. This passage consists of a meditation on the poverty of Christ which moves from his poverty in life to his poverty in death, describing Christ's poverty as a mirror image of the ascetic life of the anchoress. At his birth, he suffered poverty of room with nowhere to rest his limbs, like the anchoress who

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<sup>434</sup> Contrast UrG 6.39-44 [S/W 322], where the anchoress who turns from Christ's grace buys the world's solace and the comfort of human speech with great grief and suffering.

is enclosed in a narrow cell.<sup>435</sup> In fact, the author states that Christ was lodged at birth in a wall-less house in the middle of the street, making the anchoress's four walls seem a luxury. As he grew older, he lost even the nourishment which he obtained from his mother's breast (comparable to the anchoress's fasting), and at his death he hung naked on the cross (imitated by the anchoress in her enclosure which is described as a crucifixion within four walls). Christ's earthly poverty is contrasted with his wealth in heaven and specifically associated with the incarnation, symbolized by Christ's birth from a maiden.

The association of poverty and virginity is made explicit in *Ancrene Wisse* iv.133 [S/W 143], where the Virgin Mary fosters and feeds the infant Christ with the inadequate milk of a virgin.<sup>436</sup> Again, Christ's poverty is associated with the anchoritic life in images identical to those found in *Wohunge*. Here, however, the author includes the details that while Christ's poverty at birth included inadequate food and accommodation and rags for clothing, in adulthood he had no food, and nowhere to lay his head. In death, however, he suffered the greatest privation of all, hanging naked on the cross, with no water to quench his thirst, and not even enough ground to die on; the cross occupied only a foot of earth, and that for his torment.

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<sup>435</sup> Cp. the consideration of narrowness of room in AW vi.192-193 [S/W 186-187], (quoted below, p. 247), upon which, along with AW iv.133 [S/W 143], this passage may be based.

<sup>436</sup> Again, note the connection between the breast as an image of motherhood and nurture, and as an image of chastity.

The author declares: *Hwen þe worldes wealdent walde beo þus poure. unbileuet he is þe luueð to muchel ant zisceð worldes weole ant wunne.* ("If the world's ruler was willing to be this poor, they are faithless who too much love and covet the world's wealth and pleasure" AW iv.133, f.71a.15-17, [S/W 143]).

### PRISON

The anchorhouse thus becomes a place of penance where the anchoress atones for her sins and for those of others. As a descendant of Eve and a participant in her sin, the anchoress is subject to the same penalty which was allotted to Eve. Eve leapt through sin from Paradise to earth, and then from earth to hell where she lay in prison four thousand years. All her offspring are condemned to leap after her to death and are therefore condemned through sin to the prison of hell (AW ii.32 [S/W 68]). In *Ancrene Wisse* v.165 [S/W 166], the sinful person is led to hell as a thief is led to punishment, with shamefulness tied around his neck like a noose.<sup>437</sup> However, the hardships of the anchoress's life atone for her sin, enabling her to avoid the gallows of hell (AW iii.67 [S/W 94], iv.95 [S/W 116]).

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<sup>437</sup> This image occurs in a discussion of the importance of confession, which has the power to release the anchoress from the prison to which she is condemned by sin (see below, p. 238).

The anchoress is thus condemned to her anchorhouse as to a prison, where she does penance for her sins through her ascetic life.<sup>438</sup> Here she serves the sentence imposed upon her as an alternative to serving time in the prison of hell or hanging on the devil's gibbet (AW iv.98 [S/W 118], v.160 [S/W 162]). The prison is the anchorhouse, in which the anchoress's body is enclosed (AW ii.57 [S/W 88]);<sup>439</sup> her body, in which the soul of the anchoress is enclosed as in a torture chamber (AW iii.74 [S/W 101]);<sup>440</sup> and the earth itself, a prison in which all humanity is condemned to lie until the ransom for our sin is paid or we are led out to be hanged (AW iii.66-67 [S/W 94]).

The debt of sin which all humanity owes to God and for which we are imprisoned in the debtors' prison of the earth is paid through Christ's death on the cross, for he has pledged himself to redeem humanity, and given his body as our ransom. Thus, in a passage which compares Christ's love to earthly loves, the author of *Ancrene Wisse* declares that Christ's love is superior to that of a person who gives his pledge to redeem a friend, for he is willing to pay the ultimate price (AW vii.200-

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<sup>438</sup> For further discussion of the motif of the prison in *Ancrene Wisse* and in anchoritic literature in general, see Warren, *Anchorites and Their Patrons*, pp. 92-97; Grayson, *Structure and Imagery*, pp. 134-136; and Watson, "Methods and Objectives," pp. 139-140.

<sup>439</sup> Cp. AW ii.54 [S/W 85] where the anchoress is compared to a bird in cage. In a warning concerning the dangers of the outside world, she is cautioned not to peep ou or the cat of hell will get her.

<sup>440</sup> Cp. SM 48 [S/W 290], where Margaret is sent to a prison which is described as a torture chamber (*cwatern ant ... cwalhus*). See also n. 445, below.

201 [S/W 192]). But the ransom is also paid through God's grace, for we are "bad debtors": we owe Christ blood for bloc 1, but through his grace he takes less, accepting our tears in return for his blood (AW v.161 [S/W 163]). The anchoress is warned, however, that grace does not belong to us. We do not have a purse from which we can draw out the payment for sin. Thus, when God offers grace we must accept it immediately; when we sin, we must hurry to confession and not wait to partake of the grace offered there (AW v.173 [S/W 172]).

The anchoress also pays her ransom in the wrongs she suffers from others. Just as the words of confession embrace the ransom of grace offered by God, so the harmful words (and deeds) of those who are in the world become a ransom with which the anchoress can free herself from the debtors' prison of this world. As for the man imprisoned for debt, without this ransom the only exit from the prison is through death: she must either die in her cell or come out to be hanged. Anyone in such a position would thank someone who threw him a bag of coins, even if it was thrown hard at his heart. In this allegory, any wrong done to the anchoress becomes part of her ransom; words which are thrown at her may hit hard and hurt her heart, but she must take it gladly and thank the one who sent it, for he only harms himself and benefits her (AW iii.66-67 [S/W 94-95]).<sup>441</sup> Thus, says the author, every wrongful word, every longing of a day or sickness of an hour suffered by the

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<sup>441</sup> Cp. the image of the crown which is plaited for the anchoress by temptation and the abuse of others, steadfastly resisted and patiently borne (below, p. 277).

anchoress, gains her a reward which she would not sell for a whole hoard of gold (AW iv.98 [S/W 118]).

The anchoress is thus urged to suffer those who speak against her or mistreat her even if she is not guilty. It is better to be Christ's companion than Judas': both were hanged, but Judas was hanged for his guilt, while Christ was hanged without guilt (AW iv.146-147 [S/W 152]).<sup>442</sup>

However, the anchoress, by virtue of being human, is never totally guiltless. In an allegory of the judgement, the anchoress is warned: *o domes schulen ure swarte sinnen strongliche bicleopien us of ure sawle mordre.* ("at the judgement day, our ugly sins will arraign us sharply for the murder of our souls" AW v.157, f.83a.5-6 [S/W 160]).<sup>443</sup> Those who have refused God's doom for humanity, to live in toil and grief on earth, are condemned to the devil's doom, to burn in the fire of hell. Therefore, following Augustine,<sup>444</sup> the author of *Ancrene Wisse* urges the anchoress to judge herself, and illustrates this injunction with an allegory of the judgement of

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Hours depicting the "Double Intercession," with God in the center enthroned as ruler and judge. On His left is Christ exposing his wounded side, and on His right Mary lifts her bared breast.

<sup>442</sup> Judas actually hanged himself out of guilt for his betrayal of Christ, but the author once again manipulates his sources to make his point. See the image of the anchoritic life as a crucifixion with Christ, below, pp. 245f. The anchoress is condemned to hang for her sins and in atonement for the sins of others, even as Christ hung on the cross for the sins of humankind. The anchoress who is crucified with Christ hangs on the cross instead of on the gallows.

<sup>443</sup> Here the author quotes (and freely translates) Anselm, *Meditatio* 1 [2] PL 158, col. 724, cited by S/W AW v, n. 11, p. 388 (see the translation by Sr. Benedicta Ward, *The Prayers and Meditations of Saint Anselm*, [London, 1973], Meditation 1.92-96, p. 223). S/W note that *Ancrene Wisse* expands Anselm's phrase into a dramatic allegory.

<sup>444</sup> *Sermones* CCCL.iv.7 PL 39, col. 1542, cited by S/W AW v, n. 12, p. 388.

the soul by reason. Mind's memory arraigns the soul for sin, and fear is brought forth to bind to soul to prevent it from sinning further. But the judge (reason) is not satisfied unless the sins already committed are paid for; thus pain and sorrow are called forth to exact payment with repentance, fasting, and other bodily sorrows. In this context, the anchoress's entire life becomes acceptable payment for sin (AW v.158 [S/W 161]).

#### GRAVE

The prison of the anchorhouse to which the anchoress is sentenced for her sins, the hole or cave into which she crawls in order to avoid the pit of hell, is also the pit which is her grave. Just as the anchoress avoids the prison of hell and the devil's gallows by serving her sentence on earth in the prison of the anchorhouse, so too she may avoid the death house of hell by entering the grave of the anchorhouse.<sup>445</sup> Here she acts out her death to the world in her isolation and enclosure, as she is crucified with Christ through her ascetic life, dead and buried with Christ in her anchorhouse as he was in the tomb.

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<sup>445</sup> Cp. SK 32 [S/W 267], where Katherine's prison is referred to as the death house, a term which is also used to describe hell (SW 94 [S/W 215]; WLd 28.307-308 [S/W 252]). Cp. also WLd 24.145 [S/W 250] which describes hell as *cwalm hus*, lit. "house of torment" or prison, a term similar to that used to describe Margaret's prison (*cwalmhus* SM 48 [S/W 290]).

In a life which is itself an *imitatio Christi*, the anchoress becomes like Christ in his death so that she may share in his life (AW vi.177 [S/W 176]). Christ's death protects the anchoress from *þene deað ðet neuer ne deieð* ("that death which never dies"), as his death deadens the deadly desires of her body (LLO 11.56-12.61 [S/W 326]). Similarly, in *Hali Meidhad* 10-12 [S/W 229], virginity is described as a balm which keeps the maiden's living flesh without taint, protecting the anchoress from the rot of sin as balm keeps the dead body from rotting. The imagery of death and burial thus becomes another means of expressing the anchoress's enclosed life and the chastity which characterizes it.

When the anchoress is enclosed, she becomes symbolically dead to the world. Warren describes enclosure ceremonies in which the Office of the Dead was spoken over the anchoress's body and the anchoress was sealed within her cell.<sup>446</sup> As Savage and Watson note:

the symbolic potency of this definition [of the anchoress's way of life as a living death] can only have been reinforced by the long years that followed of living in a cramped, lightless, bare and uncomfortable cell, vulnerable to cold, damp and heat, often literally surrounded by the graves of the dead.<sup>447</sup>

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<sup>446</sup> *Anchorites and Their Patrons*, pp. 92, 98 n. 15 and Ch.4. See above, pp. 6f.

<sup>447</sup> General Introduction, p. 16.



In addition, portions of the Office of the Dead are part of the anchoress's routine devotions.<sup>448</sup> Thus she has a daily reminder of her enclosure as a death to the world, and her anchorhouse as her grave.

The anchoress's symbolic death to the world also has practical implications. She is expected to have no dealings with the outside world: in a section warning the anchoress of the dangers of peeping out of her anchorhouse windows, the author declares that since she is dead to the world, she should behave accordingly and not dote on those living in the world (AW ii.30-31 [S/W 67]). Similarly, the fact that she is dead to the world is offered as the reason that she is not to eat with guests. The author's sense of humour is evident in his comment: *me haueð iherd ofte þr deade speken wið cwike. ah þr ha eten wið cwike, ne fond ich zet n eauer.* ("One hears often of the dead speaking with the living—but eating with the living? I have never heard of it" AW viii.211, f.111b.23-24 [S/W 200]). In the same vein, the author tells the story of a religious man who, when appealed to for aid by his brother, referred him to a third brother who was dead and buried. When the brother who had requested his help queried: "Is he not dead?" the religious man replied: "So am I." (AW viii.216 [S/W 203]).

The anchoress is also cautioned not to grumble or complain and not to indulge in wanton behaviour on the same grounds: such behaviour, she is told, would be unfitting for a lady of a castle, but is contemptible in an anchoress who is buried in

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<sup>448</sup> See S/W AW i, nn. 8, 9, p. 344.

her cell, for hwet is ancre hus bute hire burinse? ('...for what is an anchorhouse but her grave?'" AW ii.58, f.29a.7 [S/W 88]). The anchoress is thus urged not to put her hand outside her window, nor to admire the whiteness of hands which are fair because they are idle:

*ha schulden schrapien euche dei þe eorðe up of hare put þ ha schulien rotien in. Godd hit wat þ put deð muche god moni ancre. for as Salomon seið. Memorare nouissima tua 7 in eternum non peccabis. þeo þe hæueð eauer hire deað as biuoren hire ehnen þ te put muneged. (AW ii.62-63, f.31b.23-28).*

They should be scraping the earth up every day out of the pit they must rot in! God knows that this pit does much good to many an anchoress—for as Solomon says: *Memorare nouissima tua et in eternum non peccabis* [Remember your last hour, and you will never sin] (Ecclesiastes 7.40). She who always has her death as though before her eyes remembers that pit [S/W 91-92].<sup>449</sup>

The anchorhouse is thus described as the sepulchre in which the anchoress is enclosed, as Christ was enclosed in a stone tomb (AW vi.192-193 [S/W 186]). The image of the sepulchre pervades the saints' Lives as well, where burial in a stone coffin becomes a symbol of honour. *Seinte Iuliane* describes Juliana's burial in a

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<sup>449</sup> S/W (AW ii, n. 89, p. 359) note: "The grave dug in the anchorhouse floor here is of course metaphorical, part of the complex of images in which the anchorhouse is itself seen as a grave." However, while in *Ancrene Wisse* the presence of the anchoress' grave within the anchorhouse is symbolic, in some instances the anchorhouse becomes a literal grave. Aelred's *Rule for a Recluse* describes the open grave within the anchorhouse, and Warren cites a passage in *Regula reclusorum Walteri reclusi* (Waite's Rule, ca.1280) which states: "The sepulchre of the recluse shall always be open so that day and night he may see where he will go." In addition, the discovery of skeletons within the ruins of anchorhouses would seem to indicate that anchorites were at least on occasion buried in their anchorhouses (*Anchorites and Their Patrons*, p. 106, n. 32).

stone coffin, worthily, as befits a saint (SJ 69 [S/W 321]), just as Christ himself was enclosed in a coffin of stone (SJ 57 [S/W 318]). Margaret's body, which is capable of miraculous healing, is enclosed in a sepulchre (SM 82 [S/W 305]) and Katherine is buried in a stone tomb on Mt. Sinai, where healing oil miraculously flows in a stream from her grave (SK 120 [S/W 284]).<sup>450</sup> So too, the anchoress is enclosed in the four stone walls of the anchorhouse that is her coffin and grave.<sup>451</sup>

Since the anchoress is dead to the world, and the world is dead to her, she is untroubled by the outside world, free to live only to Christ:

*þe deade nis noht of, þah he ligge unburiet. ⁊ rotie buuen eorðe. preise him laste him. do him scheome. sei him scheome, al him is iliche leof. þis is a seli deað. þ makeð cwic mon þus oðer cwic wummon, ut of þe worlde. Ah sikerliche hwa se is þus dead in hire seoluen, godd liueð in hire heorte. ... þus riht is euch religiuis dead to þe worlde, ⁊ cwic þah to criste. (AW vi.179-180, f.95a.17-22, 27-28).*

to the dead it is of no importance if he lies unburied and rotting above the earth—praise him, blame him, do shameful things to him, say shameful things to him, it is all the same to him. This is a blessed death which makes a living man or a living woman like this, away from the world. But certainly, whoever is dead like this to herself, God lives in her heart ... Thus each religious is properly dead to the world and yet alive to Christ [S/W 177].<sup>452</sup>

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<sup>450</sup> It seems appropriate that Katherine, who is associated with wisdom and acts as a mediator between heaven and earth, should be buried on Mt. Sinai where Moses received the law.

<sup>451</sup> Cp. WLD 28.317-30.364 [S/W 252-253], discussed above, pp. 234f.

<sup>452</sup> In this passage the author quotes Galatians 2.20, *Vtvo ego iam non ego; vivit autem in me Christus*, which he translates: *Ich liule nawt ich. ah crist liueð in me þurh his inwuniende grace* ("I live; not I, but Christ lives in me through his indwelling grace"). S/W note that the "dead" are those in contemplative life, monks, friars,

## ENCLOSURE AS CRUCIFIXION

The anchoress acts out her death to the world through her enclosure, which is itself a participation in Christ's death on the cross. The author of *Ancrene Wisse* describes three types of people chosen by God in *Ancrene Wisse* vi.177-181 [S/W 176-178]: the first two are those who live in this world as pilgrims,<sup>453</sup> and those who are dead to the world. As we have seen, the anchoress is encouraged to view her life in terms of both of these images. However, the author of *Ancrene Wisse* asserts that there is a third stage, higher than those of the pilgrim and the one who is dead to the world: the stage of the one hung at her own desire upon the cross of Christ. It is to this third and highest step that the anchoress belongs, for in her enclosure she is not only dead to the world, but, like a criminal who has been hanged, is daily hung on the cross with Christ.<sup>454</sup> In a sense, the entire anchoritic life could be described as hanging on a gibbet to avoid and atone for sin,<sup>455</sup> as the anchoress symbolically

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canons, hermits and anchorites (AW vi, n. 6, p. 393).

<sup>453</sup> These represent holy people who remain in the world, but never become citizens of it, for they are continually pressing on to the city of God (see S/W AW vi, n. 4, p. 393).

<sup>454</sup> The modern English distinction between "hung" and "hanged" is not made in the Middle English.

<sup>455</sup> Cp. AW ii.62 [S/W 91], and n. 128 above.

hangs on the cross, which was Christ's gibbet, in imitation of his suffering and death.<sup>456</sup> Thus:

*nihc ancras ne beoð nawt ane pilegrimes, ne ȝet nawt ane deade, ah beoð of þeos þridde. for al hare blisse is forte beon ahonget sarliche 7 scheemeliche wið iesu on his rode. (AW vi.180, f.95b.22-26).*

true anchoresses are not only pilgrims, nor yet only dead, but are this third; for all their joy is to be hung, painfully and shamefully, with Christ on his cross. [S/W 178].

The anchoress's entire life is thus a form of severe penance:

*Al is penitence. ani strong penitence þet ȝe eauer dreheð mine leoue sustren. Al þet ȝe eauer doð of god. Al þ ȝe þolieð is ow martirdom i se derf ordre. for ȝe beoð niht 7 dei up o godes rode. (AW vi.177, f.94a.13-18).*

All you ever endure is penance, and hard penance, my dear sisters; all the good y.<sup>u</sup> ever do, all you suffer, is martyrdom for you in the most severe of orders, for night and day you are up on God's cross [S/W 176].

The enclosure which is the anchoress's death to the world is thus also a crucifixion; the anchorhouse which is her tomb is also the cross on which she hangs with Christ. The anchoress is *wið iesu crist bitund as i sepulchre. bibarret as he wes o þe deorre rode* ("buried with Jesus Christ as if in a sepulchre, enclosed as he was on the precious cross" AW iii.88, f.45b.21-23 [S/W 111]).<sup>457</sup> Her entire life thus

<sup>456</sup> Savage and Watson point out that in Part iv, suffering and self-flagellation become the physical equivalent of the language of gibbets and gallows which pervades Part ii (AW ii, n. 89, p. 359).

<sup>457</sup> The verb *bibarren* also carries connotations of imprisonment, as indicated by Stratmann's suggested translation of "barred" (Francis Henry Stratmann, *A Middle-English Dictionary*, edited by Henry Bradley [Oxford, repr. 1986]).

becomes an *imitatio Christi*, as she becomes Christ's companion on the cross (AW iv.146-147 [S/W 152]), suffering along with Christ who was himself an anchorite on the cross and in his mother's womb:<sup>458</sup>

*þeos twa þing limpeð to ancre. nearowðe. ⁊ bitternesse. for wombe is nearow wununge. þer ure lauerd wes reclus. ant tis word murie as ich ofte habbe iseid, spealeð bitternesse. ⁊ef ⁊e þenne i nearow stude polieð bitternesse, ⁊e beoð his feolahes reclus as he wes i Marie wombe. Beo ⁊e ibunden inwið fowr large wahes? ⁊ he in a nearow cader. i neilet o rode. i stanene þruh bicluset hete feste. Marie wombe ⁊ his þruh, weren his ancre huses. I nowðer nes he wortlich mon, ah as ut of þe world forte schawir: ancren þ̅ ha ne schulen wið þe world na þing habben imeane. ⁊e þu ondswerest me. ah he wende ut of ba. ⁊e went tu alswa of hapþne ancre huses. as he dude wið ute bruche. ⁊ leaf ham ba ihale. ... þ̅ an is þe licome. þet. oþer is þe uttre hus. þ̅ is as þe uttre wah abute þe castel. (AW vi.192-193, f.102a.25-102b.12).*

These two things belong to the anchoress: narrowness and bitterness. For the womb is a narrow dwelling, where our Lord was a recluse; and this word "Mary," as I have often said, means "bitterness." If you then suffer bitterness in a narrow place, you are his fellows, recluse as he was in Mary's womb. Are you imprisoned within four walls?—And he in a narrow cradle, nailed on the cross, enclosed tight in a stone tomb. Mary's womb and this tomb were his anchorhouses. In neither was he a worldly man, but like one out of the world, to show anchoresses that they must not have anything in common with the world. "Yes," you answer me, "But he went out of both." Yes, and you too will go out of both your anchorhouses as he did, without a break, and leave them both whole. ... One of them is the body, the other is the outer house, which is like the outer wall around a castle [S/W 186-187].

The crucifixion is an image of the enclosed life throughout the anchoritic works.<sup>459</sup> The cross is eternally present before the anchoress's eyes and in her

<sup>458</sup> For the image of the anchorhouse as a womb see below, pp. 338, 341f.

<sup>459</sup> See S/W, AW vi, n. 7, p. 393. See also Watson, "Methods and Objectives, pp. 142-144, 146, and Grayson, *Structure and Imagery*, pp. 148-150.

choice of life. The crucifix hangs before her both in her anchorhouse, where she can see it and hold it, kissing the places of Christ's wounds in memory of his suffering on the cross (AW iii.72 [S/W 99]), and in the Church, where it is immediately visible (AW vii.200 [S/W 192]).

The cross is continually found as an image in the description of the anchoress's life: it is a weapon and a shield in the battle against the devil, it is the physical trigger for her meditations on the passion. The crucifix is the ultimate symbol of the anchoritic life as *imitatio Christi*: as Christ hung on the cross reddened with his blood, in a death which was painful and humiliating above all others, so the anchoress hangs with him in the pain and shame which she endures for his sake. Finally, the cross is an image for the anchoress herself, who spreads her wings as a bird does when it flies, making a cross of her body in the bitterness of the flesh, but flying in the thoughts of her heart as she meditates upon the passion of Christ which she reenacts in her cell.

The anchoress is thus encouraged to view the sufferings of her own ascetic life as a form of *imitatio Christi*, through which she atones for the sins of her senses by suffering in her senses as Christ suffered on the cross:

*Ouer alle opre pohtes in alle ower passstuns þencheð eauer in wardliche up  
o godes pinen. þ̅ te worldes wealdent walde for his þrealles þolien swucche  
schendlikes. ... turneð þruppe þer ich spec. hu he wes ipinet in alle his fif  
wittes. ⁊ eueneð al ower wa. ... to þ̅ tet he þolede. ant ze schulen lītliche  
iseon hu lutel hit reacheð. nomeliche zef ze þencheð þ̅ he wes al ladles  
⁊ þ̅ he droh al þis nawt for him seoluen, for he ne agulte neauer. zef ze*

*þolieð wa, 3e habbeð worse ofseruet. 7 al þ 3e þolieð al is for ow seoluen. (AW iv.97-98, f50a.28-50b.2, 10-17).*

Above all other thoughts, in all your sufferings always think deeply on God's sufferings: that the ruler of the world was willing to suffer such humiliations for his servants ... Turn back to where I spoke of how he was tormented in all his five senses, and compare all your woe ... to what he suffered, and you will easily see how little it amounts to, especially if you think that he was entirely innocent and that he did not endure all this for himself, since he never sinned. If you suffer sorrow, you have deserved worse; and all that you suffer, all, is for yourself [S/W 117-118].

The wounds which the anchoress suffers through the sin which enters into her heart through her five senses are thus healed by meditation on Christ's suffering in his senses upon the cross and through her own re-enactment of his suffering in her ascetic life. She is reminded of Christ's tremendous sufferings, as his feet and hands were "dug out" with dull nails (AW iv.151 [S/W 155]; cp. UrG 9.152-153 [S/W 324]), and urged to meditate upon the great love he showed in allowing himself to be so sorely wounded for her sake (AW vii.200 [S/W 192]; WLd *passim*; cp. SW 100 [S/W 217]). In meditating upon Christ's sufferings in the flesh, she will not lightly follow the flesh's pleasure or sin through her five senses (AW ii.63 [S/W 92]). Rather, she will weep in sorrow for the sin which has caused him to suffer so greatly.

The anchoress, wounded in her five senses, is healed through the five wounds of Christ (AW i.17 [S/W 57]). The blood which flows from Christ's wounds provides a healing bath which cleanses the soul:

*a drope of pine deorewurðe biode þ tu o rode scheddest were inouh to weaschen alle folkes fulðe . þeo sterke stremes 7 þet stod þet fleaw of pine*



*wunden . moncun uor to helen, cense 7 þe asch mine sunfule soule þuruh þine fif wunden iopened o rode . wið neiles uor driuene 7 seoruh fulliche forduite . hel me uor-wunded þuruh mine fif wittes wið deadliche sunnen . 7 opene ham heouenliche king toward heouenliche þinges . (LLo 11.43-53).*

one drop of your precious blood which you shed on the cross would be enough to wash the filth away from all people. May the strong streams and the flood that flowed from your wounds to heal humanity clean and wash my sinful soul. Through your five wounds, opened on the cross, driven through and sorrowfully filled up with nails, heal me, sorely wounded with deadly sins through my five senses; and open them, heavenly king, towards heavenly things [S/W 326].

Christ's wounding in the passion is portrayed as a bloodletting which heals the illness brought about by the five senses. In addition to healing, blood symbolizes sin, which must be drawn out in order for the illness to be healed. Mankind is unable to heal itself:

*A mon for uuel þ he haueð. ne let him nawt blod o þe seke halue, ah deð o þe hale to heale þe seke. ah in al þe world þe wes o þe feure. nes bimong al moncun an hal dale ifunden: þe mahte beon ilete blod, bute godes bodi ane þe lette him blod o rode. nawt o þe earm ane, ah dude o fif halue. forte healen moncun of þe secnesse þ te fif wittes hefden awakenet. (AW ii.61, f.30b.23-31a.1).*

A person who has some sickness does not have blood let from the sick part; but it is done from a sound part to heal the sick one. But in the whole world, which was in a fever, there was not among all humanity a single healthy part found where blood might be let, except God's body alone—from which blood was let on the cross, not just in the arm, but in five places, to heal humanity of the sickness that the five senses had aroused. [S/W 90].<sup>460</sup>

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<sup>460</sup> Cp. AW iii.63-64 [S/W 93].

The blood of Christ which heals the anchoress is also described as a bloody sweat which drives out the fever of her sin.<sup>461</sup> Drawing upon the well-known metaphor of the Church as the body of Christ, the author asserts that Christ is the head and we are the limbs. When the head sweats, it is a bad sign if the limbs do not. As Christ sweated blood in his laborious sufferings, so too the anchoress must be willing to suffer the sweat of an ascetic life, for the limb that does not sweat in laborious pain for Christ's love remains sick and must be cut off (AW vi.184 [S/W 180], ii.56 [S/W 88]).<sup>462</sup>

Christ is thus the heavenly physician, who makes from his own blood a mighty salve for the wounds of sin:

*nes hit forto wasche: sunifule soulen? ... Min heouenliche leche . ðet  
makedest us of þi seolf so mihti medicine . iblesced beo þu euer ... ase wis  
ase a drope of þine deorewurðe blode . muhte weaschen awei alle folkes  
fulðe, ase wis limes louerd beo ilke fif wellen of þine blisful bodie  
sprungen ⁊ striken dun strundes of blode . weasch mine fif wittes, of alle  
blodie sunnen ... þine wunden helen þe wunden of mine soule . þi deað,  
a deadie in me flesches licunge, ⁊ lichamliche lustes (UrG 7.100-8.121).*

Is your blood not for washing sinful souls? ... My heavenly doctor, who made us from yourself so mighty a medicine, blessed be you forever! ... As surely as one drop of your precious blood can wash away the filth of all people, just as surely, Lord of life, may those five wells, sprung from your blissful body, which flowed down in streams of blood, wash

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<sup>461</sup> For further discussion of the image of sweat and its connection with healing, see Grayson, *Structure and Imagery*, pp. 157-8.

<sup>462</sup> The image of Christ sweating blood derives from the description of his agony in Gethsemane in Luke 22.44, where his sweat is described as great drops of blood falling down to the ground, but is extended to include all of his suffering in the passion sequence (cp. WLD 32.450f. [S/W 254]; OrM 17.43f [S/W 329]).

my five senses clean of all bloody sins ... May your wounds heal the wounds of my soul, your death deaden in me the flesh's pleasure and bodily desires [S/W 323-324].<sup>463</sup>

The heavenly physician cures the diseases caused by the physician of hell, of whom the anchoress is told to beware:

*He haueð se monie buistes ful of his letuaies þe luðere leche of helle. þe forsakeð an, he beot an oðer forð anan riht. þe þridde. þe feorðe. ⁊ swa eauer forð aþet he cume o swuch, þ me on ende underuo. ⁊ he þenne wið þ birleð him ilome. þencheð her of þe tale of his ampoiles. (AW iv.116-117, f.61b.1-6).*

He has so many boxes full of his medicines, the evil doctor of hell! Whenever someone forsakes one, he brings another out at once, a third, a fourth, and so on until eventually he comes to one that will be taken, and that he pours out for him often. Think of the numbers of his phials! [S/W 132].<sup>464</sup>

For each of the "medicines" of the devil, the author of *Ancrene Wisse* suggests a remedy, but the most important remedy is provided in Christ's passion, in his sufferings in his five senses and in his five wounds, which heal the sins of the anchoress's senses. The anchoress is thus urged to hide in Christ's wounds, and bloody her wounded heart with his healing blood (AW iv.151 [S/W 155]).

The image of the healing bath recurs throughout *Ancrene Wisse* and the *Katherine Group*. The anchoress's soul is washed through illness (AW iv.94-95 [S/W 115]), confession (AW iv.102 [S/W 121], v.154-155 [S/W 158-159], v.166 [S/W 167]),

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<sup>463</sup> Cp. SJ 53 [S/W 317].

<sup>464</sup> Cp. AW iii.92 [S/W 113]. Baldwin finds a source for the image of the devil's phials in an anecdote about Macarius in *Vitae Patrum* III (PL 73, col.769) ("Background," p. 210).

baptism (AW v.169 [S/W 169]), the blood of Christ (UrG 7.99f [S/W 323-324]; LLo 11.43-49 [S/W 326]), and the spit that smeared Christ's face (WLd 31.398-402 [S/W 253]). Her own sufferings can also become a healing bath for her soul, as is evidenced by the Lives of the virgin martyrs. The blood of the martyrs who are converted after St. Katherine's speech is a baptism which washes them as surely as baptism by holy water (SK 72-74 [S/W 274]). Similarly, when St. Margaret is about to be immersed in a vat of water, she prays that the water might become a bath of joy and baptism to make her soft and pretty, binding her soul to Christ and casting every sin from her (SM 76 [S/W 301-302]). Again, when molten brass is poured over St. Juliana's head and when she is immersed in a vat of boiling pitch, they seem as pleasant to her as a tepid bath (SJ 25-27 [S/W 310], 63 [S/W 319]). The transformation of torture into healing is effected by the virgins' love of Christ; so too, the author of *Wohunge* asserts that Christ's face is so lovely that, *zif þe forwariede þ wallen in helle mihten hit echeliche seon, al þ pinende pik . ne þ walde ham þunche bote a softe bekinde bad* ("if the condemned who boil in hell could see it eternally, all the torturing pitch would seem to them no more than a gentle warm bath" WLd 21.39-44 [S/W 248]).

In *Ancrene Wisse* vii.201-202 [S/W 193], the author describes three healing baths which Christ prepares for the anchoress: baptism, his own blood, and the tears of the anchoress. The images of tears and blood as remedies for sin merge throughout *Ancrene Wisse*. The anchoress is reminded that she owes Christ blood for

blood, but through grace he accepts her tears in return for his blood (AW v.161 [S/W 163]). She must therefore weep for her sins as Christ wept on the cross. Christ, however, did not weep with his eyes alone, but with all his limbs, in a bloody sweat which flowed like a stream (AW ii.60 [S/W 90]). If Christ wept so for the sins of mankind, how much more must the anchoress weep for her own! Thus, the author reminds her, weeping leads to the soul's healing.

The suffering which is described as a form of crucifixion is, however, a source of joy to the anchoress, who rejoices in the shame and hardship which she suffers for Christ, knowing that if she shares in his suffering on earth, she will share in his joy in heaven (AW vi.177 [S/W 176]; cp. AW vi.180-181 [S/W 177-178]).<sup>465</sup> Thus, the anchoress exclaims:

*Mi bodi henge wið þi bodi neiled o rode . sperred querfaste wið inne four  
wahas 7 henge i wile wið þe 7 neauer mare of mi rode cume til þ i deie  
. For þenne schal i lepen fra rode in to reste . fra wa to wele 7 to eche  
blisse (WLd 36.590-597).*

My body will hang with your body, nailed on the cross, fastened, transfixed within four walls. And I will hang with you and nevermore come from my cross until I die—for then shall I leap from the cross into rest, from grief into joy and eternal happiness [S/W 256].

The image which is the ultimate expression of the anchoress's suffering is transformed into an expression of joy, as the anchoress, who has chosen the fixed abode of the

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<sup>465</sup> Here the author cites 2 Timothy 2.12, *Si compatimur, conregnabimus. As ze scottid wið him of his pine on eorðe, ze schule scotti wið him of his blisse in heouene* ("As you share with him in his torment on earth, you will share in his joy with him in heaven"), and Galatians 6.14, *Michi absit gloriari nisi in cruce domini mei iesu christi* ("far be it from me to glory except in the cross of my lord Jesus Christ").

anchorhouse over the "leap" into the world, is rewarded by a spiritual leap, not into the pit of hell, but into heaven, where she will reap eternal reward.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### THE VIRGIN'S REWARD

The ascetic life which the anchoress leads on earth is one of the means by which she preserves her chastity and the virginity of her soul. Her chaste ascetic life on earth will thus bring her to the rewards of the virgin in heaven. The author of *Ancrene Wisse* stresses that, just as the gift of chastity must be maintained with great toil, so too the reward of heaven is not to be bought with ease (AW vi.187-188 [S/W 183]). One cannot have two laced shoes without expense, or put up a cottage without toil; in the same way, bliss must be purchased with hardship and toil. The anchoress cannot expect to enter heaven with ease when the saints have bought it so dearly (AW vi.184-185 [S/W 181]).<sup>445</sup> Who, the author asks, enters an anchorhouse, which is God's prison, expecting to find ease (AW ii.57 [S/W 88]; cp. AW iv.134 [S/W 144])? Nor is the eternal bliss of heaven bought lightly.

The author of *Ancrene Wisse* cites the gaining of heaven as the third reason for flight from the world. Heaven, he states, is very high and the anchoress must throw the whole world under her feet to reach up and grasp it. She who does so is compared to the woman clothed with the sun, with the moon beneath her feet (Revelation 12.1). The moon, which waxes and wanes, symbolizes worldly things

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<sup>445</sup> Among the examples of saints cited here who have purchased heaven with pain and suffering are virgin martyrs who have their breasts torn off, who are whirled apart on wheels, and who are beheaded. All these tortures would have been familiar to the reader of *Seinte Katerine*.

which are transient and ever-changing. Anyone who wishes to reach up toward heaven and be clothed with the true sun must therefore tread down and despise worldly things (AW iii.86-87 [S/W 110]).<sup>467</sup>

The anchoress is thus urged to abandon earthly comforts, which are after all fickle, transitory, false, and bitter, in order to earn heavenly joys (UrG 5.26-6.36 [S/W 322]; HM 34 [S/W 239-240]). Like John the Baptist, the anchoress earns her reward in the solitude of the wilderness, winning for herself as he did the reward of virginity, a crown in heaven (AW iii.83 [S/W 108]). She is warned against seeking earthly reward; for example, she will earn an endless reward for her good deeds if she keeps them secret, but if they are published abroad in order to gain men's praise, she will lose her heavenly reward in exchange for an earthly one. The author points out the madness of such bad bargaining, in which the anchoress sells something which could buy the kingdom of heaven for the wind puff of earthly praise (AW iii.77 [S/W 103]).

The example of the virgin martyrs should be ever before the anchoress's eyes: Margaret, who is willing to endure any pain, bitterness or suffering on earth in order to gain the reward of maidenhood in heaven (SM 52 [S/W 291]); Juliana, who asserts that all her suffering on earth will only increase her reward in heaven (SJ 17 [S/W 309]); and Katherine, who is promised that her death will release her from the violence of battle to the fair fellowship and merry company of maidens in heaven (SK

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<sup>467</sup> Even the anchoress's servant should not ask a set wage, but receive only what she needs for subsistence. If, like the anchoress, she serves as she ought, her wage will be the high joy of heaven (AW viii.220 [S/W 206]).



38 [S/W 268]).<sup>468</sup> The virgin anchoress is thus urged to look towards heaven, to the reward which awaits her, for the thought of her future bliss will enable her to bear her present hardships joyfully (HM 14-16 [S/W 231]). Although the anchoress is reminded that she should maintain her chastity for its own sake without thought of reward (HM 34 [S/W 239]), the author of *Hali Meïðhad* is not averse to offering extra incentives.

#### THE HEAVENLY MAIDENS

The virgin's heavenly reward is described in detail in both *Hali Meïðhad* and *Sawles Warde*. The author of *Hali Meïðhad* assures the anchoress, who has forsaken all earthly bonds of friends and family to be a pilgrim living in exile on earth, that she will gain a heavenly home, where she will have a name better than son or daughter in heaven: and *Hwa mei þenche þe weole, þe wunne ant te blisse, þe hehschipe of þis mede þet tes ilke lut word biclupped abuten?* ("who can imagine the wealth, the happiness and the joy, the sublimity of the reward that these same little words encompass" (HM 16.8-10 [S/W 231]). She will join the company of maidens who:

*singe þet swete song ant þet englene drem vnume murie, þet nan halhe  
ne mei, bute meiden ane, singen in heouene; ant folhin Godd almihti,  
euch godes ful, hwider se he eauer wendeð, as þe oþre ne mahe nawt, þah*

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<sup>468</sup> Cp. SW 102 [S/W 218-219].

*ha alle beon his sunen ant alle hise dehtren. Ne nan of þes oþres crunen, ne hare wlite, ne hare weden ne mahen euenin to hare, se vnimete brihte ha beoð ant schene to biseon on.* (HM 16.14-19).

sing that sweet song and that angel's music, overwhelmingly happy, that no saint in heaven can sing but a maiden alone: "And they follow God almighty, full of every good, wherever he goes" (Revelation 14.3-4) as the others cannot, though they are all his sons and all his daughters. Nor can any of these others' crowns, nor their beauty, nor their clothes compare with theirs [the maidens'], so immeasurably bright they are and radiant to look at [S/W 231].

The company of maidens in heaven is also described in *Sawles Warde* by Love of Life:

*Ich iseh þet schene ant þet brihte ferreden of þe eadi meidnes, ilikest towart engles, ant feolahlukest wið ham blissen ant gleadien—þe, libbinde i flesche, ouergað flesches lahe ant ouercumeð cunde, þe leaðð heouenlich lif in eorðe as ha wunieð. Hare muhðe ant hare blisse, þe feierlec of hare wlite, þe swetnesse of hare song, ne mei na tunge tellen. Alle ha singeð þe þer beoð, ah hare song ne mahe nane buten heo singen. Se swote smeal ham folheð hwider se ha wendeð þet me mahte libben aa bi þe swotnesse. Hwam se heo bisecheð fore is sikerliche iborhen; for azein hare bisocnen Godd himseolf ariseð, þet alle þe oðre halthen sittende ihereð.* (SW 102.8-17).

I saw, shining and bright, the army of all the blessed maidens, most like the angels and most kin to them, rejoicing and being glad: those who, living in the flesh, overcame the law of the flesh and overcame nature—whose way is to lead a heavenly life on earth. Their joy and their happiness, the beauty of their faces, the sweetness of their song, no tongue can tell. Everyone there sings, but no one can sing their song except them. So sweet a smell follows them wherever they go that one could live forever just by that sweetness. Whoever they pray for is certainly saved; for when they pray even God stands up, who hears all the other holy ones sitting [S/W 218-219].<sup>469</sup>

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<sup>469</sup> S/W point out that, unlike its source, in *Sawles Warde* the description of the maidens is the climax of Love of Life's speech, and that this is a sign of the anchoritic audience for which this work was intended. The special place of maidens in heaven

Both descriptions of the virgin's reward agree on its uniqueness: the virgin in heaven sing a song no others can sing, join in a cosmic dance no others can follow, and wear the most beautiful clothes and the brightest crowns.<sup>470</sup>

#### BEAUTY AND ADORNMENT

The descriptions of the virgin's reward appear at first glance to concentrate on material rewards of the type which the anchoress has given up on earth (e.g. beauty, riches, social status). The incomparable beauty of the virgins in heaven is stressed: no tongue can adequately describe it. This immeasurable beauty is anticipated in the stories of the virgin martyrs, whose persecutors are first attracted by their loveliness, both physical and spiritual. Katherine is described as *feier ant freolich o wite ant o westum* ("lovely and fair in face and form"), although her beauty is subordinate to her steadfast faith (SK 4-6 [S/W 262-263]).<sup>471</sup> Maxentius compliments her on her beauty and her *muð marie* ("merry mouth"), which speaks

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also figures in *Pearl*, where they are the brides of Christ (SW n. 20, p. 409).

<sup>470</sup> Although Love of Life does not specifically mention the virgin's crown, it can be assumed (see p. 273, below). Love of Life goes on to give a detailed description of the happiness common to all in heaven, which he sums up as being of seven kinds: *lengde of lif, wit, ant luue, ant of þe luue a gleadunge wiðute mei murie, lofi-song, ant lihtschipe; ant sikemesse* ("length of life, wisdom, love, and because of love an immeasurable gladness, a happy song of praise, swiftness ... and security" SW 102 [S/W 219]).

<sup>471</sup> See Robertson, *Early English Devotional Prose*, p. 100, and above p. 195.

so wisely (SK 18 [S/W 264]). Similarly, Eleusius is struck by Juliana's *umume feire ant freoliche zuhebe* ("immeasurably fair and noble youth" SJ 5 [S/W 306]) and *hire lufsume leor, lilies ilicnesse ant nudi ase rose, ant under hire nebscheft al se freoliche ischapel* ("her lovely face, white as a lily and red as a rose, and everything below her face so gracefully shined" SJ 17-19 [S/W 309]). Later, after her conflict with the demon, Juliana comes before Eleusius with *schiminde hire nebscheft schene as þe sunne* ("her bright face shining as the sun" SJ 47 [S/W 316]). Olibrius, too, is first attracted by Margaret's appearance, *þe schimede ant schan al of wlite ant of westume* ("all shining and glowing in face and in body" SM 46.23 [S/W 289])<sup>472</sup> and, like Eleusius, is moved to lust by her pretty face. When the virgin martyrs are threatened with torture, it is to their beauty that their tormentors appeal. Olibrius urges Margaret: *Nim zeme of þi zuhebe ant of þi semliche schape, of þi schene nebschaft* ("think of your youth, and your lovely figure, and your radiant face" SM 50.6-7 [S/W 290]), and Maxentius addresses Katherine in a similar vein:

*O schene nebschaft ant schape se swiðe semlich, þet schulde beo se prudeliche ischrud ant iprud ba wið þel ant wið purple! Nim zeme of þi zuhebe, areow þi wlite* (SK 76.529-532).

O bright face and shape so comely, which should be so proudly clothed and made proud with both purple and scarlet! Take care of your youth; pity your beauty [S/W 274].

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<sup>472</sup> M/W-B translate: "[he] was dazzled by the beauty of her face and figure."

And, when the tortures finally take place, the texts lament the damage to the virgins' beautiful bodies and lovely flesh (SK 80 [S/W 275]; SJ 15 [S/W 308-309], 23-25 [S/W 310]; SM 52 [S/W 291], 54 [S/W 292], 74 [S/W 301]).

It is interesting to note that in spite of horrendous tortures, the beauty of the virgin martyrs, like the virginity which it symbolizes, remains intact. Juliana remains unblemished, although she has molten brass poured over her from head to heels, is whirled apart in a "Katherine Wheel," and is immersed in a vat of boiling pitch (SJ 25-27 [S/W 310], 51-53 [S/W 317], 63 [S/W 319]); and Katherine is healed by angels who anoint her with aromatic ointments, so that her flesh becomes so beautiful that Porphyrius and Augusta are struck with amazement (SK 84 [S/W 276]). This may be due, at least in part, to the emphasis on physical intactness which characterizes virginity literature addressed specifically to women.<sup>473</sup>

The beauty of the virgins in heaven is a fitting reward for the anchoress who is to spurn beauty on earth. Like the maiden of the Song of Songs she is to be black and white, *unseowlich wið uten, schene wið innen* ("uncomely without [and] shining within" AW I.10, f.3b.12 [S/W 50]). The anchoress is told that she should humbly regard her black exterior, and not succumb to pride on account of her white and shining maidenhood, *for hwit awilgeð þe che* ("for whiteness dazzles the eye" AW iv.145, f.77a.1 [S/W 151]). It is for this reason that the black cloth covering her window is so appropriate:

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<sup>473</sup> See above, pp. 42f.

*þ þlake clað bitacneð þ 3e beoð þlake 7 unwurð to þe world wiðuten. þ te soðe sunne hæuð utewið forculet ow. 7 swa wið ten as 3e beoð unseowlich imaket ow þurh gleames of his grace. (AW ii.30, f.12b.25-13a.1).*

The black cloth symbolizes to the world outside that you are black and unworthy, and that the true sun has burned you outwardly, and so made you as outwardly unlovely as you are, with the gleams of his grace (Canticles 1.5) [S/W 66].<sup>474</sup>

Again, the anchoress has the example of St. Margaret before her, who is burned with torches *þet te hude snawhwit swartede as hit snercte* ("so that [her] snow-white skin blackened as it scorched" SM 74.19-20 [S/W 301]). As her flesh burns, she prays that her heart will be set on fire with the fire of the Holy Spirit, and that the flame of love for Christ will blaze in her loins. As Robertson points out, the fire of

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<sup>474</sup> The Song of Songs 1.5 compares the bride who is black and yet beautiful to the "curtains of Solomon," a comparison which is most appropriate in the context of the discussion of the curtains which cover the windows of the anchoress's cell. Bradley suggests that the author is "particularly dishonest" in his use of this biblical text, using the bride of the Song of Songs "with her uninhibited expression of love, to instruct his women hearers in their worthlessness and in their need to hide their feminine beauty" ("In the Jaws of the Bear," p. 138). However, the author's application of this text is not as faulty as Bradley assumes, nor is it an assertion of his readers' "worthlessness." On the contrary, it is an affirmation that physical beauty is not necessary no: even desirable, for it is inner beauty that counts. In fact, the author later warns that a young anchoress whose face has not been burnt by the sun (in this case the earthly sun, but perhaps also, because of her youth, the "true" sun) should cover her window and not show her face even to a holy man, for even David sinned on account of the mere sight of Bathsheba (AW ii.33 [S/W 68-69]). The anchoress is to show her face only to Christ, to whom her face is beautiful (AW ii.52-53 [S/W 84-85]).

the torches is thus transformed into the sanctifying fire of the Holy Spirit and the flame of love.<sup>475</sup>

The beauty of the maidens in heaven is enhanced by their adornment. On earth the anchoress is urged to eschew adornment of the body and dresses simply, avoiding fancy clothing which may lead to pride, for *to godes ehnen ha is lufsumr.*, *þe is for þe luue of him, untiffet wið uten* ("in God's eyes she is more lovely who, for the love of him, is unadorned outwardly" (AW viii.215, f.114a.12-13 [S/W 203]; cp. HM 38 [S/W 241]). Thus, when Maxentius promises Katherine purple and scarlet clothes, a golden image of a crowned queen and a high temple of marble like one of the heavenly women in a parody of the virgin's reward promised to her by an angel (SK 38 [S/W 268], 76-78 [S/W 274-275]) and described in *Hali Meiohad*, Katherine rejects his offer, recognizing it for the temptation that it is (SK 76 [S/W 274-275]). Instead of outward adornment, the anchoress seeks to be adorned inwardly with virtue, the ornament which is most beautiful to God (HM 40 [S/W 242]). She is to follow the example of Judith, who washed herself and removed her widow's garments (signifying sorrow), and dressed herself in festive clothes and adorned herself with ornaments signifying joy. In the same way, confession adorns the anchoress inwardly with goodness and joy (AW v.155 [S/W 159]).

The anchoress will be rewarded for spurning adornment of the body, for the maiden in heaven will be adorned with beautiful clothing and jewels. Thus, after

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<sup>475</sup> Robertson, *Early English Devotional Prose*, p. 114.

Katherine is imprisoned for spurning Maxentius' offer. Queen Augusta dreams that she sees Katherine crowned and surrounded by a company of maidens and honourable men dressed in white, clearly an anticipation of the honour she will receive in heaven (SK 82 [S/W 275-276]). In addition, the maidens' clothing shines, reflecting the beauty of the resurrected body. Thus, in heaven the maidens themselves shine, as they become the "woman clothed in the sun" of Revelation, crowned with nobility, power and light (AW iii.86-87 [S/W 110]).

#### BRIGHTNESS

The brightness of the maidens in heaven is a reflection of the dazzling whiteness of the purity of virginity. Brightness is common to the maidens, martyrs and angels in *Sawles Warde*, and brightness is a distinguishing characteristic of Katherine's description of the city which is built in the heart (SK 86-90 [S/W 276-277]): everything glistens as the city is bedecked with gems more brilliant than stars, every dwelling is as bright as if it blazed with fire, and all the citizens are brighter than the sun.<sup>476</sup> Brightness seems to belong in a special sense to virgins and angels, however, and is part of the likeness to the angels that is stressed in the descriptions of the maidens in heaven. For example, the narrator of *Seinte Margarete*

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<sup>476</sup> Cp. SW 104 [S/W 220], where Love of Life tells the daughters of God that all the citizens of heaven are fleet as a sunbeam.



assures his audience that in heaven Margaret shines seven times more brightly than the sun as she sings in the host of angels (SM 84 [S/W 305]), and although Margaret's spirit rises immediately at her death to *þet stirrede bur*, "the starry chamber" of heaven, her soul is borne to heaven later by angels, who, blazing with light, first pause to sing on her body (SM 82 [S/W 304]). Similarly, the angel who visits Katherine in her cell shines so brilliantly that it seems as if the jail blazes with fire, and even the doughty saint is "somewhat alarmed" (*sumdel offruht ant offert* SK 36 [S/W 268]). Later, when Porphirius and Augusta visit Katherine and find her in the company of holy men and maidens who crown her as their queen, the prison shines with the brightest of lights (SK 82 [S/W 276]).

The brightness of the maidens in heaven is anticipated in the bodies of the virgin martyrs themselves, who shine even before they are received into the company of heaven. For example, Juliana comes before Eleusius after throwing the demon into the pit with her face *schiminde ... schene as þe sunne* ("her bright face shining as the sun" SJ 47 [S/W 316]). But Margaret is the virgin martyr who most conspicuously displays this outward evidence of her inward purity. When Olibrius first sees Margaret tending sheep, she *schimede ant schan al of wlite ant of westume* (she is "all shining and glowing in face and in body" (SM 46.23 [S/W 289]), and he is captivated by her lovely figure and radiant face (SM 50 [S/W 290]). When Margaret confronts the demon, he asserts that she shines brighter than the sun, especially her virgin body which blazes with light and her fingers which trace the sign of the cross and blaze so

brilliantly that he cannot bear to look at them (SM 64-66 [S/W 297]). Later, she emerges from the water in which she was to be tortured, *ase schene ase schininde sunne* ("bright as the shining sun" SM 76.17 [S/W 302]). It is as if virginity cannot be contained in mere human flesh, but must shine forth in all its blazing glory.

The brightness of the maidens in heaven is also prefigured by the heart purified and brightened by love as the house of the soul is set ablaze with love for Christ (AW vii.195 [S/W 189]), and by the soul which Christ washes with the spit that smeared his face (symbolizing the suffering which the anchoress endures for his love) to make it bright and clean and good in his sight (WLD 31.398-403 [S/W 253]). In *Sawles Warde*, when Love of Life enters the castle of the body, all those who dwell there are cheered, *for al þæt hus schined ant schimmed of his leome* ("because the whole house shines and shimmers with his light" SW 98.19-20 [S/W 217]). Similarly, the blazing light of virginity brightens the darkness of Katherine's prison, as she is crowned by heavenly maidens. Like the bodies of the virgin martyrs, Katherine's prison and the house of *Sawles Warde*, both of which symbolize the anchorhouse and the virgin body of the anchoress who dwells there, blaze with the light of the purity which they surround and contain. Thus, it is not physical virginity alone which makes the maidens shine, but also the inner purity for which physical virginity is maintained.

The maidens' brightness in heaven is also a reflection of the brightness of Christ, as their clothing and their bodies absorb the light which emanates from Christ, whom they follow more closely than any other in heaven (HM 20 [S/W 233]). The

anchoress is therefore assured that the body which suffers on earth for Christ's love will be adorned like his with brightness at the resurrection (AW vi.183-184 [S/W 180]). The brightness of the maidens is thus also part of the *imitatio Christi* of the anchoress. This is abundantly clear in *Seinte Margarete*. Margaret addresses Christ as the *brihtest bleo of alle þet eauer weren iborene* ("brightest face of all who were ever born"), associating this brightness with his birth from a virgin mother (SM 60.30-32 [S/W 295]). The connection between the cross and the blazing light from Margaret's fingers which trace it in defense against the demon also suggest that her brightness is a kind of *imitatio Christi*, as her sufferings and triumph are patterned after his (SM 64-66 [S/W 297]). Margaret is frequently visited by a dove who appears on a shaft of light (SM 64 [S/W 297], 76 [S/W 302], 78 [S/W 303]), and the cross appears before her eyes on the same shaft of light on at least one occasion (SM 64 [S/W 297]), symbolizing Christ's triumph over death and Margaret's triumph over the demon.

The brightness of the virgin anchoress in heaven will compensate for her entombment in the darkness of her anchorhouse on earth, for:

*Hwen he þ is ower lif eadeaweð 7 springeð as þe dahunge efter nihtes þeosternesse, ant ze schulen wið him springen schene þen þe sunne in to eche blisse.* (AW vi.179, f.95a.13-16).

when [Christ] who is your life appears again and breaks forth like the daylight after night's darkness, you also will break forth with him, brighter than the sun, into eternal joy [S/W 177].

Thus, the author of *Ancrene Wisse* tells his audience that the seventh reason for fleeing the world is *forte beo þe brihtre 7 brihtluket seon in heouene godes brihte*

*nedscheft* ("in order to be the brighter, and to see God's bright countenance more brightly in heaven" AW iii.88, f.45b.18-19 [S/W 111]). The brightness of heaven illuminates the eye and mind: one of the marriage gifts which the author of *Ancrene Wisse* promises his readers that Christ will bestow upon them is the light of clear sight (AW ii.50 [S/W 82]).<sup>477</sup> The anchoress, enclosed within the darkness of her anchorhouse, may be blindfolded on earth, not knowing the outward things of ear or eye, but she will be wise, knowing all God's counsels, mysteries and secret judgements (AW ii.51 [S/W 82]; cp. SW 102-104 [S/W 219]).<sup>478</sup> This knowledge is dependent upon the anchoress's enclosure in solitude, for God does not reveal his hidden secrets in a crowd (AW iii.80-81 [S/W 105-106]).<sup>479</sup>

Thus, the anchoress in her anchorhouse is in the position of Juliana, cast into prison, alone and in darkness (SJ 27 [S/W 310]). Watson points out the parallels between Juliana's situation and that of the anchoress:

Like the anchoress she has chosen Christ not an earthly lover, and like the anchoress she must be shut up in a prison and suffer physical pain and spiritual temptation as a result of this choice. In darkness and alone, she is removed from the world like the anchoress whose windows are properly covered. ... As a result ... she acquires enormous power and insight.<sup>480</sup>

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<sup>477</sup> See the discussion of the marriage gifts below, pp. 270, 360f.

<sup>478</sup> For further discussion of the virgin's privileged access to truth see below, p. 297.

<sup>479</sup> See the discussion of solitude above, pp. 124f.

<sup>480</sup> "Methods and Objectives," p. 139.

The prison of the anchorhouse is thus transformed into heaven, the new Jerusalem which Katherine assures Queen Augusta is a city which can be built in the soul (SK 82-90 [S/W 275-277]).

#### SWIFTNES

As well as being brighter than the sun, the anchoress is promised that because she is buried on earth in her anchorhouse as if in a sepulchre, in heaven she will be *swifte as þe sunne gleam* ("swift as the sun's gleam" AW iii.88, f.45b.21 [S/W 111]).

Love of Life identifies swiftness as one aspect of the happiness common to all in heaven:

*Ha beoð alle as lihte ant as swifte as þe sunne-gleam, þe scheot from est into west ase þin ehelid tuncð ant openeð; for hwær se eauer þe gast wule, þe bodi is ananrihte wiðute lettunge. (SW 104.26-28).*

they are all as fleet and as swift as the sunbeam which shoots from east into west in the twinkling of an eye: for wherever the spirit wants to be the body is immediately, without difficulty [S/W 220].

Like brightness, however, swiftness belongs to the virgin anchoress in a special way. Swiftness is the second of the two marriage gifts promised to the anchoress in AW ii.50-51 [S/W 82], a gift which will compensate for the constraint of their enclosure, just as the light of clear sight compensates for its darkness:

*Alle þeo in heouene schule beon ase swifte, as is nu monnes þoht. as is þe sunne gleam þe smit from est, in to west. as þe ehe openeð. ah ancras bisperret her, schulen beo þer 3ef ei mei lihtre ba ⁊ swifre. ⁊ i se wide*

schakeles. as me seið pleien in heouene large lesewen. þ te bodi schal  
beon hwær se eauer þe gast wile, in an hondhwile. (AW ii.50-51,  
f.24b.22-28, emph. mine).

All in heaven will be as swift as human thought is now, as the sun's ray glancing from the east into the west in the twinkling of an eye. *But anchoresses, shut in here, will be—if any can be—both lighter and swifter there, and play in the wide meadows of heaven in such loose chains, as they say, that the body will be wherever it wants to go in a moment* [S/W 82] (emph. mine).

These passages are a clear example of the *Ancrene Wisse* author's adaptation of his sources to an anchoritic audience, as he takes a general characteristic which elsewhere is common to all in heaven and appropriates it in a special way for his audience of anchoresses. In their note to *Ancrene Wisse* ii.51 [S/W 82], Savage and Watson suggest that here *Ancrene Wisse* is expanding on the passage in *Sawles Warde*.<sup>481</sup> They note elsewhere that the passage in *Sawles Warde* is not in the immediate source, and suggest a possible source in the Anselmian *De Humanibus Moribus*.<sup>482</sup> Although they acknowledge the possibility that *Ancrene Wisse* may be making independent use of *De Humanibus Moribus*, they point out that the sharing of the English phrase "in the twinkling of an eye" (which does not occur in the Latin

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<sup>481</sup> AW ii, n. 67, p. 356.

<sup>482</sup> SW n. 23, p. 410. But see also Shepherd, "'All the wealth of Croesus...': A Topic in the 'Ancrene Riwe'" MLR 51(1956), pp. 162-3, who cites as a source Anselm's *De beatitudine*, and its expanded form in *Liber Similitudinum*. Shepherd's suggestion is made in the context of a discussion of the exemplary names in AW vii.203 [S/W 194], where swiftness is associated with Asahel, and suggests a further source for this passage in the *Elucidarium* of Honorius of Autun, another member of the Anselmian circle. In any case, it would appear that the notion was considered to be Anselmian.

source) suggests that *Ancrene Wisse* is dependent on *Sawles Warde*.<sup>483</sup> In any case, the author of *Ancrene Wisse* has clearly transformed an aspect of the bliss common to all in heaven into a distinct property of the anchoress in heaven, altering his source for his specific audience.

The author of *Ancrene Wisse* encourages the anchoress to anticipate and prepare for the lightness and swiftness of heaven here on earth. She is to give away the things of the world which would burden her on her path towards heaven, and go lightly, as pilgrims do (AW vi.179 [S/W 177]). If the flesh follows the soul and does not drag her down through love of worldly comforts, through the soul's sublimity the weight or *pondus* of the flesh becomes very light, lighter than the wind and brighter than the sun. Thus, the anchoress is urged to maintain her nobility and master her flesh so that it does not master her soul (AW iii.74 [S/W 100-101]). If she does so, she will be like the pelican, with little flesh and many feathers, so that, light and lean, she may fly well (AW iii.67-70 [S/W 95-98]). The fleshly anchoress, on the other hand, is like the ostrich, who is dragged down by her feet, or the fleshly lusts to which she succumbs.

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<sup>483</sup> AW ii, n. 67, p. 356. The English phrasing is close, but not exact: AW reads *as þe ehe openeð*; SW reads *ase þin ehelid tuneð ant openeð*.

## THE MAIDEN'S CROWN

Another feature of the common reward which is appropriated by the anchoritic literature in a special way for virgins is the maiden's crown. Although the crown is not among the attributes of the maidens described by Love of Life, Savage and Watson point out that

Love of Life has described those who receive a special crown (known as an *aureola*) for their labour on earth: the patriarchs, prophets and apostles who proclaimed Christ; the martyrs and confessors who died for Christ; the virgins who kept themselves pure for Christ.<sup>484</sup>

Similarly, John the Baptist earns for himself the crowns of preacher, martyr and virgin (AW iii.83-84 [S/W 107-108]; cp. SK 74 [S/W 274]). The crown, often described as a "champion's crown" (*kempene crune*),<sup>485</sup> is thus another feature which is awarded to several classes of the citizens in heaven, not virgins alone.

Like the virgins' clothing, their crowns are brighter and more beautiful than any other (HM 16 [S/W 231]; cp. HM 20 [S/W 233]). The maidens' crowns are adorned with flowers and jewels, symbolic of their maidenhood (HM 20 [S/W 233]). Unrue argues that this typically medieval description of the virgin's crown would be particularly appealing to a thirteenth century woman, who would be familiar with the

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<sup>484</sup> Notes to SW, n. 21, p. 409.

<sup>485</sup> See, for example, HM 20/9-10 [S/W 233], 42/14-15 [S/W 243]; SM 74/32 [S/W 301]. It is only the passage in *Sainte Margarete* which identifies the champion's crown specifically as a reward for virginity.



garlands of flowers which were common in manuscript illustrations at the time. As well, headdresses of flowers or gold wreaths with a flowered design were very popular, and garlands were used as rewards for success at games.<sup>486</sup> Such scenes were often depicted as ornaments on a lady's toilette, and would also have been familiar to thirteenth century readers.<sup>487</sup>

The adornment of the maiden's crown with flowers and gems is another example of the use of images which are applied to Christ to describe the virginity and maiden's reward. Virginity is described as a flower (HM 8-10 [S/W 228]), the bright blossom in the body that bears it (SM 48 [S/W 289]). So, too, Christ is a flower, a *bløstme iblowen ant iboren oj meidenes bosum* ("blossom bloomed and born on a maiden's breast" SM 60.31-32 [S/W 295]), the shoot which blossoms from the stem of Jesse in the virgin birth (AW i.24 [S/W 62]).

Christ is also described as a jewel (eg. SM 62 [S/W 296]): he is the agate which the anchoress keeps in the nest of her heart to protect her good works from the poisonous serpent of hell (AW iii.72 [S/W 99]); his limbs adorn the cross like pearls (AW i.13 [S/W 54]). Virginity, too, is described as a precious treasure (HM 8 [S/W 228]) and a jewel (SM 48 [S/W 289], 74 [S/W 301]). Although not the only precious

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<sup>486</sup> Thus, *kempene crone*, the "champion's crown," takes on the additional connotation of the victor's reward, in this case for victory in the battle against sin and temptation, the world, the flesh and the devil.

<sup>487</sup> Unrue, "*HM* and Other Virginity Treatises," pp. 170-173. Unrue also cites Wm. Stearns Davis, *Life on a Medieval Barony*, (New York, 1923), Preface and p. 91.

gem, it is the most valued, surpassing the gems of widowhood and wedlock in its essential nature as a ruby surpasses a jacinth. Maidens are warned, however, that the quality of their jewel is also important: just as a bright jacinth is better than a wan ruby, so too a mild wife or a humble widow is better than a proud maiden (HM 38 [S/W 241]). The ruby of virginity is nothing without humility; in *Ancrene Wisse* v.169 [S/W 169], the redness of shame is ranked above that of a precious gem.

The maiden's crown is thus symbolic of her virginity and of her imitation of Christ in the preservation of that virginity. It is for this reason that it is the brightest and most beautiful. In fact, the virgins' crowns appear to be more numerous as well. Although in *Ancrene Wisse* preachers, martyrs and virgins are all said to receive *crune up o crune* ("crown after crown") in heaven, with overflowing reward (AW iii.83 [S/W 108]), in *Hali Meidhad* it is apparently the virgin alone who earns an overflowing cup and measure running over of reward, *crune upo crune* ("crown upon crown" HM 18.4 [S/W 232]). In *Hali Meidhad*, it appears that the virgin will receive two crowns (at least), for she will receive in addition to the champion's crown common to all, *a gertondesche schininde schenre þen þe sunne, aureola ihaten o Latines ledene* ("a garland shining brighter than the sun, called an *aureola* in the Latin language" HM 20.11-12 [S/W 233]).

Millett and Wogan-Browne explain this passage by suggesting that virgins not only receive the heavenly reward of eternal life (i.e. the golden crown of Exodus 25.25, which Millett and Wogan-Browne identify with the "champion's crown") but

also the "aureola" or special, smaller crown which is given to those who aspire to perfection (usually virgins, martyrs and preachers).<sup>488</sup> Later in *Hali Meiohad*, however, the champion's crown is not simply the reward of eternal life, but a reward for those who struggle most against the devil (HM 42 [S/W 243]). The champion's crown in *Hali Meiohad* is thus the crown of virgins, martyrs and preachers, distinct from the *aureola*. The passage in *Hali Meiohad* 20 [S/W 233] clearly distinguishes the *aureola* as a crown which the virgins alone receive, one of the many privileges which *schawioð ful sutelliche hwucche beoð þer meidnes, ant sundrið ham from þe oðre wið þus feole mensken world buten ende* ("show very clearly who are the maidens there, and divide them world without end from the others with these many honours" HM 20.14-16 [S/W 233]). It would appear that the author has appropriated a term which is elsewhere applied to virgins, martyrs, and preachers and applied it to virgins alone.

The crowns which the virgin martyrs anticipate are clearly seen as a reward for their chastity and for the fidelity to Christ which that chastity represents: Margaret asserts that Christ has given her a champion's crown in return for the jewel of virginity which she has given him (SM 74 [S/W 301]), and Katherine is invited by Christ to heaven, where a company of maidens and the household of heaven are coming to meet her with the conqueror's crown (SK 126 [S/W 283]). However, their crowns are also, at least in part, a reward for their preservation of that chastity in the

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<sup>488</sup> HM 18/4n. See also Millett, *Hali Meiohad* 10/5-9n., and 11/17-20n., where Millett suggests a source in Bede's comment on Exodus 23.25 in *De Tabernaculo et Vasis ejus*, Ch.6, PL 91.409-10.

face of terrible torture: as Juliana asserts, the more she is hurt by her tormentors on earth, the brighter and fairer her crown in heaven (SJ 17 [S/W 309]). So too, in *Ancrene Wisse*, the anchoress's crown is a reward for standing firm in the midst of temptation, sickness and suffering, for these gild her crown in heaven as the gold of the crown is tested in suffering as in fire, becoming equal to a martyr's crown (AW iv.95 [S/W 116]; cp. AW iv.100 [S/W 119]), iv.121 [S/W 134]; HM 42 [S/W 243]).

Thus, although some passages, such as the description of Katherine's crown, conflate the *aureola* of the virgin and that of the martyr, it would seem that the anchoress is led to expect that second crown (of the martyr) as well. The anchoress is assured that when she stands against temptation, the devil simply increases her reward, instead of drawing her into eternal torment. Thus, ironically, he braids her a crown of joy, or rather, many crowns, as many as the times that she is able to overcome temptation. These are identified not as physical adornments, as in *Hali Meiohad*, but rather as many different kinds of happiness. (AW iv.121-122 [S/W 134-135]). Thus, the author urges the anchoress, when the devil approaches:

*nulle ze bute lahen him lude to bismere þ he is se muchel ald cang þe  
kimeð his pine to echen, ⁊ breiden ow crune.* (AW iv.139, f.74a.4-6).

will you not merely laugh him loudly to scorn, that he is such an old fool that he comes to increase his own pain, and to braid you a crown? [S/W 147].

So too, of those people who cause the anchoress to suffer, for example through their harsh words, the author says:

*let him 7 þ gleadliche breide þi crune. ... Ani tu segge alswa bi hond þe misdeð þe. 7 bi þe muð alswa þe ewt misseð þe. Iblescet beo þi muð sei. for þu makest lome prof to timbrt mī crune (AW iii.66, f.33b.21-22, 26-29).*

Let them braid your crown, and that gladly. ... And you should say this too about the hand that harms you, and also about the mouth which insults you in any way; 'Blessed be your mouth,' say, 'for you make of it a tool to build my crown' [S/W 95].

Maidenhood is thus crowned queen of heaven (HM 10 [S/W 228]). Here, as in the heavenly dance,<sup>489</sup> the anchoress follows in the footsteps of the Virgin Mary, to whom she prays, recognizing that Christ himself *wið his blisful eames sette þe i trone. 7 cwene crune of heaued brihtre þen þe sunne. heh heouenliche cwen* ("with his blissful arms set you on a throne and crowned you queen of heaven, brighter than the sun, high heavenly queen" AW i.24, f.10a.10-12 [S/W 61]; cp. HM 18 [S/W 233]). As the Virgin Mary's enthronement is associated with the mystical embrace, so too is the virgin's rule with Christ in heaven, when she will sit beside her heavenly spouse and rule with him as befits his beloved bride. Indeed, as Christ's lady, she will rule with him over all the earth and more:

*wult tu castles. kinedomes. wult tu wealden al þe world? Ich chulle do þe betere. makie þe wið al þis, cwen of heoueriche. þu schalt te seolf beo seoueuald brihtre þen þe sunne. nan uuel ne schal nahhi þe. na wunne ne schal wonti þe. al þi wil schal beon i wraht in heouene 7 ec in eorðe. 3e 7 zet in helle. ne schalheauer heorte þenchen hwuch selhðe, þ ich nule 3eouen for þi luue. unmeteliche. vneuenliche. unen'eliche mare. Al Creasuse weole, þe wes kinge richest. Absalones schene wlite. ... Asaeles swiftschipe ... Samsones strengðe ... Cesares freolec. Alixandres hereword. Moyses heale. (AW vii.203, f.107b.25-108a.10).*

<sup>489</sup> See below, pp. 282f.

Will you have castles, kingdoms? Will you rule the world? I will go one better for you: with all this make you queen of heaven, too. You will yourself be seven times brighter than the sun, no evil will come near you, no joy will you lack. All your desire will be done in heaven and also on earth, yes, and even in hell. No heart will ever imagine happiness so great that I will not give, for your love, immeasurably, incomparably, endlessly much more: all Croesus' wealth, who was the richest king; Absalom's shining beauty ...; Asahel's swiftness, ...; Samson's strength ...; Caesar's generosity; Alexander's fame; Moses's vigour [S/W 194].<sup>490</sup>

The earthen castle in which the anchoress is imprisoned now is thus contrasted with the heavenly reward that Christ offers the virgin as queen of heaven. The wealth which she will possess when she is enthroned with Christ is better than any earthly wealth. The richness and beauty of the maiden's adornment in heaven is also a reflection of the nobility of the virgin. Like a lady in a castle, she is noble and free, crowned with Christ and ruling at his right hand, lady over all creation with him (WLd 22.82-102 [S/W 249]).

#### THE MAIDEN'S SONG

The anchoress is crowned with Christ as she participates in the marriage feast of heaven, a feast which is characterized by mirth and joy. The joy of heaven is

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<sup>490</sup> See Shepherd, "All the Wealth of Croesus," who analyses the seven rewards offered to the soul that loves Christ and suggests sources for the exemplary figures who illustrate the rewards in Honorius of Autun, *Elucidarium* and Anselm's *Proslogion* and *De beatitudine*. Shepherd also cites other examples of the use of these figures in twelfth and thirteenth century literature.

anticipated in Katherine's description of the city built in the heart (SK 86-90 [S/W 276-277]). One of the most striking characteristics of this city is the perpetual music, as all the inhabitants sing together like lifelong friends, laughing in joyful revelry. Again, however, while everyone in heaven sings, the maidens have a special song, one like no other (SW 102 [S/W 218-219]).

In *Hali Meidhad* all song in heaven is described as *for te þonki Godd ant herien of his grace ant of his goddede* ("to thank God and praise him for his grace and kindness" (HM 16.22-23 [S/W 231]). The widows, wedded and maidens all sing songs of thanksgiving and praise: the wedded thank Christ that at least they were caught by the marriage bed as they fell, so that they did not plunge all the way into hell, and the widows thank him that his power held them in chaste purity so that they could atone for the sins of the flesh committed in this world (HM 16-18 [S/W 231-233]).

These songs are sweet:

*ah al is meidenes song unilich þeose, wið engles imeane, dream ouer alle þe dreames in heouene.* (HM 18.28-29).

But the maiden's song is utterly unlike them, shared with the angels', music over all the music in heaven [S/W 233].

The unique song of the maidens is an angel's song, (HM 16 [S/W 231]), as they thank and praise God:

*þet he on ham se muche grace 3ef of himseoluen þet ha forsoken for him euch eorðlich mon, ant heolden ham cleane aa from fleschliche fulden i bodi ant i breost ... Þis song ne muhen nane buten heo singen.* (HM 18.33-20.1, 4).

that he gave them so much grace from himself that they forsook every earthly man for him and kept themselves always clean of fleshly filth in body and in heart ... This song none but they can sing [S/W 233].<sup>491</sup>

The songs of thanks and praise sung by the virgins, widowed, and wedded, especially the angel's song of maidenhood's honour in heaven, are contrasted with the crying and groaning in hell of those who succumb to lust (HM 42 [S/W 243]). This contrast is also seen in *Seinte Margarete* 82 [S/W 304-305], where angels bear Margaret's soul to heaven singing with sweet voices while the spirits of hell scream and howl.<sup>492</sup> The song of the maidens in heaven is also in direct contrast to the "mermaid's music" of earthly wealth which Katherine fears will draw her to her death if she accepts the parody of the virgin's reward with which Maxentius tries to persuade her (SK 76-78 [S/W 274-275]).

The song which the maidens sing in heaven is the song of the bride for the groom at the marriage feast towards which the anchoress travels on her laborious road (HM 20 [S/W 233]; cp. AW iv.98 [S/W 118]). The anchoress who suffers in her cell is therefore assured that she will sing before the Lord in heaven, thanking him for the earthly sorrow which has brought her to such bliss (AW iv.98 [S/W 118]).

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<sup>491</sup> Cp. SW 102 [S/W 219].

<sup>492</sup> The maiden's song, like the crown which she is promised, thus becomes a symbol of the virgin's reward in its entirety, just as the howling of the demons is a symbol of despair. The maiden who preserves her chastity is consistently promised a crown and a song in heaven. For example, in SM 44 [S/W 288], maidens are urged to listen to Margaret's story especially carefully so that through the saint they may sing the maiden's song with her and the heavenly host.



The song of the maidens at the marriage feast in heaven is an image drawn from Revelation 14.3-4. Savage and Watson suggest that the uniqueness of the maidens' song is also connected to this passage, where the song of the maidens before the Lamb is "a new song."<sup>493</sup> The imagery of Revelation is reflected in Katherine's description of the revelry of the citizens of the city built in the heart, as well as in the physical features of the city itself (SK 88 [S/W 276]).

#### THE COSMIC DANCE

The bliss of the bridal feast of the Lamb is also expressed in the image of the dance. The author of *Hali Meidhad* cites Revelation 14.3-4 to represent the dance of the virgins in heaven as a participation in a great cosmic dance, as they follow God *hwider se he eauer wendeð* (HM 16.16 [S/W 231]). Although this phrase is normally translated "they follow God wherever he goes" (following the Vulgate which reads *hi sequantur Agnum quocumque ierit*), in the paragraph which follows the author of *Hali Meidhad* draws upon the ambiguous nature of the verb *wenden* to reinterpret the passage, describing the maidens' progress as: *efter Godd hare anes zong hwider se he eauer turneð, ant hare fare se feirer biuoren alle þe oþre* ("their unique going after God wherever he turns, and their movement so fair before all the

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<sup>493</sup> SW n. 19, p. 409.

others" HM 16.20-21 [S/W 231], *emph. mine*; cp. HM 20.9 [S/W 233]).<sup>494</sup> The maidens in heaven are said to dance and sing in their own special circle, led by Christ and the Virgin Mary (HM 18 [S/W 233]). The author of *Hali Meidhad* is careful to state that although all follow Christ, only the maidens can follow him in the honour of virginity, and dance in their circle. It is for this reason that the robes of the maidens are so much brighter than the others, since they walk next to God wherever he goes [lit. turns] (HM 20 [S/W 233]), singing and circling in a great cosmic dance.

The maidens' following after God is thus transformed from a procession into a cosmic dance, a *carol* which reflects the unity of the maidens with Christ.<sup>495</sup>

Savage and Watson note that:

the combination of singing and ring-dancing described in this image of virginal beatitude ... is a *carol* in the original medieval sense of the word. Although the Church took a moralistic line on actual dancing, carol is often used in medieval literature as an image of joy, including the metaphysical joy of the great cosmic dance itself.<sup>496</sup>

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<sup>494</sup> *Wenden* can mean to turn, direct one's course, or, simply, go (see the definition in Strattmann). M/W-B, in an apparent effort to be consistent with the Vulgate, translate both passages as "wherever he goes." The text, however, is quite clearly departing from the literal meaning of the Latin here.

<sup>495</sup> See Stevens, *Words and Music*, p. 166, who notes that the traditional "carole" can be either a ring-dance or a procession.

<sup>496</sup> HM n. 29, p. 414. The "moralistic" attitude towards dancing can be seen in AW v.163 [S/W 164]) where joining in, or even watching, the ring-dancing in the churchyard is among the sins which the anchoress hypothetically confesses (see also Stevens *Words and Music in the Middle Ages: Song, Narrative, Dance and Drama 1050-1350*, [Cambridge, 1986], pp. 161-2).

The closed circle of the cosmic dance which none but the maidens can enter reflects the unity of the anchoress with Christ achieved in the enclosed space of her anchorhouse.

The unbroken circle of the maidens' dance also reflects the wholeness of their maidenhood, as they dance before their beloved at the marriage feast, singing their thanks for the unbroken purity which they have maintained for his love. This is also made clear in *Ancrene Wisse*, where the cosmic dance is seen as a continuation of the anchoress's life on earth as a form of *imitatio Christi*. She leaves all, as Christ did, to follow him on earth in her enclosure, that she may follow him to the joy of heaven *7 zet tear ouer al folhi þe hwiderward se þu eaue wendest as nane ne mahen bute ane meidnes* ("and even there follow you wherever you go as none can do except for maidens" AW iii.87 [S/W 110]). The author repeats the reference to Revelation 14.4, that in the heavenly dance the maidens follow Christ wherever he goes; however, *Ancrene Wisse* includes the gloss that the maidens follow Christ with *both* feet, i.e., with wholeness of heart and body. The maidens' dance thus reflects the purity of both body and heart, just as their song does in *Hali Meiohad* (HM 18-20 [S/W 233]).<sup>497</sup>

Stevens notes that in Dante the cosmic dance is a symbol of joyful participation in the divine order, and that the metaphor is often used to signify unity

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<sup>497</sup> Quoted above, p.280.

and joy.<sup>498</sup> The metaphor of the dance is specifically associated with a marriage feast in a Latin wedding hymn from Spain which dates from the ninth century or earlier. In this hymn, the wedding is seen as a re-enactment of the redemption and the earthly music, song, and dance reflect divine joy as the participants reach towards heaven in thanksgiving.<sup>499</sup>

Stevens also points out the link between the dance and the courtly tradition,<sup>500</sup> a link which makes it a most appropriate activity for the marriage feast of the Lamb. This link is reflected in the garland, or *aureola* of the maidens who participate in the dance, a garland which is decorated with flowers, recalling the chaplet, or garland of flowers worn in the dance in the later romance tradition.<sup>501</sup>

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<sup>498</sup> *Words and Music*, p. 159. A possible influence upon this metaphor is the Acts of John (94f.) in which Christ leads the disciples in a dance-song at the last supper, although it is unlikely a direct source (see Dronke, *The Medieval Lyric*, 2nd. ed., [Cambridge, 1977], p. 84). The metaphor of the dance is also found in later mystical texts, such as the writings of Rolle, Suso, and *The Chastising of God's Children*.

S/W cite Aelred's *RR* 15 and Ambrose, *De Virginibus* II.ii.17 (PL 16 col.211) as possible sources for the image in *Hali Meïðhad*, as well as a secular parallel in *The Romance of the Rose* (c.1230), a text in which the dance symbolizes concord, the joy of the courtly elite and the delights and rewards of the good life on earth (see Stevens, *Words and Music*, p. 164).

<sup>499</sup> Dronke, *Medieval Lyric*, pp. 186-187.

<sup>500</sup> *Words and Music*, pp. 164-167.

<sup>501</sup> Stevens, *Words and Music*, p. 167; cp. Dronke, *Medieval Lyric*, pp. 198-204).

The image of the mystical love dance occurs in several thirteenth century texts. Mechtild of Hackeborn speaks of the passion of Christ as a ring dance<sup>502</sup> and Mechtild of Magdeburg writes of a mystical union of the soul with her beloved using the metaphor of a ring-dance led by Christ in which the soul leaps into love, and from love into union. Here, as in *Hali Meibhad*, the dance of praise is associated with song, and is prepared through faith, chastity and the "sacred perfection" of Christ. Yet even with these virtues, the soul needs Christ to lead her in the dance:

I cannot dance O Lord, unless Thou lead me.  
 If Thou wilt that I leap joyfully  
 Then must Thou Thyself first dance and sing!  
     Then will I leap for love  
 From love to knowledge,  
 From knowledge to fruition,  
 From fruition to beyond all human sense  
 There will I remain  
 And circle evermore.<sup>503</sup>

#### THE SWEET SMELL

Love of Life tells his auditors that as the virgins follow Christ in the cosmic dance, a sweet smell follows them, reminding the reader of the sweet smell which

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<sup>502</sup> See Riehle, *Middle English Mystics*, p. 49.

<sup>503</sup> *The Flowing Light of the Godhead*, in Elizabeth Petroff (ed.), *Medieval Women's Visionary Literature*, (Oxford, 1986), p. 219. Cp. also the translation by Marcelle Thiébaux, *The Writings of Medieval Women*, (New York, 1987), p. 217.

accompanies meditation and the holy life.<sup>504</sup> The smell is so sweet that one could live forever by its sweetness. The life-giving properties of the smell of chastity are reminiscent of *Hali Meidhad* 10 [S/W 229], where virginity is described as a balm which preserves the flesh. This is contrasted with the flesh itself, which does not produce sweet smells or balm (AW iv.142-143 [S/W 149]). Through the sweet smells which she finds in heaven, the anchoress is rewarded for the stench she endures on earth. On the other hand, those who delight in sweet smells on earth are rewarded with the stench of hell (AW ii.55-56 [S/W 86-87]).

A sweet smell also characterizes the city built in the heart, where everything is *beatewil, swottre ant swettre þen eauer ei healewi* ("delicious, sweeter and more fragrant than any healing nectar" SK 88.618 [S/W 276]). A sweet, healing smell emanates from St. Katherine's prison, comforting and putting fear to flight, as angels anoint her wounds with aromatic ointment, healing her flesh and restoring it to its original wholeness (SK 84 [S/W 276]). Such holy, healing oil is itself a participation in the fragrance of Christ, who is the sweetest and most fragrant of all things (SM 62 [S/W 296]).

The comfort of the sweet smell of chastity is an integral part of the maidens' reward. After the battle against the devil is waged on earth, the anchoress, like Katherine, is promised rest, peace, ease and comfort. The anchoress is like Israel travelling through the wilderness towards rest, prosperity, joy, the heart's desire and

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<sup>504</sup> See above, p. 107.

the body's ease and happiness (AW iv.113 [S/W 128]). On earth, bodily ease is lechery's ally and is to be avoided, for joy is not bought with ease and comfort (AW iv.148 [S/W 154], viii.220 [S/W 206]). In heaven, however, it is considered to be an integral part of the anchoress's reward. Thus, the anchoress who toils in pain in the strange country in which she now sojourns will be rewarded with honour and rest in her own country, i.e., the Kingdom of Heaven, where she will receive rest, ease and honour in return for her toil and shame on earth (AW vi.182-183 [S/W 179-180]).

### THE EARTHLY REWARD

#### REST AND PEACE

In *Seinte Katerine*, the promise of peace, rest, and eternal reward made to Katherine by the angel is fulfilled at her death when the whole company of maidens and the household of heaven come to meet her with the conqueror's crown (SK 126 [S/W 283]). Her reward is also partially realized on earth, however, as she sits in her cell surrounded by honourable men dressed in white (representing the patriarchs, prophets, apostles, martyrs, and confessors described in *Sawles Warde*) and merry maidens who crown her as a queen with a golden crown (SK 82 [S/W 275-276]). Later, she is visited by Christ himself with angels and maidens, in anticipation of the

company into which she will be received at her death (SK 96 [S/W 278]). So, too, the author of *Ancrene Wisse* insists that sweet rest is available here in this world, before the anchoress reaches heaven (AW iv.113 [S/W 129]). In her anchorhouse, which is Jerusalem, or the "sight of peace",<sup>505</sup> she can experience the peace of heaven, for at home in Jerusalem she need know nothing of the world's clamour (AW iii.89 [S/W 112]).

The peace which the anchoress finds in her anchorhouse is symbolized by the third of the three Marys, Mary Salome, whose name means "peace." Here, as in the image of Jerusalem, the imagery of the high tower of virginity combines with the notion of peace.<sup>506</sup> The anchoress, after her bitter fight with the devil, has climbed so high that she has her heart's ease in the war against vice and the peace of a clean conscience. However, the author of *Ancrene Wisse* notes that this peace is tinged with the bitterness of longing for heaven and weariness of this world (AW vi.191 [S/W 185]).

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<sup>505</sup> S/W (AW iii n. 77, p. 368) suggest a source in pseudo-Jerome, *De Nominibus* (PL 23, col. 1212).

<sup>506</sup> "Salome" and the final "saalem" of Jerusalem are both from the Hebrew root שָׁלוֹם, from which *shalom*, meaning "peace" is also derived.



## FREEDOM

The peace which the anchoress finds in her anchorhouse is associated with the freedom from care which chastity brings. In the anchorhouse which is her tower, the tower of Zion, the anchoress is:

*se freo of hireseoluen þet ha nawiht ne þearf of oðer þing þenchen bute  
ane of hire leofmon wið treowe luue cwemen, for he wule carie for hire  
þet ha hæueð itake to of al þet hire bihoueð, hwil ha riht luueð him wið  
soðe bileaue (HM 4.16-19).*

so free in herself that she need never think of another thing at all than of pleasing her beloved and faithful love (for he to whom she has turned will care for her in all that she needs, while she sincerely loves him with true belief) [S/W 22ü].

She must remain in the tower of her chastity, however, in order to maintain that freedom and peace. If she descends from her high tower to marry, she gives up both her freedom from the cares which accompany worldly wealth and her nobility, for she *lutlin hire leafdischipe ase muchel as hire leatere were is leasse wurð ant leasse hæueð þen hefde ear hire earre* ("lessens her ladyship by as much as her second husband is less worthy and has less than her first" HM 4.23-25 [S/W 226]).

Paradoxically, the very fact that the anchoress has forsaken the wealth of the world is proof of both her nobility and her freedom; she has given up the bundles and bags of earthly gains and worldly revenues, for *noblemen ⁊ gentile ne beoreð nanes packes* ("nobles and gentlefolk do not carry packs" AW iii.87, f.45a.19-20 [S/W 110]). This would be particularly appropriate to the three anchoresses for whom

*Ancrene Wisse* was originally written, who were apparently of noble birth.<sup>507</sup> The world fights to enslave the anchoress through possessions, lust and her own weak nature which seeks to master her (WLd 27.276 [S/W 251]; HM 8 [S/W 228]). The virgin who succumbs to lust is a slave to her man and to her desire, ridden by the devil as his beast of burden (HM 12 [S/W 229]). Even the married woman is enslaved by the burdens of running her household (HM 32-34 [S/W 239]), and worry over her worldly possessions (HM 26 [S/W 235]), but the virgin anchoress is free to concentrate on her love for Christ. The wife lives in Babylon, enslaved to the world, but the virgin dwells in Zion, free from society's pressures.

The freedom of the anchoress is, ultimately, freedom to serve. Like St. Margaret, who asserts her social status as that of a free woman, but her spiritual state as that of a slave to God, the virgin is freed from society's demands in order to serve Christ. She is assured that this service, unlike the bitter slavery of the wife, will bring her sweetness and joy, on earth as well as in heaven, for *se hende is ure Lauerd þet nule he nawt þet his icorene beon her wiðute mede* ("so gracious is our Lord that he does not wish that his chosen ones be without reward here" HM 6.8-9 [S/W 227]; cp.

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<sup>507</sup> The Nero Ms. contains a passage which is not found in any other ms., describing the three sisters for whom the text was written: *Muche word is of ou hu gentile wummen 3e boeð. vorgodleic 7 for ureoleic i3imed of monie. 7 sustren of one ueder 7 of one moder. i ne blomme of ower 3uweðe uorheten alle wordes blissen. 7 bicomen ancren* ("There is much talk of you, what well-bred women you are, sought after by many for your goodness and generosity, and sisters of one father and of one mother, who in the flower of your youth renounced all the world's joys and became anchoresses" Nero f.50.23-27, Day p. 85, trans. S/W p. 12, cp. Salu, p. 84).

AW iv.113-114 [S/W 129]). Thus he offers those who love and serve him comfort in grace; the anchoresses' lives may appear on the surface to be full of suffering, but:

*habbeð mare delit þrin þen ei oðer habbe i licunge of þe worlt. Þis ure Lauerd zeueð ham her as on earnesse of þe eche mede þet schal come þrefter. Þus habbeð Godes freond al þe frut of þis worlt þet ha forsaken habbeð, o wunderliche wise, ant heouene ed ten ende. (HM 6.12-16).*

they have more delight in it than anyone else has in the pleasures of the world. This our Lord gives them here as an earnest of the endless reward that will come afterwards. So God's friend has in a marvellous way all the fruit of this world that she has forsaken and heaven at the end [S/W 227].

The lot of the anchoress, even on earth, is such that she would not change her state even to be crowned a queen (HM 6 [S/W 227]).

The maiden's reward, then, is achieved, at least in part, on earth. In the Lives of the virgin martyrs, the maiden's crown, like the reward which it represents, is in some way achieved on earth, prior to the virgins' entrance into heaven. Margaret phrases her assurance of a crown in the *past* tense, implying that the crown is already hers. In fact, she is crowned while still alive by a dove which descends on a shaft of light to place a golden crown on her head as she rises out of the vat of water in which she was to have been tortured (SM 76 [S/W 302]).<sup>508</sup> Again, Katherine has already been crowned like a queen by the maidens and "honourable men" who surround her in her prison cell. Similarly, the song of praise which the maidens sing

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<sup>508</sup> This dove is reminiscent of the dove which descends on Christ at his baptism and announces his divine sonship, just as St. Margaret is affirmed by the voice of the dove. This is another example of the presentation of Margaret's life (and by implication the anchoress's) as patterned upon that of Christ.

in heaven is anticipated in *Sainte Margarete* when Margaret comes out of the water which was to be her death singing a psalm of praise (SM 76 [S/W 302]). The heavenly city of Jerusalem, where the anchoress receives her reward, is also the "city built in the heart," present within the anchorhouse itself.

#### THE ANGELIC LIFE

The individual elements of the maiden's reward are features which are frequently identified as being shared with the angels. When Love of Life rehearses the wonders of heaven in *Sawles Warde*, he moves from the description of Christ and Mary to the angels and archangels, the blessed spirits who are always in the presence of God to serve him, who sing without weariness (SW 100-102 [S/W 218]). He then describes the bright and shining army of blessed maidens who are most like the angels because they lead a heavenly life on earth (SW 102 [S/W 218-219]).

Virginity, in fact, makes the anchoress equal to the angels, in the likeness of the heavenly nature. Like the maiden's reward, however, her equality with the angels is not limited to heaven: through virginity, the anchoress leads the life of the angels here on earth (HM 10 [S/W 229]; cp. HM 20 [S/W 234], 40 [S/W 242]). Millett and Wogan-Browne point out that, although the prospect of the angelic life is essentially a promise to be fulfilled in heaven after the resurrection, "virginity ... offers an earthly

approximation ... to the angelic life and is our best image of redemption as well as of our first home in Paradise.<sup>509</sup> Although the virginity of the angels is more blessed now, the virginity of the anchoress is kept with greater effort: the maidens in heaven are described as *þe, libbinde i flesche, ouergað flesches lahe ant ouercumeð cunde, þe leadeð heouenlich lif in eorðe as ha wunieð* ("those who, living in the flesh, overcame the law of the flesh, and overcame nature—whose way is to lead a heavenly life on earth" SW 102.10-11 [S/W 218]). The virginity of the anchoress will therefore be given a greater reward (HM 10 [S/W 229]).

The angelic quality of the virginal life and the heavenly reward which it entails are manifested in the intimate relationship with angels enjoyed by the virgin martyrs, who are all visited by angels on numerous occasions. The souls of all three virgin martyrs are borne to heaven by angels singing a sweet song (SK 128 [S/W 283]; cp. SK 126 [S/W 283]; SM 82 [S/W 304-305]; SJ 69 [S/W 320]), and angels regularly respond to their prayers. When St. Juliana is visited by the devil in the guise of an angel she prays for guidance and an angelic voice exposes the devil's ploy and instructs Juliana to bind him, promising that she will be victorious (SJ 31-33 [S/W 312-313]). Later, when Eleusius prepares a fire to torture Juliana, she prays and an angel appears to quench the fire (SJ 61 [S/W 319]).

St. Katherine prays for aid in her war of words and is answered by an angel who arrives in her cell in a blaze of light and promises heavenly aid and victory (SK

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<sup>509</sup> M/W-B, p. xvi.

36-38 [S/W 268]) and when she is faced with the wheel she prays and an angel swoops down and plunges into the wheel like a thunderclap (SK 104 [S/W 279]; cp. SJ 53 [S/W 317]). She is ministered to in her cell by angels who, accompanied by a bright light and sweet smell, anoint and heal her wounds (SK 84 [S/W 276]). Angels also visit her to offer encouragement in her ordeal, this time accompanied by heavenly maidens and by Christ himself. And, in the likeness of a dove, angels feed her for twelve days and nights during her imprisonment (SK 94-96 [S/W 278]).

St. Margaret is visited, not by angels, but by a dove. Although in *Seinte Katerine* angels appear in the form of a dove, the dove which appears to Margaret is associated with the cross and the voice of Christ and the Holy Spirit. When she prays for aid, she requests a messenger from God in the form of a dove (SM 54 [S/W 292]; cp. SM 48 [S/W 289]). When the dove appears, however, it seems to be more for her personal vindication and affirmation than to offer assistance, which Margaret does not seem to require. After she has defeated the dragon, a dove arrives in her cell on a beam of light in the shape of a cross and announces that the gates of Paradise are now open to her (SM 66 [S/W 297]). Again, when she is about to be immersed in a vat of water, she prays that the Holy Spirit will descend in the image of a dove and bless the water. At this, the earth trembles, and a dove descends, burning as with fire, to set a golden crown on Margaret's head. She rises, shining and singing, from the water and the dove invites her once again to enter heaven, emphasizing that it is her maidenhood which has won her this great honour (SM 76

[S/W 302]). Finally, as Margaret faces her death, a dove arrives with a clap of thunder, bearing a blazing cross and speaking with the voice of Christ, affirming her blessedness and promising a heavenly reward (SM 78-80 [S/W 303]).

In the Lives of the virgin martyrs, the angelic life is portrayed with images which are typical of the description of the heavenly reward for maidenhood described so frequently in *Ancrene Wisse* and the *Katherine Group*, such as light, sweetness, song, crowns, power, and entry into paradise. However, although the texts of the *Katherine Group* stress the rewards of the angelic life, it is important not to lose sight of the goal of the virginal life: the anchoress is not encouraged to preserve her virginity for the simple purpose of attaining a heavenly reward which is described in admittedly materialistic terms. As Bosse states:

the rather garish rewards of virginity—the special songs and dances, the shining robes and glittering halos—are merely emblems of an especially intimate union with Christ and the heavenly company after death.<sup>510</sup>

The goal of virginity is spiritual: virginity is regarded as the state in which the angels live in contemplation of God.<sup>511</sup> Thus, Millett and Wogan-Browne assert: "the purpose of virginity is to help the soul develop the power of seeing God."<sup>512</sup>

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<sup>510</sup> Bosse, "Female Sexual Behavior," p. 24. The statement occurs in a discussion of *The Book of Margery Kempe*, but is equally applicable to *Hali Meïðhad* and the saints' Lives of the *Katherine Group*.

<sup>511</sup> S/W HM n. 5, p. 411; cp. Millett, *Hali Meïðhad*, pp. xxvii-xx for patristic background.

<sup>512</sup> M/W-B, p. xv.

The virgin's privileged access to truth is illustrated in *Seinte Iuliane*, where language which would normally be figurative becomes the expression of ultimate truth on Juliana's tongue.<sup>513</sup> Juliana is able to transform her experience of imprisonment and torture "into fresh knowledge of God," leading to a "sense of integrity as a purposive God-directed movement through time and experience."<sup>514</sup> So too, the virgin anchoress is encouraged to transform her experience of enclosure into an intimate communion with Christ.

#### UNION WITH CHRIST

Virginity not only makes the anchoress like the angels, enabling her to see God, it makes her *like* God (HM 10 [S/W 228]). Virginity is *ilich him [Criste] in halschipe, vnwemmet as he is, ant þet eadi meiden his deorrewurðe moder* ("like [Christ] in wholeness, spotless as he is, and also that blessed maiden his precious mother" HM 4.14-15 [S/W 226]). Maidenhood, inviolate and pure, is modelled on the absolute purity of Christ, a virgin born of a virgin (HM 10 [S/W 228-229]), and Christ is held up as a model for the anchoress as she strives to become like him: insofar as Christ was a virgin, physical virginity is in itself a form of *imitatio Christi* (AW iv.134 [S/W

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<sup>513</sup> Price, "SJ and Hagiographic Convention," p. 48.

<sup>514</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 53.



141]). The soul enclosed in the anchoress's body is the image of God in a special sense, since virginity which is preserved unbroken is the likeness of God, who is unbroken (HM 10 [S/W 228-229]).<sup>515</sup>

The unbroken maiden also models herself after the Virgin Mary whose body was unbroken even after the birth of Christ (AW i.23 [S/W 61]; LLo 10.7-8 [S/W 325]). The virgin anchoress seeks to purify herself so that she may receive Christ within her heart as the Virgin Mary bore him within her womb, for "Christ's incarnation in a virgin mother shows that 'purity is the only complete indication of the presence of God'.<sup>516</sup> Virginity, or purity of heart, thus enables the soul to achieve that union with God which *Ancrene Wisse* and the *Katherine Group* characterize as Christ dwelling within the heart. Chaste purity is the absolute prerequisite for the relationship with Christ as lover/spouse which will be examined in Chapters Five and Six.

Christ himself is the ultimate reward, the "maiden's prize" (*meidenes mede* SM 56.23 [S/W 293]). He is described as the crown which the virgins and martyrs will receive (SM 62 [S/W 296]). The author of *Ancrene Wisse* assures his readers that the

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<sup>515</sup> For the patristic background to the concept of virginity as the image and likeness of God, see Thomas Renna, "Virginity in the *Life* of Christina of Markyate and Aelred of Rievaulx's *Rule*," ABR 36 (1985) p. 80.

<sup>516</sup> Millett and Wogan-Browne xvi, citing Gregory of Nyssa *On Virginity* v.344, col.2, in W. Moore and H.A. Wilson, *Select Writings and Letters of Gregory, Bishop of Nyssa*, A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, 2nd ser. (New York, 1893; repr. Grand Rapids, Mich., 1954).

shield of Christ's body will both shield and crown them in heaven. St. Katherine urges the onlookers at her death not to mourn, for she is going to eternal rest in the Kingdom of Heaven, and can see Christ, her lord, love, life, lover, joy, spouse, happiness, reward, and crown awaiting her (SK 122-124 [S/W 282]).

In *Seinte Katerine*, the virgin's reward is described in more spiritual terms than in, for example, *Hali Meiodhad*. Although the material view of heaven is reflected in the description of the city built in the heart (SK 86-90 [S/W 276-277]), the heavenly reward which Katherine anticipates at her death is eternal rest in the kingdom of heaven with Christ, who is himself the maiden's reward and crown (SK 122-124 [S/W 282]). She is promised that in the company of maidens she will find endless life with Christ, her lord and lover (SK 38 [S/W 268]). This spiritual reward which follows her battle on earth is contrasted with the material reward sought by the scholars who have come to do battle in order to be rewarded with gold and gifts. Like the virgin who succumbs to temptation, when the scholars lose their battle, they also lose their reward (SK 42-44 [S/W 269]).

The maiden's reward is thus defined by Katherine in terms of eternal rest and union with Christ. The rest and peace which are promised to Katherine in heaven as she is united with her heavenly spouse are available to the anchoress on earth through contemplation. The true anchoress is compared to a bird of heaven who flies up and sit on the green boughs singing merrily. Thinking of the joy of heaven which never fades but is always green, she will sing merrily, i.e., will dwell in such

thoughts and like those who sing will have mirth in her heart (AW iii.70 [S/W 98]). However, although the song of the anchoress may be joyful, it is composed in suffering as well as in mirth. The anchoress singing merrily in the treetops is also the anchoress who is hung with Christ on the tree of the cross, in order that she might sing joyfully with Holy Church and rejoice in Christ's cross (AW vi.180-181 [S/W 178]).

Paradoxically, rest and peace are found in union with Christ through toil and pain, as the anchoress leaves the world behind to toil in the wilderness and carve a resting place for herself (AW iii.86 [S/W 110]). Like the bird, the anchoress builds her nest (which the author of *Ancrene Wisse* equates with rest) on high, leaving the earth (i.e. the love of worldly things) behind as she flies high toward heaven (AW iii.69 [S/W 97]). The nest, harsh without and soft within, symbolizes the anchorhouse's harsh existence, and the anchoress's body, punished without, yet containing the soft, pure heart. The false anchoress, who is bitter and hard-hearted, indulging her fleshly desires, builds her nest backwards, soft on the outside and thorny within. Such a nest makes a bad resting place (AW iii.71 [S/W 98]). The true anchoress, however, protects the nest of her heart with a rigorous life, hardening her body with suffering and softening her heart with love. A properly built nest will become the resting place of Christ, who comes to dwell within the nest of the anchorhouse and of the heart.

In the end, the anchoress finds rest only in union with Christ; thus the ultimate resting place for the anchoress, as for Christ, is *þe deore rode þet he on reste* ("the beloved cross he rested on" SM 60.17 [S/W 295]).<sup>517</sup> The image of Christ "resting" on the cross which is portrayed as the site of his suffering and toil captures the ultimate paradox of the anchoress's life: it is only as she hangs on the cross with Christ, labouring with him in her imitation of his passion, that the anchoress will rest in the arms of her beloved who adorns the cross, his arms outstretched to embrace his beloved bride.

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<sup>517</sup> Millett and Wogan-Browne translate "the beloved cross that he was raised on," although they give no indication of why they do so. The image of Christ raised on the cross is, however, conventional, while the image of Christ "resting" on the cross is, to say the least, unusual.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### ENCLOSURE AND UNION

The understanding of the anchoritic life outlined in the preceding chapters is a determining factor in the type of mysticism taught by *Ancrene Wisse* and the texts of the *Katherine Group* and the *Wooing Group*. At first glance it might seem that the anchoress, enclosed in her cell to escape the temptations and distractions of the world and heroically battling temptation from within, has entered into a life which emphatically repudiates her sexuality and denies any positive function to the body. It would seem, perhaps, that apart from the apparently negative function of suffering, the body is to be renounced entirely.

In fact, however, the mysticism of *Ancrene Wisse* is profoundly rooted in the body, as the sinful impulses of the flesh are recognized in the most vehement of terms and, through suffering in imitation of Christ, are violently wrested from their sinful course and redirected into a path which leads to union with Christ. In this way, suffering takes on a positive aspect, serving as a trigger for meditation on the passion which merges into erotic union with Christ. Through such meditation the erotic impulses of the flesh are transferred from human and worldly objects to the human and divine Christ, and are thus transformed into redeeming qualities. The flesh which defines all humanity (male as well as female) is liberated, rather than denied, in an identification with Christ, who took on human flesh in order to redeem it.

This is in part a development of the increasing devotion to the humanity of Christ which emerged in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. With the increased emphasis on the Incarnation as the vehicle of redemption, the focus of meditation became not the divine, conquering Christ, but the human, suffering Christ. Beginning with Anselm, and reaching fuller expression with the writings of St. Bernard, the affective mysticism of the eleventh and twelfth centuries came to focus on a love relationship with Christ, the heavenly bridegroom, and his earthly spouse, the human soul. Christ's incarnation and passion revealed not so much his divine power and might, but his love. This represented a radical shift, with far-reaching implications, especially for women.

Devotion to and meditation on the humanity of Christ was particularly suited to women for several reasons. As Bugge points out:

Once the humanity of Christ was established for doctrinal purposes, a full range of human qualities associated with the husband or lover became available for increased devotion and meditation. ... As emphasis on Christ's humanity focused attention on his male sexuality, so the latter provoked increased interest in the femaleness of the professed virgin. The result was a new concern to show her drawing upon distinctively female resources to attract and hold the love of Christ.<sup>518</sup>

This type of devotion, expressed in texts written by and for women, differs from the devotion found in the mysticism of Bernard, where the spouse is always the human soul, grammatically feminine but asexual in nature. Whereas for Bernard the spousal

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<sup>518</sup> Bugge, *Virginitas*, pp. 98, 107.

metaphor is always rooted in the spiritual and has no place in the realm of the physical, in medieval works associated with female mystics the metaphor is "literalized." The love-relationship with Christ takes on a new, erotic quality, expressed in terms which exploit the sexuality of the female mystic.

Besides the obvious fact that women would more naturally respond to a physical, erotic relationship with a male Christ than would men, women were psychologically conditioned to accept themselves as weak and therefore were more open to a form of spirituality which transformed physical weakness rather than denying it. Medieval attitudes towards women taught women to despise their bodies as essentially weak and sinful, and to expiate their sinfulness through suffering.<sup>519</sup> Women were thus better able than men to identify the weakness of their flesh with the essential paradox of the Incarnation; that it is through the physical weakness and suffering of the human Christ that humankind is redeemed. As Bynum points out:

Women ... often used their ordinary experiences (of powerlessness, of service and nurturing, of disease, etc.) as symbols into which they poured ever deeper and more paradoxical meanings.<sup>520</sup>

Thus, instead of denying their rootedness in the body, women were able to accept it, purge it, and transform it in a mystical identification with Christ.

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<sup>519</sup> See, for example, the discussion in Robertson *Early English Devotional Prose*, chapter 3 (pp. 32-43). Robertson is too harsh in her assessment and fails to see any positive implications for women in the association of the feminine with weakness and suffering. Her review is nonetheless important in illustrating common attitudes towards the body and, in particular, the female body.

<sup>520</sup> *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, p. 25.

## PREPARATION FOR UNION

The mysticism of *Ancrene Wisse* and its related texts is profoundly rooted in the body. Christ, the bashful lover of the Song of Songs who will embrace his beloved only in a secret place, must be sought within the heart. However, the anchoress cannot lose sight of the fact that her heart is enclosed within her body; thus, she herself is God's chamber, the enclosed bower in which she seeks her beloved (AW ii.49 [S/W 82], ii.55 [S/W 86], iii.88 [S/W 110-111]). The matrix of anchorhouse/body/heart which is established by the imagery of enclosure discussed above in Chapter One thus takes on a profound significance; the body is the dwelling place of the heart, even as the heart is the dwelling place of Christ, and therefore both the body and the heart must be prepared for His coming.

This preparation involves withdrawal from the world and the "guarding" of the senses, as the body and mind are trained to focus on inner realities by *using* the outer, physical world as a trigger for meditation on the inner, spiritual world. Spirituality which claims to transcend the flesh often simply denies it. *Ancrene Wisse*, on the other hand, begins with the acceptance of the body and a recognition of its sinfulness, and centres the spirituality of the anchoress on the physical. The anchoress is taught how to overcome her own sinful human (not female) nature and prepare her soul and the body which encloses it to receive Christ. The author of *Ancrene Wisse* deals with the very practical problem of living in the body by making



the body itself the vehicle of redemption as the anchoress transforms the body in which she is imprisoned into the bower in which she keeps tryst with Christ.

The anchoress is thus taught to centre her contemplation: she begins with a focus on her own body, acknowledging its sinfulness so that she can begin to cleanse and prepare it. This centring is facilitated by the anchoress's daily reading, which is intended as a springboard for meditation (cp. AW iv.149, [S/W 153]). Passages which are often condemned as extreme examples of misogynist male attitudes to the female body are in fact part of the recognition of the potential sinfulness of human flesh and the heart enclosed within it, which is an essential precondition for the cleansing of both body and soul.<sup>521</sup> The anchoress is, indeed, encouraged to meditate upon her own sinful nature, but this is never the author's last word. The same anchoress who describes herself as a "foul stud mare" is also the beloved bride who prepares her body to receive Christ.

*Ancrene Wisse* is insistent upon the anchoress's need to prepare for the embrace of her divine lover. She must first admit the sinfulness of the flesh in confession; this acknowledgement is itself cleansing (AW iv.149 [S/W 153], v.155 [S/W 159], v.166 [S/W 167]). However, the process of readying her body and the heart

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<sup>521</sup> For example, the passage in which the anchoress describes herself as a "foul stud inare" (AW v.163 [S/W 164]). Grayson points out that this is part of the author's insistence that confession must be naked, concealing nothing, rejecting the rhetoric which might serve to mitigate the offense. In this way, confession becomes a way of striking out at the devil. Grayson cites parallels in Bernard, *Sermones*, 111, 454 (*Structure and Imagery*, p. 139 and n. 10).

which it encloses to receive Christ is only completed through enclosure, asceticism and meditation, through which sinful flesh is made fit for the indwelling of Christ.

Christ, the mystical lover whose love transcends all earthly loves, is at the same time the mother who prepares healing baths for his dear beloved, who is also his sick child, in order to wash her and ready her for his embrace.<sup>522</sup> These baths are important to the understanding of anchoritic mysticism, since they embody the main vehicles for union with Christ and express the stages through which the anchoress must pass. The first bath is baptism, which symbolizes the anchoress's turning to God and the cleansing which is a prerequisite for union. Baptism is specifically identified as a vehicle for erotic union in *Seinte Margarete* as Margaret prays:

*Festne wið fulluht mi sawle to þe seoluen, ant wið þes ilke weattres wesch me wiðinnen, ant warp from me awei eaueruech sunne, ant bring me to þi brihte bur, brudgume of wunne. (SM 76.8-11).*

Bind with baptism my soul to yourself, [and with the same waters wash me within,] and cast from me every sin, and bring me to your bright chamber, bridegroom of joy [S/W 302].<sup>523</sup>

The second bath is composed of the tears (both inner and outer) of the anchoress, which are sparked by meditation upon her own sinfulness and on the sufferings of Christ, and which bind Christ through his love (AW iv.125 [S/W 137]). This bath represents the purgative stage. The third bath is formed of Christ's blood, which

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<sup>522</sup> On the merging of erotic imagery with images of motherhood and fertility, see below pp. 312, 340f.

<sup>523</sup> The passage in square brackets, omitted by S/W, is supplied from M/W-B, p. 77.

unites the anchoress to Christ through meditation on the passion and through the eucharist. Christ's blood washes away sin and prepares the soul for union with him (UrG 8.110-120 [S/W 324]). However, it is also the means of union, as the anchoress consumes the body and blood of Christ in the eucharist.<sup>524</sup>

The ascetic, enclosed life described in the preceding chapters is thus a preparation for mystical union with Christ. Earthly joys and pleasures are relinquished in order to seek the heavenly joy of union with Christ, the most profound expression of which is found in the image of the mystical embrace:

*penc ancre hwet tu sohtest þa þu forsoket þe world i þi biclusunge. biwepen þine ahne ⁊ opres sunnen. ⁊ forleosen alle þe blissen of þis lif. forte cluppen blisfulliche þi blisfulde leofmon i þe eche lif of heouene. (AW ii.57, f.28b.17-21).*

Think, anchoress, what you looked for when you forsook the world in your enclosure: to weep for your own and others' sins, and to lose wholly all the joy of this life so as to embrace your joyful lover joyfully in the eternal life of heaven [S/W 88].

Like the virgin martyrs, the anchoress seeks the invitation which Christ, the eager bridegroom of heaven, extends to St. Margaret:

*Cum nu, for Ich kepe þe, brud to þi brudgume. Cum, leof, to þi lif, for Ich copni þi cume. Brihtest bur abit te; leof, hihe þe to me. Cum nu to mi kinedom (SM 80.13-15).*

Come now to your bridegroom, lady, for I await you. Come, beloved, to your life, because I long for your coming; the brightest chamber waits for you. [Beloved], hurry to me; come now to my kingdom [S/W 303].

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<sup>524</sup> See above, pp. 248f. See also pp. 320f., 329f., below.

The invitation becomes a reality when Margaret's spirit rises at her death to the *istirrede bur*, the "starry chamber" or bower of heaven (SM 82 [S/W 303]).

The anchorhouse which is the anchoress's prison and grave thus becomes the gateway to a life of love in union with Christ. Similarly, in *Wohunge* 21.145-50 [S/W 250] those who are delivered from the prison and death-house of hell in the harrowing of hell are brought into a jewelled bower (*zimmede bur*), the abode of eternal joy. So, too, St. Katherine's prison is transformed into a place where she communes with Christ, and eventually she is released from it to be united with her lover and spouse through death (SK 95 [S/W 278], 126-8 [S/W 283]).

However, the anchoress's union with Christ as lover is not confined to heaven; it takes place on earth, within the anchorhouse itself, for God lives in the heart of the anchoress who is dead to the world and to herself (AW vi.179 [S/v 177]). The heart thus becomes the chamber which bears Christ (HM 6 [S/W 226]), the bower in which the anchoress is united with her lover, the marriage bed of the anchoress and Christ.<sup>525</sup> The body which encloses the anchoress's heart and the anchorhouse which encloses her body thus become "physical representation[s]" of the mystical bower where the soul is united to Christ.<sup>526</sup> The withdrawal from the world which

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<sup>525</sup> For the image of the heart as a marriage bed, see below, pp. 316f. See also the passage from James of Vitry's hagiography of Mary of Oignies, quoted by Caroline Walker Bynum, "Women Mystics and Eucharistic Devotion in the Thirteenth Century," *WS* 11 (1984), p. 179.

<sup>526</sup> S/W, General Introduction, p. 24.

characterizes the anchoritic life is undertaken in order to free the anchoress and her senses for a mystical intimacy with Christ which compensates for the earthly comforts which she has renounced.<sup>527</sup> The grave of the anchorhouse is thus transformed into the dwelling of God as the anchorhouse becomes the bower in which the anchoress communes with her beloved.

#### THE ELUSIVE LOVER

The anchoress thus withdraws from the world in order to prepare herself for union with Christ (HM 6 [S/W 227]). The author of *Ancrene Wisse* states that the sixth reason for fleeing the world is in order to be intimate with Christ. He puts into the mouth of Christ the words of Isaiah 11.9:

*Ich chulle leade þe he seið to his leofmon in to anli stude. ⁊ ter ich chulle luueliche speoke to þin heorte. for me is lað preasse. (AW iii.88, f.45b.15-17).*

"I shall lead you," he says to his beloved, "into a solitary place, and there I shall speak lovingly to your heart; for I dislike a crowd" [S/W 110-111].

Christ is a jealous spouse, who demands total allegiance: the anchoress is to show her face to Christ alone if she wishes to see him clearly with her heart's eyes (AW ii.48, 52-53 [S/W 82, 84-85]).

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<sup>527</sup> S/W, General Introduction, pp. 24-26.

*Ancrene Wisse* stresses the importance of looking inward and blinding the outward sight by guarding it closely: otherwise the anchoress *ne mei iseo godd mid gastelich sihðe. ne þurh swuch sihðe icnawen. 7 þurh þe cnowleachunge ouer alle þing luuien.* (AW ii.49, f.24a.7-9: she "may not see God with her spiritual sight, nor through that sight know him, nor through that knowledge love him above everything" [S/W 82]). Thus Christ implores her:

*bihald inward þer ich am 7 ne sech þu me nawt wið ute þin heorte. Ich am wohere scheomeful. ne nule ich nohwer bicluppe mi leofmon bute i stude dearne. O þulli wise ure lauerd spekeð to his spuse. Ne þunche hire neauer wunder 3ef ha nis muchel ane, þah he hire schunie. 7 swa ane þ ha putte euch worldlich þrung. 7 euch 3urð eorðlich, ut of hire heorte, for heo is godes chambre.* (AW ii.49, f.23b.18-25).

"Look within where I am and do not seek me outside your heart. I am a bashful lover, I will not embrace my beloved anywhere but in a secret place." In this way our Lord speaks to his spouse. Let it never seem strange to her that he shuns her if she is not much alone—and so much alone that she puts all the thronging world and every earthly disturbance out of her heart. For she is God's chamber [S/W 82].<sup>528</sup>

Although in *Ancrene Wisse* vii Christ is presented as an importunate lover,<sup>529</sup> he is not always the ardent wooer who seeks the anchoress out. The presentation of Christ as the lover-knight must be read in light of what comes before, where Christ is presented as the often elusive lover, who must himself be wooed. The anchoress is therefore urged to call out to God, wooing him aggressively with tears and crying. Once she has won him, she is to reach out and grasp him, holding

<sup>528</sup> Cp. AW iii.80 [S/W 105].

<sup>529</sup> See the discussion of the parable of the Royal Wooing, below, pp. 366f.

him tightly until he has granted her desire (AW i.21 [S/W 59]; cp. AW vii.208-209 [S/W 197-198]).<sup>530</sup>

Images of motherhood merge with erotic imagery in a lovely passage where the author of *Ancrene Wisse* describes the elusiveness of Christ as a mother's playfulness with her child:

*flid from him 7 hut htre. 7 let him sitten ane. 7 lokin 3eorne abuten  
cleopien dame dame. 7 wepen ane hwile. 7 þenne wið sprede earmes  
leapeð lahhinde forð. cluppeð 7 cusseð 7 wipeð his ehnen. Swa ure  
lauerd let us ane iwurden oder hwile. 7 wiðdraheð his grace. his cunfort  
7 his elne. þet we ne findeð swetnesse i na þing þ we wel doð. ne sauur  
of heorte. (AW iv.119, f.62b.8-15).*

She runs away from him and hides herself, and lets him sit alone and look eagerly about crying "Mother! Mother!" and crying for a while; and then with open arms she jumps out laughing, and hugs and kisses him and wipes his eyes. So our Lord sometimes lets us be alone and withdraws his grace, his comfort and his support, so that we find no sweetness in anything that we do well, nor savour in our hearts [S/W 132].

The author goes on to list six reasons why God withdraws himself. For example, he withdraws so that the anchoress may know her own feebleness and *3eie lude efter him 3ef he is to longe* ("cry loudly for him if he is too long" AW iv.119, f.63a.10 [S/W 133]); so that the anchoress will *seche him 3eomluket. 7 cleopie 7 wepe efter him as deð þe lutel baban efter his moder* ("seek him the more eagerly, and call and weep after him like the little baby does after its mother" AW iv.120, f.63a.22-23 [S/W 133]); so that she will welcome his return more gladly; and finally:

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<sup>530</sup> See above, p. 205.

*þ tu þrefter þe wisluker wite him. hwen þu hauest icaht him 7 festluker halde. 7 segge wið his leofmon. Tenut eum nec dimittam.* (AW iv.120, f.63a.25-27).

so that you will guard him the more wisely when you have caught him, and hold him more tightly, and say with his beloved, *Tenui eum nec dimittam* [I have taken hold of him and will not let him go] (Canticles 3.4) [S/W 133].<sup>531</sup>

Here, the child who weeps after its mother merges with the beloved bride who eagerly seeks the embrace of her lover and holds him fast.<sup>532</sup>

#### THE CHAMBER OF THE HEART

The anchoress's urgent pursuit of Christ within her anchorhouse and within her heart requires that she draw her senses away from the world, as she seeks after Christ with her inner senses, instead of seeking out the world with her outer senses. The anchoress's guarding of her outer senses is thus directed to the purpose of

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<sup>531</sup> One of the sources cited by Baldwin ("Background," p. 213 n. 93) is Gregory, *Homilia in Iob* V.v.6 (PL 75, col. 683): "The spouse hides when he is looked for so that when he is not found he may be looked for the more eagerly...." Once again, the author of *Ancrene Wisse* has expanded and interpreted his source using imagery which is particularly suited to his female audience.

<sup>532</sup> See below pp. 346f. Cp. also the parable of the man with the new wife, discussed below, p. 387.



developing her spiritual senses, especially her inner sight, as she seeks to see and touch Christ in mystical union.<sup>533</sup> In this way

the anchoress' body and her cell, if they isolate her soul from sensuality, can become the "secret place" into which Christ deigns to come as lover. ...the anchoress is faced with a choice both metaphysical and erotic: she can dally with the world at her window, anger her jealous lover and be led into sin, or she can enclose her heart as she has her body, and find a superior dalliance within.<sup>534</sup>

The anchoress is faced with a fundamental choice: to let her eyes stray to the outside world, or to remain in the chamber of her anchorhouse and enjoy the kisses of her beloved in the bower of her heart (*hoerte bur*, AW ii.54-55 [S/W 86]; cp. AW i.21 [S/W 59], where Christ descends into the *breostes bur*).

The significance of virtue, therefore, is defined in terms of the marriage of the anchoress with Christ: because she is Christ's spouse, she must guard herself unblemished. The anchoress, concealed from the world, cultivates her beauty (i.e. virtues) for Christ alone, to whom her hidden face is lovely (AW iii.87 [S/W 110]). Chastity is paramount, for Christ will not abide a faithless spouse,<sup>535</sup> but chastity alone is not enough. As the author of *Hali Meïðhad* states:

*ʒef þu hauest wið meïðhad meokelec ant mildschipe, Godd is i þin  
heorte; ah ʒef þer is ouerhohe oðer ei prude in, he is utlahe þrof, for ne*

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<sup>533</sup> See above, pp. 119f.

<sup>534</sup> S/W AW ii, n. 57 p. 355.

<sup>535</sup> For the image of the false anchoress as a whore or faithless spouse, see below, pp. 386, 387.

*muhen ha nanes weis beddin in a breoste, þe ne mahten hawt somet eardin in heouene. (HM 38.3-6).*

If you have along with maidenhood humility and mildness, God is in your heart; but if there is arrogance or any pride in it, he is exiled from it, because those who could not live together in heaven can in no way bed together in one heart [S/W 241].

Even as there can be no indwelling of God in the heart which harbours vice, so too God will not dwell in the heart which remains turned toward the world. The sensual overtones of God's indwelling are clear:

*auh ase þu al hauest licamliche iwend me from þe worlde, wend me ec heortliche . ⁊ turn me allunge to þe . wið soðe luue . ⁊ mid bi leaue . þet ich nabbe no mong ne felauahschipe . ne speche . ne priuite wið þe worlde . for ich wot mi leofmon . der ich so cleopian þe . ðet fleschlich luue ⁊ gostlich . eorðlich luve ⁊ heouenlich, ne muhen onone wise bedden in one breoste (UrG 5.21-29).*

But as you have turned me wholly away from the world in my body, turn me also in my heart, and turn me altogether to you with true love and with faith, so that I have no companionship, no fellowship, no speech, no closeness with the world. For I know, my lover—do I dare call you so?—that fleshly love and spiritual, earthly love and heavenly, can in no way lie together in one heart [S/W 322].

## THE ARBOUR

The anchoress's body and the heart which it encloses are thus the dwelling place of God (AW vi.179 [S/W 177]; HM 6 [S/W 226]), the chamber in which she keeps tryst with Christ (AW ii.49 [S/W 82]), the bower in which she dallies with Christ (AW i.21 [S/W 59]; ii.54-55 [S/W 86]), and the marriage bed in which her love lies

(UrG 5.21-29 [S/W 322]). The chamber is prepared in withdrawal from the world to the solitude of the anchorhouse, with which the body is identified, in order to cultivate virtue and spiritual love.

Ultimately, the virtues which the anchoress cultivates in her enclosed life become the flowers which adorn the bower she prepares for her lover: her chaste body and the heart which it encloses.

*mi flesch is ifluret. bicumen al neowe. for ich chulle schriue me ⁊ herie godd willes. wel seið he ifluret to betacnfn wil schrift. for þe eorðe al unnet. ⁊ te treon als wa openið ham ⁊ bringeð forð misliche flures. ... Eadmodnesse. abstinence. Culures unlaðnesse. ⁊ opre swucche uertuz beoð feire i godes ehnen. ⁊ swote i godes nease smeallinde flures. Of ham make his herbearhe inwið þe seoluen. for his delices he seið beoð þer forte wunien. (AW v.173, f.92a.13-21).*

"My flesh has flowered, and has become all new, for I will confess myself and willingly praise God." Well he says "flowered" to signify willing confession; for the earth and the trees too open themselves up quite freely and put out different flowers. ... Humility, abstinence, the mildness of the dove, and other such virtues, are fair in God's eyes, and are sweet-smelling flowers in God's nose. With them, make his arbour within yourself; "For his delight is to dwell there," he says [S/W 172].<sup>536</sup>

The body is clearly emphasised: it is the *flesh* which flowers through the practice of virtues which are both inner (humility and mildness) and outer (abstinence). In her withdrawal from the world, through confession and virtue (or guarding the senses), then, the anchoress prepares her body and heart to receive Christ. Similarly,

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<sup>536</sup> Based on Psalm 27.7, Song of Songs 2.12 and Proverbs 8.31, all three of which the author quotes.

suffering and hardship are described as tools with which the anchoress may cultivate the garden of her heart (AW vii.196 [S/W 189]).

Grayson points out the sensual nuances of the fertile images of flowers and growth in *Ancrene Wisse*. The trees which flower as a token of spiritual health can be compared to the earth and trees where the bird has its nest in AW iii, which are signs of life and growth. Furthermore, the reference to the mildness of the dove as one of the virtues which adorn the arbour within the heart recalls the image of the dove which flees into the wounds of Christ. Grayson suggests that the refuge of Christ's wounds is here replaced by the arbour, the nest which is prepared for Christ's indwelling presence.<sup>537</sup>

#### THE NEST

The preparation of the anchoress's body and heart for union with Christ through her enclosed, ascetic life is thus also expressed in the image of the nest that is harsh on the outside but soft on the inside, representing the body hardened by asceticism and the heart softened by love (AW iii.71 [S/W 98-99]). The inner softness and sweetness of the heart is also associated with the body. In AW vi.192 [S/W 186] the image of the suffering of Christ on the cross is combined with the image of his

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<sup>537</sup> Grayson, *Structure and Imagery*, pp. 145-146. For an excellent discussion of the imagery of the garden in AW vii, see Grayson, pp. 180ff. and chapter 7, *passim*.

anointing by the three Marys, whose names mean bitterness, as Christ stretches himself out on the cross and makes himself smooth and soft to touch. The same suffering which makes the nest harsh and bitter on the outside anoints and heals, softening the heart within. Again, the emphasis is on the body as well as on the heart. Similarly, anger transforms Christ's spouse into a wolf, with a rough pelt about her heart. The anchoress who succumbs to anger is urged to shed her rough pelt and cultivate a smooth soft skin (AW iii.64-65 [S/W 94]).

As noted above, the anchoress can protect her heart from the poison of bitterness by keeping the gemstone of Christ within her nest as the eagle keeps agate in its nest to ward off the poisonous serpent. She keeps Christ in her heart by thinking of his sufferings and of his sweet heart, so soft within, which provides a model for her own nest, harsh without through suffering and soft within (AW iii.71 [S/W 98-99]). The anchoress is encouraged to use the visual image of the crucifix as a focus for meditation, kissing the wounds of Christ in a literal anticipation of the metaphorical kiss of her beloved:

*Hwa se ne mei þes ȝimstan habben ne halden i þe nest of hire heorte,  
lanhure i þe nest of hire ancre hus, habbe his iliche. þ is þe crucifix  
bihalde ofte þron. 7 cusse þe wunde studen i swote munegunge of þe soðe  
wunden þe he o þe soðe rode þuldliche þolede. (AW iii.72, f.37a.22-26).*

Whoever cannot have or hold this gemstone in the nest of her heart should at least have its likeness, that is the crucifix, in the nest of her anchorhouse; let her look on it often and kiss the places of the wounds in sweet memory of the true wounds which he patiently suffered on the true cross [S/W 99].

The image of the nest also merges images of motherhood and fertility with erotic imagery as the angry anchoress is compared to the pelican who slays her chicks in *Ancrene Wisse* iii.63-64 [S/W 93].<sup>538</sup> The chicks are restored through the blood which flows from the tearing of the mother's breast, an image which clearly symbolized Christ's torn and bleeding side which later becomes the refuge of the anchoress<sup>539</sup> and the love-letter written in his blood.<sup>540</sup> The parallel between the wound in Christ's side and the maternal breast of the pelican also recalls the parallel between Christ's wounded side and the maternal breast of the virgin Mary, noted above.<sup>541</sup>

The connection between the blood which flows from the torn breast of the pelican and breast milk is noted by Bynum. Blood, like breast milk, is the fluid of life.<sup>542</sup> In addition, the torn breast of the pelican suggests the connection between blood and milk which is found in *Seinte Katerine*, where milk flows from the severed head of the saint. Both breast milk and blood are associated with the healing and life-giving properties of the eucharist, and both are found as symbols of union with

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<sup>538</sup> See above, p. 217.

<sup>539</sup> See below, p. 348.

<sup>540</sup> See below, p. 384.

<sup>541</sup> See p. 178.

<sup>542</sup> *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, pp. 270f.

Christ. Christ's passion and the eucharist which commemorates it are thus both associated with the nurturing maternal breast.

#### THE PASSION AS A VEHICLE FOR UNION

The nest of the heart is prepared, not only through suffering but through meditation on the passion, which reinforces the meaning of the suffering of the anchoress. Meditation upon her own body shifts to meditation on the suffering body of Christ, as she "guards" her own senses by remembering Christ's suffering in the senses.<sup>543</sup> Meditation upon the passion focuses the anchoress's senses upon Christ, readying her for the mystical embrace of her lover who is spread upon the cross. The five wounds of Christ can heal the wounds inflicted upon her soul by her five senses; through meditation upon Christ's wounds, the anchoress can turn her senses to heavenly things (LLo 11.45-12.69 [S/W 326]; cp. UrG 7.96-8.128 [S/W 323-324]).

The suffering of the anchoress and her meditation on the passion are not only preparation for mystical union with Christ, they are themselves vehicles of union just as the crucifixion which is the ultimate symbol of the anchoress's enclosed life becomes the symbol of union with Christ. The anchoress is taught to see the hardships of her life not only as an imitation of Christ's sufferings, but as a

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<sup>543</sup> See, for example, the last section of AW ii, discussed above, pp. 121f.

identification with them. Through mystical union with Christ, her own body is fused with Christ's human body which suffered on the cross to redeem mankind.

The anchoress's suffering body is thus redeemed by Christ's suffering body, with which it is identified. As the anchoress in *Wohunge* declares:

*þu me derennedes wið like. ⁊ makedes of me wrecche þi leofmon ⁊ spuse . Broht tu haues me fra þe world to bur of þi burðe . steked me i chaumbre . I mai þer þe swa sweteli kissen ⁊ cluppen . ⁊ of þi luue haue gastli liking . A swete iesu mi liues luue wið þi blod þu haues me boht . ⁊ fram þe world þu haues me broht . (WLd 35.570-580).*

You vindicated me with your body, and made of me, a wretch, your lover and spouse. You have brought me from the world to the bower of your birth, locked me in a chamber. There I may sweetly kiss and hold you, and in your love take pleasure, spiritually. Ah, sweet Jesus, my life's love, with your blood you have bought me, and from the world you have brought me [S/W 256].

The only response to such a sacrifice is total and complete identification with the one who made it:

*Mi bodi henge wið þi bodi neiled o rode . sperred querfaste wið inne four wahes ⁊ henge i wille wið þe ⁊ neauer mare of mi rode cume til þ i deie . For þenne schal i lepen fra rode in to reste . fra wa to wele ⁊ to eche blisse A . iesu swa swet hit is wið þe to henge . forhwen þ iseo o þe þ henges me beside, þe muchele swetnesse of þe, reaues me sele of pine . (WLd 36.590-603).*

My body will hang with your body, nailed on the cross, fastened, transfixed within four walls. And I will hang with you and nevermore come from my cross until I die—for then shall I leap from the cross into rest, from grief into joy and eternal happiness.

Ah Jesus, so sweet it is to hang with you. For when I look on you who hang beside me, your great sweetness snatches me strongly from pain [S/W 256].



Here, meditation on the anchoress's own body and the body of Christ merge.

Bugge's comment on this passage is illuminating:

It is worthy of note that the emphasis ... is exclusively on the body (despite an occasional sanitary *gastliche*). It is Christ's body which accomplishes the redemption and evokes passionate sympathy; it is the virgin's body which she offers to him ... quite literally, to hang on the same cross.<sup>544</sup>

No matter how completely the anchoress identifies with the sufferings of Christ, however, she cannot fully repay the debt of suffering that she owes him. The passage in *Wohunge* continues:

*Bote swete iesu hwat mai mi bodi a3aines tin . For 3if ich mihte a þusand fald 3iue þe me seluen nere hit nowt onort te þ 3ef þe seluen forme . (WLD 36.602-608).*

But sweet Jesus, how can my body be set against yours: For if I could give you myself a thousandfold, it would be nothing compared with you, who gave yourself for me [S/W 256].

## THE MYSTICAL EMBRACE

The anchoress's identification with Christ in her suffering becomes her union with him as his bride, for as she hangs with him on the cross she is enfolded in the embrace of his outstretched arms. As Savage and Watson point out in their introduction to *Wohunge*:

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<sup>544</sup> *Virginitas*, p. 106.

the work's most important source is the non-literary one of the anchoresses' real situation, as they saw it: married to Christ and crucified with him by their enclosure, and needing only to ratify that marriage and transform that crucifixion by passionately assenting to both in their hearts.<sup>545</sup>

All of the anchoritic texts take the anchoress's "real situation" as their starting point, drawing upon her enclosure and asceticism to develop images of mystical union. The anchoress enters into the harsh life of the anchorhouse in a whole-hearted assent to suffering, for it is only by throwing herself into Christ's arms, spread wide on the cross, that the anchoress can be enfolded in his embrace. Thus the anchoress cries out:

*7 weneð ei to beon bi clupped bi tveonen þine blisfulle ermes in heouene . bute he worpe er him her, bi tveonen þine rewðful ermes oðe rode? Nai soðes nai, ne wene hit neuer nomon . þuærh þis lowe cluppinge . me mot come to þe he:ie, þet wule bi cluppen þe þer swuch, ase þu eri þer lowerd of leoue . he 1:rot clupprn þe er her . swuch ase þu makedest þe her . wrecche, for us wrec:he: . ((UrG 6.58-7.67).*

And does anyone believe they will be embraced between these joyful arms in heaven, unless here they first throw themselves between your pitiful arms on the cross? No, surely, no, let no one ever believe it. Through this low embracing one must come to the high; whoever wants to embrace you there, in the form you take there, Lord of light, must first embrace you here, in the form you made yourself here, a wretch for us wretches [S/W 323].

Here, the anchoress's suffering on earth (the "low embracing") leads to the joyful embrace of Christ in heaven (the "high embracing"): the anchoress can only anticipate the joy of embracing Christ's resurrected body with her own in a mystical

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<sup>545</sup> S/W, ed. note to *Wohunge*, p. 246.

union which will be the consummation of all her suffering on earth. However, through meditation on the human body of Christ upon the cross and through identification of her own suffering with his, she can enter into an embrace on earth with the Christ who took on human flesh in order to redeem it. This distinction between the earthly and heavenly embrace is not, however, found in *Ancrene Wisse*, where the emphasis is on the embrace of the beloved experienced by the anchoress in her enclosure, in the bower of her heart.

The image of the embrace is associated with the virgin's reward, both on heaven and on earth as the anchoress prays:

*auh leue me ðet ich mote soðliche seggen wið ðe meiden þet of þe seið  
þeors wordes . Mi leofmonnes luft erm halt up min heaued heo seið . ⁊  
his riht erm schal bi-clupen me abuten . let me beo þi leouemon ⁊ siggen  
ase heo seið . leof wið þi luft erm . þ is . wið þine worldliche zeouen hold  
up min heaued ðet ich þuruh to mucche wone ne falle i fulðe of sunne .  
⁊ leof wið þin riht erm . þ is in heuene wið endelease blissen biclupe me  
abuten . al schal beon þ ich wulle þe-onne forð swete milde louerd bidde  
oðer wilni (LLo 13.115-126).*

But grant me that I may truly speak with the maiden who said these words about you: 'My beloved's left arm holds up my head,' she says, 'and his right arm will hold me tight' (Canticles 2.6). Let me be your beloved, and say as she says, 'Dear with your left arm'—that is, with your earthly gifts—'hold up my head, so that I do not fall into the filth of sin through too much need; and, dear, with your right arm'—that is, in heaven with endless joys—'hold me tight.' From then on, sweet, gentle lover, all will be as I want to ask or desire [S/W 327].

In *Ureisan* the right arm of Christ outstretched on the cross symbolizes the power of the Virgin Mary, as Christ bows his head towards her as if to say *Moder al þ þu wult, al ich wulle* ("Mother, all that you will, all I will" UrG 9.146-149 [S/W 324]). Similarly,

in *Hali Meidhad* the virgin's reward is found in God's arms, and Christ's embrace in heaven is said to make even the ugliest brighter than the sun (HM 40 [S/W 242], 36 [S/W 240]).

Again, the image of the mystical embrace combines images of erotic union with images of motherhood. The passage from *Ureisun* quoted above begins:

*hwi ne bihold ich hu þu streihst þe for me on þe rode? hwi ne worpe ich me bi tweonen þeolke ermes so swide wide to spredde . ⁊ i openeþ so þe moder deð hire ermes . hire leoue child for to bi cluppen? ze sodes . ⁊ þu deorewurde louerd gostliche to us ⁊ to ðine deorelinges . wið þe ilke spredunge zeiest . ase þe moder to hire childe . hwo leof? hwo lif? hwo deð him her bitweonen? hwooc wule beon bi clupped? a iesu þin edmodnesse . ⁊ þi muchele milce . hwi nam ich iþin ermes so istreihste . ⁊ ispred on rode? (UrG 6.47-58).*

Why do I not behold how you stretched yourself out for me on the cross? Why do I not throw myself between those arms spread so very wide, and opened like a mother does her arms to enfold her darling child? Yes, truly, and you, precious Lord, in the spreading of your arms cry out spiritually to us and to your dear ones like a mother to her child: "Who's my dear? Who's my life? Who's this in my arms? Who wants to be hugged?" Ah, Jesus, your humbleness, your great mercy! Why am I not in your arms, so stretched and spread on the cross? [S/W 323].

The lover who embraces his beloved bride in erotic union is once again also the mother who enfolds her adored child in a loving embrace. The hugs and kisses of the mother flow into the passionate embrace of the spouse in a rich tapestry of images which draw upon the essential "femaleness" of the anchoress, merging images of sexuality and fertility even as the two are intricately entwined in the woman herself. This merging of eroticism with images of nurture is a characteristic feature

of several of the anchoritic texts, and suggests, as Bugge also points out, that the eroticism of *Ancrene Wisse* is more subtle and more complex than has been assumed.<sup>546</sup> However, it is not, as Bugge somewhat condescendingly suggests, merely an overflowing of emotion. Rather, the blend of erotic imagery with images of motherhood produces a complex web of imagery drawing upon the femininity of the anchoress and her own special circumstances in order to initiate her into a mysticism which is uniquely her own.

### THE EUCHARIST AS A VEHICLE FOR UNION

#### THE KISS OF CHRIST'S MOUTH

The mystical embrace of Christ on the cross is also associated with the mystical kiss of the Song of Songs which is a common image for the soul's union with Christ.<sup>547</sup> The anchoress is to eagerly seek this mystical kiss:

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<sup>546</sup> *Virginitas*, p. 101.

<sup>547</sup> The kiss of Christ's mouth as an image for mystical union is especially to be found in Bernard's *Sermons on the Song of Songs* 1-8 (see especially the discussion by Baldwin, "Background," pp. 276-277). It is also a common image for the union of souls and of the individual soul with Christ in patristic literature. Ambrose particularly uses the kiss in an erotic context to symbolize the union of the lovesick soul with Christ (Perella, *The Kiss Sacred and Profane*, [Berkeley, 1969], pp. 44-45). S/W cite further parallels in Anselm and Augustine (AW vii, n. 32 p. 401). See also

*þe schuldest ipin heorte þur biseche me cosses, as mi leofmon þ seið to me i þ luue boc . Osculetur me osculo oris sui. þ is. Cusse me mi leofmon wið þe coss of his muð muðene swetest. (AW ii.55, f.27a.12-15).*

"You should beseech me for kisses within your heart's bower, as my lover, who says to me in the book of love: '*Osculetur me osculo oris sui*' (Canticles 1.1)—that is, 'Let my lover kiss me with the kiss of his mouth, the sweetest of mouths.'" [S/W 86].

Although Christ has taken the initiative in his suffering on the cross and in bringing the anchoress from the world into the bridal chamber, the anchoress herself must pursue his embrace and his kiss (cp. WLd 35.570-585 [S/W 256]).<sup>548</sup> The anchoress beholds Christ on the cross, *þe tospreat swa his earmes toward ow. ⁊ buheð as to beoden cos duneward his heaued* ("who spreads wide his arms toward you and bends down his head as if to be kissed" AW vii.205, f.108b.19-20 [S/W 195])<sup>549</sup> and

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Woolf, *English Religious Lyric*, pp. 32-33.

<sup>548</sup> The kisses of men are to be shunned as diligently as the kiss of the beloved is sought (AW ii.62 [S/W 91], viii.218 [S/W 205]; HM 14 [S/W 230]).

<sup>549</sup> This could be translated "as if to offer a kiss" (so M/W-B, p. 123), although the meaning "as if to invite [or ask for] a kiss" is better in the context, which invites the anchoress to choose Christ as her lover (see the definition of *beoden* in Strattmann, and the discussion of AW vii below, Chapter Six). Cp. Aelred *RR* ii.26, p. 73 (cited by Shepherd, note to 23.2, pp. 58-59), which reads "his outspread arms will invite you to embrace him." Aelred, however, uses the image in a different way, including a reference to the naked breasts of Christ which nourish the anchoress with the consoling milk of sweetness. The image of Christ as a nursing mother can be found in Clement of Alexandria and, in the twelfth century, such writers as Anselm and Bernard (see Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, p. 94. For examples from the lives of continental women mystics, and the connection with the eucharist, see pp. 116-118, 172-180). The parallel between the wounded side of Christ and the naked breasts of the virgin is common in medieval devotion (see Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, pp. 270-275, and above, p. 178). Cp. also AW iii.72 [S/W 99], where the anchoress literally kisses the places of Christ's wounds, "in sweet memory of the true

passionately throws herself into his embrace. Similarly, in *Ureisu* the anchoress exclaims:

*A swete iesu . hwi mid ermes of luue ne cluppe ich þe so feste . þet no þing þeonne ne muwe breiden mine heorte? hwi ne cusse ich þe sweteliche ine goste . wið swete munegunge of þine goddeden? (UrG 7.77-81).*

Ah, sweet Jesus! Why do I not embrace you with arms of love so fast that nothing can then draw my heart away? Why do I not kiss you sweetly in my spirit with the sweet memory of your good deeds? [S/W 323]).

The mystical kiss is associated with images of eating and tasting, as it becomes an image for the sweetness of Christ's love:

*þis coss leoue sustren is a swetnesse ⁊ a delit of heorte swa unimete swete, þ̅ each worldes sauur is bitter þer toȝetnes. Ah ure lauerd wið þis coss ne cusseð na sawle. þe luueð ei þing buten him (AW ii.55, f.27a.15-19).*

This kiss, dear sisters, is a sweetness and a delight of the heart so immeasurably sweet that every taste of the world is bitter compared with it. But our Lord kisses no soul with this kiss who loves anything but him [S/W 86].

Perella notes the connection between the kiss and taste in Song of Songs 4.1, where the kiss is also associated with honey and the sweetness of the lips. He suggests that the connection between the kiss and eating is a further feature of the kiss as a symbol of merging or union,<sup>550</sup> and notes that the liturgical kiss of peace became an integral part of the eucharist in early Christianity. He points out that the eucharist

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wounds.<sup>55</sup>

<sup>550</sup> *Kiss*, pp. 1-4.

itself is a sign of love and union, incorporating the partaker into Christ.<sup>551</sup> In the case of the anchoritic texts, however, it would be more accurate to say that in the eucharist, by consuming the symbolic body and blood of Christ, the participant absorbs Christ, incorporating his body into her own. The author of *Ancrene Wisse* takes full advantage of the connection between the eucharist and the mystical kiss and embrace, as the eucharist becomes the ultimate moment of erotic union with Christ.

Metaphors of eating used in connection with erotic union with Christ are not limited to the eucharist, but are found throughout *Ancrene Wisse*. The anchoress's body which feeds on Christ in the eucharist also becomes food which nourishes Christ: the tender sapling protected by thorns so that the wild beasts will not chew on it (AW vi.250 [T 193]) is at the same time the fig tree whose bark protects the soft sweetness within so that it may produce sweet fruit to feed God (AW iii.132 [T 78-79]). The flesh whose natural tendency is to become wild through sin is tamed by the solitary and ascetic life of the anchoress, and transformed into the sweet wild flesh which is desired by Christ as he hunts and devours the anchoress:

*for alswa as i wildemes beoð alle wilde beastes ant nulleð nawt þolien monne nahunge. ah fleoð hwen ha heom ihéred, alswa schulen ancras ouer alle opre wummen beo wilde o þisse wise. ⁊ þenne beoð ha ouer opre leoue to ure lauerd. ⁊ swetest him þuncheð ham. for of all flesches is wilde deores fleschs leouest ⁊ swetest. (AW iv.101, f.52a.11-16).*

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<sup>551</sup> *Küst*, pp. 23-24.



for just as there are all kinds of wild beasts in the wilderness who will not endure the approach of people, but flee when they hear them, in the same way anchoresses, more than all other women, ought to be wild in this way. And then they will be dear to our Lord more than others, and will seem sweetest to him. For of all meat, the meat of wild game is dearest and sweetest [S/W 119].<sup>552</sup>

The erotic overtones of metaphors of eating have been noted by Bynum.<sup>553</sup>

Here again, a metaphor which is originally associated with sin, and specifically lechery, is transformed into an erotic image of union with Christ.<sup>554</sup> The belly which burns with the fire of lechery is transformed by the eucharist into the heart which burns with the love of Christ, and into the womb which receives him in a re-enactment of the Incarnation.<sup>555</sup>

This can be most clearly seen in the episode of the dragon in *Seinte Margarete*, which is a gross parody of the erotic hunt and of the eucharist. Before her encounter with the dragon, the imprisoned and solitary Margaret is fed on bread and spring-water, evoking Old Testament typology of Israel's wandering in the wilderness and the New Testament sacraments of baptism and eucharist (cp. SJ 55 [S/W 317]), as

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<sup>552</sup> As is his wont, the author of *Ancrene Wisse* uses similar images to describe the negative aspects of the anchoritic life, such as the sin of despair, which "chews and devours God's sweet kindness and his great mercy and his measureless grace" (AW iv.105 [S/W 123]). Cp. AW ii.43 [S/W 78], where the anchoress is instructed to "chew" the sweet spice of hope, the opposite of despair.

<sup>553</sup> *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*.

<sup>554</sup> The association of lechery and gluttony in *Ancrene Wisse* has been noted above, pp. 165f.

<sup>555</sup> See below, pp. 338, 340f.

well as the anchoress's practise of fasting. The connection between fasting and chastity as means of asserting personal autonomy has already been noted.<sup>556</sup> A further connection between fasting and chastity can be found in the fact that both prepare the anchoress for an erotic union with the heavenly bridegroom; fasting prepares her for the eucharist in which she consumes Christ, and chastity prepares her for the erotic embrace and kiss of the lover for whom she preserves it. The erotic scene in which the dragon, a symbol of lust, devours Margaret, the icon of chastity, parodies both the eucharist and the erotic hunt, in which the anchoress and Christ devour each other in love. It is significant, therefore, that the power of Margaret's chastity and her commitment to her heavenly lover enable her to transform the belly of the dragon into the womb of her own rebirth, an image which is also associated with the eucharist.<sup>557</sup>

#### THE MASS KISS: BOWER

Just as the anchoress must prepare her body and heart to receive Christ in mystical union, so too she must prepare for the reception of the eucharist. She is urged to settle disputes and cleanse her heart of anger before receiving the eucharist,

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<sup>556</sup> See above, p. 177.

<sup>557</sup> See above pp. 163f.

just as she must wash her soul through confession to prepare it for the embrace of her beloved (AW iv.132 [S/W 142]; cp. AW v.108 [S/W 125]).

The anchoress's participation in the eucharist is intimately linked with her meditation on Christ's passion. In her morning prayers, she is specifically enjoined to *þenchen o godes flesch 7 on his deorewurde blod þ is abuue þe hehe weoued* ("think on God's body and on his precious blood which is on the high altar" AW i.13, f.5a.2-3 [S/W 53]). She is to pray especially at times when secular priests sing mass, again underlining the commemoration of the passion in her morning prayers (AW i.16-17 [S/W 56] cp. S/W n. 11 p. 345). Savage and Watson point out that, at least in part, these prayers are a series of morning greetings to the anchoress's spouse, the crucified Christ who is present physically in the eucharistic elements on the altar and imaginatively in the crucifix on her wall.<sup>558</sup> Throughout *Ancrene Wisse* the physical presence of Christ is stressed, adding to the realism of the anchoress's erotic meditation upon the passion.

Bynum draws attention to the emphasis on the physical presence of Christ in the eucharist in the devotion of thirteenth century women mystics and the importance of the stress on the physicality and humanity of Christ.<sup>559</sup> The author of *Ancrene Wisse* draws upon the same tradition of eucharistic devotion, stressing the physical presence of Christ in the eucharist *i þe measse hwen þe preost heueð up godes licome*

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<sup>558</sup> AW i, n. 2, p. 343.

<sup>559</sup> "Women Mystics," *passim*. See also *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, pp. 48-55.

("in the mass, when the priest lifts up God's body" (AW i.20, f.8a.19 [S/W 58]; cp. AW iv.135 [S/W 144]). It is at this moment that the anchoress's body, the house of her soul, becomes the receptacle for the body of Christ:

*set quis est locus in me quo ueniat in me deus meus quo deus ueniat aut maneat in me ... Quis michi dabit ut uenias in cor meum & inebries illud. ⁊ unum bonum meum amplectar te? Quis michi es miserere ut loquar. angusta est tibi domus anime mee. quo ueni as ad eam dilatetur abs te. ruinosa est refice eam. habet que offendant oculos tuos. fateor ⁊ scio. set quis mundabit eam? aut cui alteri preter te clamabo? ... Efter þe measse cos hwen þe preost sacreð. þer forȝeoteð al þe world. þer beoð al ut of bodi þer i sperclinde luue bicluppeð ower leofmon þe in to ower breostes bur is ilihu of heouene. ⁊ haldeð him heteuest aþet he hadde iȝettet ow al þ ȝe eauer easkið. (AW i.20-21, f.8a.26-27, 8b.1-6, 18-23).*

*But what place is there in me where my God may come, where God may come and dwell in me, ... Who will grant that you may come into my heart and make it drunk, that I may embrace you, O my one good? What are you to me? Have mercy, that I may speak. The house of my soul is too narrow for you—so that you may enter it, let it be made large by you. It is ruined; repair it. It contains what offends your eyes, I know and confess—but who shall cleanse it, or to whom else but you shall I cry? ... After the kiss of peace when the priest consecrates the host, forget all the world, be wholly out of your body, embrace in shining love your lover who has alighted into the bower of your heart from heaven, and hold him as tight as you can until he has granted all you ever ask (Genesis 32.24-26) [S/W 59].*

In this passage we find the consummation of the entire anchoritic life: the narrow anchorhouse, which is at the same time the anchoress's body and her heart, ruined through sin, is repaired and enlarged by Christ, who by entering into the anchoress's body through the eucharist transforms her heart into the bower where she is united with her beloved (cp. AW vi.192-193 [S/W 186-187]). As Grayson points out:

The effect of the Mass passage relies heavily on a succession of images sensuous and sensual: the house of the soul, the house in ruins, sacramental feeding on the Body, the Mass kiss, the lover come into the breast's bower, the special favors asked of him and the like. The dominant object or vehicle is the *body* ... but always the presence of light, actual or impending, promises to bring Grace.<sup>560</sup>

In the passage concerning the mass kiss, the eucharist becomes the vehicle for union with Christ which is described in very physical terms. The imagery is concrete and physical, offering a sensual experience of mystical union:

Cleansed and receptive, the communicant responds when the sacramental eating of the Body infuses the soul with spirit and sensual fervour, interpreted here in the literal sense as a physical lover entering the bower of the beloved.<sup>561</sup>

It is important to note that however "literalized" the bridal metaphor is, it remains a metaphor; however rooted in the body the imagery becomes, it is still imagery, representing an experience which is described as taking place "out of the body." One should not imagine the anchoress succumbing to a frenzy of physical ecstasy. The movement of the passage is inward, as the bower becomes a symbolic place replacing the house of the soul in ruins.<sup>562</sup> This is reinforced by the fact that the erotic union with Christ in the eucharist occurs whenever the priest says mass (i.e. daily), not only when the anchoress actually receives the eucharist, which as we know from Part viii, was less frequent.

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<sup>560</sup> *Structure and Imagery*, pp. 34-35.

<sup>561</sup> Grayson, *Structure and Imagery*, p. 34.

<sup>562</sup> Grayson, *Structure and Imagery*, p. 35.

Bynum points out the intricate relationship between the eucharist and mystical union in thirteenth century female devotion: "To receive was to become Christ—by eating, by devouring and by being devoured."<sup>563</sup> However, she notes that "devotion and reception were separated, ... the mass was as much the occasion for inner mystical eating as for real reception of the awesome sacrament."<sup>564</sup> Hence, as in *Ancrene Wisse*, "ecstasies come at the moment of elevation rather than of reception of the host."<sup>565</sup> Thus, as Savage and Watson correctly note, although the passage concerning the mass-kiss is frequently cited as a rare mystical moment in the text, it is in fact intricately related to the imagery found throughout the anchoritic texts and draws its force from the conviction that Christ is physically present in the eucharist. It is for this reason that participation in the eucharist and the union with Christ that is the goal of the anchoritic life is associated with meditation and prayer during the celebration of the Mass and is not tied to actual reception.<sup>566</sup>

It is significant that this passage is found at the beginning of *Ancrene Wisse*, in a section that is concerned with devotions, or the outer rule. The author simply assumes that this kind of mystical encounter with Christ is a daily feature of the anchoress's enclosure. In addition, the integral relationship between the anchoress's

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<sup>563</sup> "Women Mystics," p. 185.

<sup>564</sup> "Women Mystics," p. 186.

<sup>565</sup> "Women Mystics," p. 186.

<sup>566</sup> AW i, n. 17, p. 346.

union with Christ and the eucharist, evoked by meditation and prayer in the context of her daily devotions, indicates that the mysticism of *Ancrene Wisse* is deeply rooted in the liturgy of the eucharist. As Grayson suggests:

the inductive outer (formula) sections prepare for the spiritual purging ... and ultimately the dissolving of all physical things as Christ enters the bower.<sup>567</sup>

It is essential, therefore, not to separate the erotic imagery of mystical union from its framework of prayer and contemplation. This is particularly important in the context of the spousal metaphor and its relation to the romance tradition (discussed in Chapter Six).

#### THE EUCHARIST AS INCARNATION: WOMB

The devotion of the anchoress which finds its fulfilment in the eucharist is, however, more than an ecstatic encounter with a spiritual lover. As Bynum points out, the eucharist was also an encounter with the *humanity* of Christ and, as was characteristic of thirteenth century women's spirituality, Christ's humanity is centered in his physicality, his incarnation in human flesh, his body and blood.<sup>568</sup> So too in *Ancrene Wisse*, the physical presence of the *human* Christ is emphasized, as the anchoress is united with Christ's body and blood in the eucharist. Images of the

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<sup>567</sup> *Structure and Imagery*, p. 34.

<sup>568</sup> "Women Mystics," p. 188.

eucharist and incarnation are merged, as the anchoress meditates on the suffering of "God's manhood," focusing on Christ as a human being, sharing our nature, shedding his blood:

*þe ilke blisfule bodi þei com of þe meiden 7 deide o þe rode niht 7 dei bi ow. nis bute a wah biweonen. 7 euche dei he kimeð forð 7 schaweð him to ow fleschliche 7 licomliche inwið þe measse. biwrixlet þah on opres lre under breades sume. for in his ahne ure ehnen ne mahten nawt þe brühte sihðe polien. Ah swa he schaweð him ow, as þah he seide. lowr ich her hwet wulle 3e. seggeð me hwet were ow leof. hwerto :seodeð ow? Meaneð ower noede. (AW iv.135, f.72a.5-13, emph. mine).*

And you have that same blood, that same blissful body which came out of the maiden and died on the cross by you night and day; there is only a wall between. And every day he comes out and shows himself to you in a fleshly and bodily way in the Mass, but changed into another appearance, under the form of bread—for in his own form our eyes could not endure the bright sight. But so he shows himself to you, as though he was saying: "See, here I am. What do you want? Tell me what you long for. In what way are you needy? Speak your need." [S/W 144, emph. mine].

For the anchoress the eucharist is a re-enactment of the Incarnation itself, as her body merges with the body of Christ, not only in imitating his suffering but also in mystically consuming his body and blood. Eucharist and incarnation merge in "the insistent *image* and *experience* of flesh taken into flesh."<sup>569</sup> Simply by observing the eucharist, which she sees as often as the priest says mass in the church adjoining her cell, the anchoress receives *þe meidene bearme iesu godd godes sune þe licomliche lihteð oðerhwiles to ower in. 7 inwið ow eadmodliche nimeð his herbearhe.* ("the virgin's

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<sup>569</sup> Bynum, "Women Mystics," p. 188, emph. mine.



child, Jesus, God's Son, who descends at those times in the flesh to your inn, and humbly takes his shelter within you" AW iv.138, f.73a.23-25 [S/W 146], emph. mine).

Here, the anchoress's participation in the eucharist is explicitly paralleled with Christ's descent into human flesh in the Incarnation. Once again, images of motherhood and erotic union are combined: the anchoress's union with Christ's flesh in a re-enactment of Mary's reception of Christ into her womb is also an erotic union with her beloved, as her understanding of the eucharist is conditioned by the mystical embrace of the beloved which has been described above.<sup>570</sup> Note that the anchoress's body is once again the *herbearhe* or arbour in which she receives Christ in erotic union (cp. AW v.173 [S/W 172]),<sup>571</sup> as well as the inn or womb in which she nurtures him. The combination of the images of the maiden's son, the anchoress's body as an inn, and the fertile image of the arbour again emphasises the use of feminine imagery which combines sensuality, motherhood, fertility and nurture.

The erotic overtones are reinforced by the context; this passage follows directly upon the description of the devil's mounting of the anchoress who succumbs to lust,<sup>572</sup> and the eucharist becomes the means by which the anchoress overcomes him. Thus, the author of *Ancrene Wisse* assures his readers that:

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<sup>570</sup> For a detailed discussion of this fusion in the devotion of thirteenth century women, see Bynum "Women Mystics," *passim*.

<sup>571</sup> See above, pp. 316f.

<sup>572</sup> See above, pp. 101f.

*al þe deofles strengþe mealteþ þurh þe grace of þ̅ hali sacrament hest ouer  
opre ... þis hehe sacrament in hardi bileaue ouer alle oðre þing unwið  
hise wrenches. ⁊ brekeþ hise strengþes. (AW iv.138-139, f.73a.21-22,  
74a.1-2).*

all the devil's strength melts through the grace of that holiest of all the sacraments ... this high sacrament, taken in firm faith, over all other things uncovers his tricks and breaks his strength [S/W 146, 147].

Similarly, the demon who accosts St. Juliana confesses that true faith and sincere prayer can overpower him,

*þenne meast iuuen þe preost in-wið þe messe noteþ godes licome þet he  
nom of þet laðlese meiden. Þer is riht bileaue ant inwarliche bonen swa  
icweme to godd þet i þet ilke time we biginneþ to fleon ant turneþ to  
fluhte. (SJ 39).*

most of all when the priest in the Mass takes God's body, which he took from that innocent maiden. Their true belief and sincere prayers are so pleasing to God that at that very moment we [i.e. demons] begin to run and turn to flee [S/W 314].

Again, the power of the eucharist is based on the physical presence of Christ in the moment of consecration, not the actual reception of the eucharist by the communicant. It is the presence of Christ's *body* in the host, that same body "which he took from that innocent maiden," which is the source of power. The virgin anchoress can participate in this power through meditating on the body of Christ (on the cross and in the eucharistic host), and through preparing her own body to receive him. The anchoress's sinful flesh is transformed and redeemed as the devil's

mounting is replaced by the indwelling of Christ in an erotic union and the fire of lust is purged by the fire of love for Christ (AW vii.205-6 [S/W 195-196]).<sup>573</sup>

At the same time, the anchoress's body is paralleled to that of the virgin Mary, bearing Christ within her, as Christ descends to the "inn" of her body. The erotic image of "flesh taken into flesh" noted by Bynum becomes an expression of impregnation, as the anchoress makes room in her "inn" for the Christ child who found no room on earth. The anchoress's labour with Christ on the cross becomes the labour of a woman in childbirth as the matrix of the anchorhouse, body, grave, cross, bower, and arbour is expanded to include the womb (AW vi.192-193 [S/W 186-7]). The implanting of Christ in the heart transforms the nest where the young are nurtured into the womb or garden in which love grows, the inn or arbour which shelters Christ. The anchoress's body which merges with Christ's in suffering thus becomes the vehicle of the Incarnation, as Christ descends to the anchoress, and the human flesh which encloses him becomes her own. The anchoress becomes the bearer of the incarnate Christ as, like the Virgin Mary, she makes her body into his anchorhouse: *7 te lauerd þ al þe world ne mahte nawt bifon, bitunde him inwið hire*

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<sup>573</sup> See Robertson, *Early English Devotional Prose*, pp. 67, 73-74. Robertson argues that this is simply another example of the transference of the desires of the flesh to Christ. However, it is clear, as the discussion proceeds, that the desires of the flesh are not transferred, but *transformed*.

*meidnes wombe*. ("and the Lord whom all the world might not contain enclosed himself in her maiden's womb" AW ii.41-42, f.19b.16-18 [S/W 76]).<sup>574</sup>

Robertson argues that the anchoress's imitation of Mary in both this passage and the discussion of the mass-kiss (and therefore the imagery of the womb) is essentially passive as the anchoress simply waits for Christ's entry into her body.<sup>575</sup> This passivity is, Robertson suggests, part of the male author's misogynist assumption that a passive relationship with God is the only kind of which women are capable. She further argues that the passage concerning the mass-kiss, found in the context of devotions which are to a large extent focused on the virgin Mary, is part of a larger transformation of the anchoress from Eve to Mary, and contends that "a woman's flesh is redeemed because her gender is denied." This denial of gender, Robertson suggests, is implicit in the idea of the virgin mother, an argument which seems to contradict her point that the anchoress's passive role is explicitly tied to her gender.<sup>576</sup>

Robertson's reading is not true either to *Ancrene Wisse* or to thirteenth century female mysticism in general. In her contention that the anchoress's imitation of Mary is essentially passive, Robertson fails to note the fecundity of the imagery of childbearing, as the anchoress labours both literally and metaphorically with Christ on

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<sup>574</sup> Here, the image of the Incarnation as Christ's enclosure in the Virgin's womb is associated with the power of Mary's few but well-chosen words.

<sup>575</sup> *Early English Devotional Prose*, pp. 61-70.

<sup>576</sup> *Early English Devotional Prose*, p. 61.

the cross.<sup>577</sup> The anchoress is not merely a passive vessel into which Christ descends; she must actively prepare for his coming as the brittle vessel of her virgin flesh is transformed into the womb which bears and nurtures Christ and into the bower in which she dallies with Christ. The anchoress's union with Christ is vital and dynamic, expressed in erotic and fertile images which emphasize the role of the anchoress as well as that of Christ. This is especially true of images of the eucharist, as the anchoress actively consumes Christ rather than passively waiting for Christ to enter into her. As Bynum puts it in her description of the virginal mystic:

she scintillated with fertility and power. Into her body, as into the eucharistic bread on the altar, poured the inspiration of the spirit and the fullness of the humanity of Christ.<sup>578</sup>

This can be clearly seen in Hildegard's hymns to the Virgin Mary, which teem with dynamic images of fecundity. For example, *Ave, generosa* describes the brooding of God over the Virgin Mary and its consequences:

... heaven flooded you like  
unbodied speech  
and you gave it a tongue.

... you lured the supernal one.

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<sup>577</sup> Cp. the comparison between St. Margaret and the Woman Clothed in the Sun, above, p. 168. This allusion follows immediately upon Margaret's physical contest with the dragon, and is followed directly by her even more physical encounter with the demon. The use of the imagery of childbirth and the womb in *Seinse Margarete* is indeed anything but passive.

<sup>578</sup> *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, p. 20.

How he reveled  
 in your charms! how your beauty  
 warmed to his caresses  
 till you gave your breast to his child.

And your womb held joy when heaven's  
 symphony rang from you,  
 a maiden with child by God,  
 for in God your chastity blazed.<sup>579</sup>

Also, in *O viridissima virga*, the conception of Christ is depicted in the image of the Virgin Mary's "blossoming boughs," which "burst into verdure." Mary's womb is depicted as a fertile garden in which the birds of heaven nest.<sup>580</sup>

The merging of erotic themes with sensual images of motherhood and fertility (especially in texts such as *On Lofsong of ure Louerde* which focus on the Virgin Mary, and in the womb image found in *Ancrene Wisse*) suggests that, far from being a denial of gender, this imagery is an appeal to precisely that which defines the female gender. As Bynum points out with reference to the devotion of thirteenth century continental mystics:

women seem to have concluded from their physicality an intense conviction of their *ability* to imitate Christ without role or gender inversion. To soar toward Christ as lover and bride, to sink into the

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<sup>579</sup> Hildegard of Bingen, *Symphonia*, transl. Barbara Newman (Ithaca, 1988), p. 123. I have given Newman's verse translations, which, in a discussion of the difficulties of translating poetry, she describes as "frankly and blithely interpretive" in an attempt "to convey the freshness and emotional vitality of Hildegard's songs" (p. 61). These translations do indeed transmit the sense of Hildegard's verse better than a literal rendering of the Latin.

<sup>580</sup> *Symphonia*, p. 127. Cp. also *O viriditas digiti Dei*, p. 183.

stench and torment of the crucifixion, to eat God, was for the woman only to give religious significance to what she already was.<sup>581</sup>

Women were thus able to "embrace their femaleness as a sign of closeness to Christ,"<sup>582</sup> as the eucharist becomes a moment of ecstasy in which "sexual feelings were ... not so much translated into another medium as simply set free."<sup>583</sup> This is particularly true of Hadewijch, who describes mystical union with Christ using extremely erotic images of eating, tasting, nursing (or being nursed), and pregnancy.<sup>584</sup> For example, in *Poems in Couplets* 14, Hadewijch allegorizes the growth of love as a spiritual pregnancy, outlining the development of love in each of the nine months of gestation.<sup>585</sup> In Vision Seven, she describes union with Christ through the eucharist in extremely erotic terms:

I desired to have full fruition of my Beloved, and to understand and taste him to the full. I desired that his Humanity should to the fullest extent be one in fruition with my humanity. ... Then he gave himself to me in the shape of the sacrament, in its outward form, as the custom is; and then he gave me to drink from the chalice, in form and taste, as the custom is. After that he came himself to me, took me entirely in his arms, and pressed me to him; and all my members felt his in full

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<sup>581</sup> "Women Mystics," p. 205.

<sup>582</sup> Bynum, "Women Mystics," p. 203.

<sup>583</sup> Bynum, "Women Mystics," p. 191.

<sup>584</sup> See Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, pp. 153-160.

<sup>585</sup> *Hadewijch: The Complete Works*. ed. and trans. Mother Columba Hart, (London, 1980), pp. 345-350.

felicity, in accordance with the desire of my heart and my humanity. So I was outwardly satisfied and fully transported.<sup>586</sup>

#### UNION AS POWER

The eucharist, and the union with Christ which it embodies, is also a source of power for the anchoress. The power of the eucharist over the devil is clearly delineated in the anchoritic texts.<sup>587</sup> However, the anchoress's union with Christ through meditation on the body of Christ, both in the eucharistic host and on the cross, also gives her power over Christ himself. Christ speaks to her in the eucharist, saying: *lowr ich her hwet wulle ze. segged me hwet were ow leof. hwerto needed ow? Meaned ower noede.* ("See, here I am. What do you want? Tell me what you long for. In what way are you needy? Speak your need." AW iv.135, f.72a.11-13 [S/W 144]). The anchoress's power over Christ is intimately connected to his humanity, which is exposed in the eucharist:

The eucharist was, to medieval women, a moment at which they were released into ecstatic union; it was also a moment at which the God with whom they joined was supremely human because supremely vulnerable and fleshly.<sup>588</sup>

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<sup>586</sup> *Heclevijch: The Complete Works*, pp.280-281.

<sup>587</sup> See above, p. 339.

<sup>588</sup> Bynum, "Women Mystics," p. 192; cp. *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, p. 54.



The anchoress is encouraged to take advantage of his vulnerability: *haldeð him heteuest apæt he habbe izettet ow al þæt 3e eauer easkið.* ("hold him as tight as you can until he has granted all you ever ask" AW i.21, f.8b.21-23 [S/W 59]).

The power of the anchoress over Christ is also manifested in the gift of tears in prayer. The anchoress *vno* has such a gift *mei don wið godd al þæt ha eauer wule.* ("may do with God all that she wants" AW iv.125, f.66a.23-24 [S/W 137]). The anchoress is urged to beg Christ's aid:

*wepinde 7 graninde biuore godes ehnen. halseð meadlesliche on his derue passtun. on his deorewurðe blod. on his sif wunden. on his moder teares. o þe ilke tittes þæt he seac. þæt he milc þæt him feaia. on alle his halhene luue. o þe deore druerie þæt he haueð to his deore spuse. ... on his deað o rode. for hire to biȝeotene. ... Ant ure lauerd ihalset swa, ne mei for reowðe weamen hire ne sweamen hire wið warne. nomeliche swa as he is se unimete large. þæt him nis na þing leouere. þen þæt he mahe ifinden acheisun forte ȝeouene. (AW v.168-169, f.89b.6-12, 14-18).*

weeping and groaning in God's eyes, asking his help ceaselessly by his grievous passion, by his precious blood, by his five wounds, by his mother's tears, by those same breasts that he suckled, the milk that fed him, by the love of all his saints, by the dear love-gift he made to his dear spouse ... in his death on the cross for her sake. ... And our Lord, so asked, cannot for pity deny her or grieve her with refusal, especially as he is so immeasurably generous that nothing is dearer to him than to find a reason to give [S/W 169].

This passage combines images of Christ's passion as a love-gift to the soul and the imagery of motherhood, as Mary's fertility is appealed to as an instance of love. The breasts of the virgin are commonly appealed to in prayer and meditation as Mary

bare her breast before Christ, even as he exhibits his pierced and bleeding side before the Father.<sup>589</sup>

The only response to such vulnerable love is to love in return, and in the end it is the anchoress's love for Christ which empowers her, transforming suffering into joy. As Christ stretches out his arms on the cross to embrace the anchoress, so too she is to stretch out her love to Christ and possess him:<sup>590</sup>

*luue haueð a meistrie biuoren alle oþre. for al þæt ha ríneð, al ha turneð to hire, ⁊ makeð al hire ahne. ... streche þi luue to iesu crist, þu hauest him iwunnen. Rin him wið ase muche luue. as þu hauest sum mon sum chearre. he is þin to don wið al þæt tu wilnest. (AW vii.208, f.110a.15-17, 23-25).*

Love has an authority before all others, for all she touches she turns it to herself and makes it all her own. ... Stretch out your love to Jesus Christ, and you have won him. [Touch]<sup>591</sup> him with as much love as you sometimes have for some man. He is yours to do all that you want with [S/W 197].

In this passage Bugge notes

the underlying conviction that the male Christ is something of an easy mark for female blandishments. As he grows more masculine and more sexually susceptible, the figure of the ... anchoress becomes more realistically feminine.<sup>592</sup>

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<sup>589</sup> See above, n. 549, and p.178. Similar imagery can be found in the texts of the *Wooing Group*, especially LLo and LLe.

<sup>590</sup> For a discussion of the mystical possession of God, see Riehle, *Middle English Mystics*, p. 128f.

<sup>591</sup> S/W translate "Reach for."

<sup>592</sup> *Virginitas*, p. 107.

Thus, the sexual attraction which was condemned for luring the animal/man into the pit of lechery is redeemed as physical beauty is cultivated for Christ alone and Christ is touched with love and succumbs.

The anchoress is thus encouraged to seek God actively by fleeing the world and entering into the harsh life of the anchorhouse in a whole-hearted assent to suffering. Her ascetic, enclosed life is the means by which she is united to Christ and by which she is empowered. Thus, the fleeing into Christ's wounds which is an image for the hiddenness of the anchoress is also an image for the anchoress's bold wooing of Christ as she calls upon the power of his passion:

*flih to his wunden. Muchel he luuede us þe lette makien swucche þurles in him forte huden us in. Creop in ham wið þi þoht. ne beoð ha al opene? ⁊ wið his deorewurðe blod biblodde þin heorte. ... Mi culture he seið cum huð te i mine limen þurles. i þe hole of mi side. Muche luue he cudde to his leoue culture þ he swuch hudles makede. loke nu þ tu þe he cleopeð culture. habbe culture cunde. þ is wið ute galle. ⁊ cum to him baldeliche.* (AW iv.151, f.79b.10-14, 24-28, emph. mine).

Flee into his wounds. He loved us much who allowed such holes to be made in him for us to hide in. Creep into them with your thought—are they not entirely open?—and bloody your heart with his precious blood. ... 'My dove,' he says, 'come hide yourself in the openings in my limbs, in the hole in my side.' Much love he showed to his dear dove in making such hiding-places. See now that you whom he calls a dove have the nature of the dove, which is without gall, and *come to him boldly* [S/W 155, emph. mine].<sup>593</sup>

The anchoress's suffering is transformed into joy; the marks of her suffering are the footprints of her beloved, leaping over the mountains:

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<sup>593</sup> Cp. Bernard, *Sermons on Song of Songs* 66 (S/W AW iv, n. 127), and a closer parallel in *Aelred*, RR 31, pp. 90-91.

*beo 3e dunes ihehet toward heouene. for lo hu speked þe leafdi iþ swete  
luue boc. venit dilectus meus saliens in montibus. transiliens colles. Mf  
leof kimeð leapinde ha seið o þe dunes. þ is. totret ham tofulod ham.  
þoled þ me totreode ham. tuki ham al to wundre. schawed tn ham his ahne  
troden. þ me trudde him in ham. ifinden hu he wes totreden as his trode  
schawed. (AW vi.193-194, f.103a.4-11).*

you are mountains raised up high towards heaven. For see how the lady speaks in that sweet love-book: *Venit dilectus meus saliens in montibus, transiliens colles* (Canticles 2.8)—“My beloved comes leaping,” she says, “on the mountains”, ... that is, he treads them down, he disfigures them, allows them to be trodden down, mistreats them cruelly, marks them with his own footprints, so that people may follow his tracks in them, and discover how he was trodden down, as his footprints show [S/W 187].<sup>594</sup>

Her suffering is a sign of her imitation of Christ and of her union with him as beloved.

The ascetic life would seem to emphasize woman as victim, as the body which is vulnerable to the lusts of both the woman herself and of others is tamed and subdued through suffering. This is especially true of the saints' Lives where physical suffering is explicitly associated with sexual threat. However, the suffering which subdues the lusts of the flesh, or which is imposed in order to gratify the lusts of another, is also the means of transformation, as the victim becomes the beloved, embracing Christ through her suffering. Grief is transformed into joy, and the victim acquires power over both those who would victimize her and over Christ himself.

The erotic union with Christ available to the anchoress thus transforms and redeems, as the body which is vulnerable to lust (her own and others') becomes the

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<sup>594</sup> The passage omitted from the translation is also omitted from the Corpus text, and supplied by Savage and Watson from Cleopatra.

vessel which bears Christ through imitation and union. *Ancrene Wisse* celebrates the essential femaleness of the anchoress, presenting a rich tapestry of images in which sinful human flesh is recognized in contemplation, controlled through chastity, cleansed through confession and prepared through suffering so that it can be transformed through the redirection of its own desires. Ultimately, female flesh is uniquely transfigured as it reflects and re-enacts the supreme paradox of Christianity, in which that which is weak and shameful is that which redeems the world.

## CHAPTER SIX

### THE SPOUSAL METAPHOR

The context of the anchoritic conception of mystical union described in Chapter Five is essential to an understanding of the way in which the anchoritic texts use the spousal metaphor made popular by Bernard of Clairvaux's *Sermons on the Song of Songs*. The metaphor of the anchoress as the bride of Christ permeates the anchoritic texts: *Ancrene Wisse* and *Hali Meithad* begin with biblical quotations which are then expounded with reference to the bride (AW I.5 [S/W 47], quoting Song of Songs 1.3; HM 2 [S/W 225], quoting Psalm 44.11), the virgin martyrs are presented throughout the saints' Lives as the brides of Christ, and the texts of the Wooing Group are wholly grounded in the metaphor of Christ's love for the soul. Even *Sawles Warde*, in which the spousal metaphor is not explicit, emphasizes the love of God for the precious treasure of the human soul.

Savage and Watson suggest that the traditional images of twelfth-century "bridal mysticism" are presented in the anchoritic texts "not ... as images at all but as factual descriptions."<sup>595</sup> The symbolic marriage of the soul to Christ which was made popular by Bernard is "literalized," as the union between Christ and the soul is expressed in erotic imagery which is profoundly rooted in the body. However, as we have suggested in Chapter Five, this is not, as Robertson argues, a limiting of the

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<sup>595</sup> General Introduction, p. 25.

spiritual potential of the anchoress.<sup>596</sup> In fact, the erotic union with Christ which the anchoress seeks in her enclosure is a liberating union, freeing the anchoress from the limits of her sinful human flesh by transforming that flesh into the means of her redemption and the redemption of the world.

The spousal metaphor is the primary expression of the anchoress's union with Christ. Enclosed in her cell, the anchoress is married to Christ, in a mystical relationship which is described and experienced in a physical way, drawing upon and reflecting her real situation. The human relationships which the anchoress forsook in her enclosure are replaced by a relationship with Christ which more than compensates for what she has lost.<sup>597</sup> Christ is mother, father, sister, brother, friend, and, most important, lover.

#### CHRIST AS SUITOR

Because the relationship with Christ which the anchoress finds in her anchorhouse is seen, at least in part, as compensation for the human companionship which she has renounced, the presentation of Christ as lover and spouse in the

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<sup>596</sup> There are several weaknesses to Robertson's argument, discussed further below, pp. 410f.

<sup>597</sup> See Robertson's analysis of the structure of *Hali Meidhad*, discussed below, p. 355.

anchoritic texts takes on a very realistic dimension. Christ is not merely the heavenly lover who communes with the soul, but a potential husband who competes with would-be earthly husbands for the hand of the anchoress in their own arena and on their own terms.<sup>598</sup> Thus, in the saints' Lives, earthly suitors are rejected because of a prior commitment to the heavenly suitor for whom the maidens wish to preserve their virginity intact. Each of the virgin martyrs has chosen Christ as their lover (SM 46 [S/W 289], 48 [S/W 290]; SJ 3 [S/W 306]; SK 26 [S/W 266]). When they are approached by a man who wishes to marry them or take them as a lover, they refuse on the grounds that they have already chosen a lover who is superior in every way: the most beautiful, the sweetest, the most powerful, and the wisest (SM 50 [S/W 290-291]; SJ 11-15 [S/W 308], 21 [S/W 310]; SK 26 [S/W 266], 78-80 [S/W 275]). In fact, Katherine describes her relationship with Christ as a literal marriage which nothing can dissolve:

*He haueð iweddet him to mi meidhad wið þe ring of rihte bileaue, ant ich habbe to him treowliche itake me. Swa wit beoð iuestnet ant iteiet in an, ant swa þe cnotte is icnut binuhhen us tweien, þet ne mei hit liste, ne luðer strengðe nowðer, of na liuende mon lowsin ne leoðien. He is mi lif ant mi luue, he is þet gleadeð me—mi soðe blisse buue me, mi weole ant mi wunne (SK 78.552-80.558).*

He has married my maidenhood with the ring of true faith, and I have committed myself to him truly. We are so fastened and tied as one, and the knot so knotted between us two, that no desire, or mere strength either, of any living man, will loosen or undo it. He is my life and my love; he is the one who gladdens me, my true bliss above me, my prosperity and my joy [S/W 275].

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<sup>598</sup> See S/W, p. 25.



The competition between Christ and an earthly lover is most clear in *Seinte Juliene*, where Juliana is aggressively wooed by Eleusius, who displays all the classic symptoms of the lover of medieval romance: wounded by the darts of love (SJ 5 [S/W 306], burning and melting with the rays of love (SJ 19 [S/W 309]), sighing (SJ 19 [S/W 309]), and performing tasks set by his prospective bride in order to win her (SJ 7-11 [S/W 307-308]). However, the rays of love soon turn to the burning heat of anger, his sighing turns to the rending of his clothes in mad rage,<sup>599</sup> and his eagerness to woo his lady by fulfilling her demands turns to brutal torture. Eleusius' "love" is contrasted with the love of Christ, who protects his beloved in the face of temptation and torture, heals the wounds inflicted by her earthly tormentor, and promises her eternal reward when she is at last united with him in heaven.

The contrast between Christ and an earthly husband is also the controlling influence on the structure of *Hali Meiohad*. Robertson points out that *Hali Meiohad* is not, as is often assumed, "a simple patchwork of conventional sources,"<sup>600</sup> but instead uses conventional sources in an unconventional way:

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<sup>599</sup> Cp. SK 80 [S/W 275] where Maxentius also loses control over his senses and begins to tremble in a mad rage.

<sup>600</sup> See, for example, Millett, *Hali Meiohad*, introduction and notes. Millett identifies a wide variety of sources upon which the author has drawn. In the more recent edition of *Hali Meiohad* by M/W-B, the text is discussed primarily in the context of conventional virginity literature and established traditions, characterizing, for example, its denunciations of human sexuality as "at most extensions of established positions" (p. xvi).

*Hali Meidenhad* breaks with tradition by offering women the opportunity to experience the emotional fulfillments of marriage not in its usual secular context but through a spiritual alliance with Christ.<sup>601</sup>

*Hali Meidhad* thus offers the anchoress the same choice which is faced by the virgin martyrs and which is stressed in *Ancrene Wisse*, and it is this choice which determines the structure of the work. As Robertson points out, *Hali Meidhad* is divided into three sections: the first section presents the life of the virgin as the bride of Christ, and is dominated by the image of the high tower of virginity; the second compares this life to the conventional states of women,<sup>602</sup> concentrating on the undesirable lot of the married woman; and the third section returns to virginity, offering Christ as "a more suitable and more fulfilling partner than a secular husband."<sup>603</sup> Thus:

the author first establishes a spiritual model, then contrasts it with the alternatives available in the secular world, and finally redefines the spiritual model in terms of the desires and needs of the secular world. The author transforms a woman's desire for an earthly marriage into the fulfilment of a spiritual marriage to Christ that transcends the emotional needs of an earthly marriage, and the reader of this work experiences the metaphorical marriage of the soul to Christ as though it were a literal marriage.<sup>604</sup>

The description of earthly marriage in *Hali Meidhad* has often been criticized for its harshness. In fact, the author of *Hali Meidhad* manages to combine a

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<sup>601</sup> Robertson, *Early English Devotional Prose*, p. 78.

<sup>602</sup> i.e. maidenhood, widowhood and marriage.

<sup>603</sup> Robertson, *Early English Devotional Prose*, p. 79.

<sup>604</sup> Robertson, *Early English Devotional Prose*, p. 80.

startlingly realistic portrait of the potential hazards of married life with a wry humour that is captivating. He begins by listing, and then refuting, the reasons for seeking an earthly husband: a man's strength, earthly prosperity, comfort, love, and children.<sup>605</sup> He contrasts the wavering maiden's romantic view of marriage with a grim reminder of the realities of a medieval marriage, the discomforts and dangers of child-bearing and the anxiety which accompanies child-rearing.<sup>606</sup> The description is laden with realistic details which are all the more remarkable coming from a male author: the brutality of an abusive husband and the cares of the household; the miseries of pregnancy, when the womb swells "like a water-bag," the aching of the limbs, nausea, and finally, the suffering of labour (HM 30-32 [S/W 238]); the burden of sleepless nights with a young infant and the difficulty of feeding a small child and knowing how much to put on the spoon (HM 32-34 [S/W 239]).<sup>607</sup> Most humorous and, some might argue, most realistic, is the oft-quoted kitchen scene:

*Ant hwet 3ef Ich easki 3et, þah hit þunche egede, hu þet wif stonde, þe  
ihereð hwen ha kimeð in hire beam schreamen, sið þe cat et te fliche ant*

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<sup>605</sup> Compare similar lists in *Wohunge* (below, p. 359) and *Ancrene Wisse* (below, p. 359).

<sup>606</sup> For discussions of the lot of medieval wives, see Fell, *Women in Anglo-Saxon England*; Power, *Medieval Women*; and James A. Brundage, *Law, Sex, and Christian Society in Medieval Europe*, (Chicago, 1987).

<sup>607</sup> Although M/W-B cite several possible sources for this account ((M/W-B xix-xx, and note to 32/18-25), it is the author's use of his sources which makes his presentation unique.

*ed te hude þe hund, hire cake bearnen o þe stan ant hire kelf suken, þe crohe eornen i þe fur—ant te cheorl chideð? Pah hit beo egede i sahe, hit ah, meiden, to eggī þe swiðre þerfrommart, for nawt ne þuncheð hit hire egede þet hit fondeð. (HM 34.6-11).*

And what if I go on to ask, even if it seems absurd, what life is like for the woman who, when she comes in, hears her children screaming, sees the cat at the bacon and the dog at the rind, her cake burning on the hearth and her calf sucking spilt milk, the pot boiling over in the fire—and the lout grumbles away? Though what I say is comic, maiden, it ought to urge you the more strongly away from it; for it does not seem comic to her who experiences it [S/W 239].

The metaphorical hell of the medieval kitchen has become the literal hell of the harassed housewife.<sup>608</sup>

In contrast to the earthly marriage, which will disappoint all expectations, the author of *Hali Meðhad* presents Christ as the ideal spouse who offers all that the maiden could desire from an earthly spouse and more: he is the richest, the most beautiful, the most generous (HM 34-36 [S/W 240]); with him the maiden will bear *dehtren ant sunen of gasteliche teames, þe neuwer deie ne mahen ah schulen aa biuore þe pleien in heouene* ("daughters and sons, spiritual children who never die, never can, but who will always play before you in heaven" HM 36.8-10 [S/W 240]).<sup>609</sup>

The presentation of Christ as a literal lover competing with earthly suitors is particularly prominent in *Wohunge*. Again, the spousal metaphor is literalized:

<sup>608</sup> For the medieval kitchen as a metaphor for hell, see above, p. 165.

<sup>609</sup> Cp. the motif of God as a mother playing with her child in AW iv.119 [S/W 132], above, p. 312, and below p. 398.

the reader of *Wooing* is encouraged to choose Christ as a lover in a literal, one might even say a physical, way, and to argue over his suitability as a husband as though this is exactly what he is, or is to become.<sup>610</sup>

The work begins by listing the things which are desirable in a lover (beauty, riches, generosity, wisdom, power, nobility, virtue, honour and love), and then proceeds to show how all these are gathered together in Christ, the perfect lover (WLd 20.5-27.262 [S/W 248-251]). In *Wohunge*, Christ competes, not with the worst-case scenario, as in *Hali Meiðhad*, but with the best, most idealistic portrait of the noble wooer. He wins his lady through the excellence of his virtues, and the fullness of his love. The second half of *Wohunge* is a passion meditation in which the anchoress contemplates the extremes to which Christ went to win her love and responds (so far as she may) in kind.

In *Hali Meiðhad*, the author woos the anchoress on behalf of Christ; in *Wohunge* the anchoress herself compares Christ to an earthly suitor, recalling his wooing in the incarnation and passion. In *Ancrene Wisse*, Christ in person challenges the anchoress to find a superior lover, as he woos her for himself:

*Nam ich þinge feherest. nam ich kinge richest. nam ich hest icunnet. nam ich weolie wisest. nam ich monne hendest. nam ich þinge freoest? ... Nam ich alre þinge swotest ⁊ swetest? þus alle þe reisuns hwi me ah to ʒeoue luue, þu maht ifinden in me. (AW vii.202-203, f.107b.7-13).*

Am I not the fairest one? Am I not the richest king? Am I not the highest born? Am I not the wisest among the rich? Am I not the most courteous of men? Am I not the most generous one? ... Am I

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<sup>610</sup> S/W ed.note to WLd, p. 246.

not of all things the gentlest and sweetest? So you can find all the reasons why one ought to give love in me [S/W 194].

Christ offers to purchase the anchoress's love with a love that surpasses all others, and will do yet more:

*sete feor o þi luue. þu ne schalt seggen se muchel, þ̅ ich nule ȝeoue mare. wult tu castles. k̅ingedomes. wult tu wealden al þe world? Ich chulle do þe betere. makie þe wið al þis, cwen of heoueriche. ... ne schalnewer heorte þenchen hwuch selðe, þ̅ ich nule ȝeouen for þi luue. unmeteliche. vneuenliche. unendeliche mare. (AW vii.203, f.107b.24-27, f.108a.2-4).*

put a price on your love. You will not say so much that I will not give more. Will you have castles, kingdoms? Will you rule the world? I will go one better for you: with all this make you queen of heaven too. ... No heart will ever imagine happiness so great that I will not give, for your love, immeasurably, incomparably, endlessly much more [S/W 194].

Here, as in *Hali Meiohad*, the enticements to love are presented in admittedly materialistic terms. Similarly, in the parable of the Royal Wooing<sup>611</sup> the king woos his bride with beautiful gifts. Bradley's comment on the Royal Wooing is typical of the criticism of this materialistic wooing, when she speaks of "the symbolic worldly enticements which the author of the *Ancrene Riwe* mistakenly thought would appeal to the female mystic."<sup>612</sup> However, Bradley and others fail to give sufficient attention to the fact that these gifts are, indeed, *symbolic*, and that they pale in

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<sup>611</sup> See below, pp. 366f.

<sup>612</sup> "In the Jaws of the Bear," p. 136. It is difficult to know why Bradley assumes that the AW author was "mistaken," especially in light of the preponderance of this kind of imagery in texts written by both men and women throughout the middle ages.

comparision to the greatest love-gift of all, the offering of the king's own body and his life to redeem his lady love.

The image of the love-gift is found in several of the anchoritic texts. In *Hali Meidhad* the kingdom of heaven is described as the "morning-gift" or marriage gift (*marhe3eue*) of Christ (HM 34 [S/W 240]),<sup>613</sup> and *Ancrene Wisse* refers to the four marriage gifts (*marhe.7euen*) which the anchoress will receive in heaven, which Savage and Watson identify as "the four qualities to be given to the resurrected body, according to 1 Corinthians 15.42-44" (AW i.19 [S/W 58]).<sup>614</sup> Later, the author identifies two of these marriage gifts as swiftness and the light of clear sight (AW ii.50-51 [S/W 83]).<sup>615</sup> Most important, Christ's blood shed on the cross is the love-gift which he makes to his dear spouse, as well as the price which he pays for her love (AW v.168-169 [S/W 169]). The only possible response to such a gift is the gift of the anchoress's whole self in return (WLD 22.90-23.105 [S/W 249]). Thus, St. Katherine exclaims: *'ich mot ba mi flesch ant mi blod offrin him to lake þe offrede to his feader, for me ant for al uolc, him seolf o þe rode.'* ("I offer both my flesh and my

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<sup>613</sup> Millett and Wogan-Browne translate this term "marriage gift" and gloss it as "the 'morning gift' presented by the husband to the wife on the morning after the consummation of their marriage." They note that the term is frequently used to describe the reward of Christ's chosen (note to HM 34/32, p. 152).

<sup>614</sup> S/W I i, n. 15 p. 345.

<sup>615</sup> See above, p. 270.

blood as a gift to him who offered to his Father, for me and for all people, himself on the cross" (SK 98.692-100.694 [S/W 278]).

Christ's death on the cross is both a gift and the purchase price for the anchoress's love. Just as the devil bargains to buy or steal the anchoress's soul, Christ offers her a price for her soul and her love. The ultimate price which Christ is willing to pay for the anchoress's love is himself, as he woos her in the incarnation and passion to prove his great love for her and force her love in return:

*Me lauere þu seist hwerto. ne mahte he wið leasse gref hebben arua us? zeoi iwiss ful lühtliche. ah he nalde. for hwi? forte bineomen us euch bitellunge a zein htm of ure luue þ he se deore bohte. Me buð lühtliche þing þ me luueð lutel. He bohte us wið his heorte blod, deorre pris nes newer. forte ofdrahen of us ure luue toward htm. þ costmede him se sare. (AW vii.200, f.106a.13-19).*

"But Lord," you say, "why? Could he not have delivered us with less pain?" Yes indeed, very easily, but he would not. Why not? To deprive us of every excuse for not giving him our love, which he so dearly bought. A thing little loved is easily bought. He bought us with his heart's blood—never was a price dearer—to draw out our love toward him, that cost him so bitterly [S/W 192].

The price which Christ was willing to pay for the anchoress's soul is indicative of its worth in his eyes, a fact of which the author of *Ancrene Wisse* reminds the anchoress: *aa bihald hire wurð þ he paide for hire. 7 dem þrefter hire pris* ("Ah! ah! Consider the price that he paid for her, and so judge her worth ..." AW' :v.150, f.79a.28-79b.1 [S/W 155]).

Christ's wooing in the incarnation and passion is most eloquently expressed in *Wohunge*, where Christ's entire life is seen as labour for the anchoress's love:



*A . deore cheap hefdes tu on me . ne was neuwer unwurdi þing chepet swa deore . Al þi lif on eorðe wes iswink for me swa lengre swa mare Ah bifore þin ending swa unimeteleche þu swanc ⁊ swa sare þ reade blod þu swattes (WLd 32.446-453).*

Ah, you had an expensive buy in me! Never was an unworthy thing bought so dearly. Your whole life on earth was labour for me, all the more as it went on. Ah, before your end you laboured so immeasurably and so bitterly that you sweated red blood [S/W 254].

#### CHRIST AS HERO

Christ's labour in the incarnation and passion is also presented as a battle which he fights for the anchoress's love. The anchoress is beset by the three deadly foes of the world, the flesh and the devil, against which she must guard herself cleverly (WLd 27.270-279 [S/W 251-252]). In *Wohunge*, as in *Ancrene Wisse*, the anchoress must "guard" herself against dangers both from without and within. The spiritual battle which she faces is, in both cases, one in which she requires the aid of Christ. In both texts, the imagery of guarding and of battle paves the way for the presentation of Christ as the valiant lover who joins in the battle to rescue his lady, and the realization of the anchoress's union with Christ in his passion. Alone the anchoress is weak and defenceless, and her enemies, seeing this, attack even harder (WLd 28.280f [S/W 252]). In this passage, the heroic elements discussed above<sup>616</sup>

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<sup>616</sup> See above, pp. 172, 226 and n. 310.

re-emerge, complete with the beasts of battle, when the enemies of the anchoress are described as *wode wulues þ̅ fainen of hare prae* ("mad wolves joyful of their prey"), grinning at each other in anticipation of victory (WLd 28.288-291 [S/W 252]). Christ is presented as the heroic warrior who valiantly comes to the anchoress's rescue:

*þu biheld al þis 7 tu allegate seh þ̅ ine mihte stonde a gain hare wilfulle  
crokes þurh wit oðer strengðe þ̅ wes in me seluen ... þu com me to helpe  
. feng to fihte for me (WLd 28.299-303, 305-306).*

You saw all this, and you clearly saw that I could not stand against their determined deceptions, through any wit or strength that was in me ... You came to my help, took on the fight for me [S/W 252].

Christ joins the battle in his incarnation, fighting for the anchoress's soul through poverty, grief, shame and suffering:

*þu biddes me bihalde hu þu fahst for me . þ̅ i pouerte of worlde ne  
schome of wicke monnes muð for uten mine Gulte . ne secnesse of mi  
bodi . ne flesches pine drede . hwæn þ̅ i bihalde hu þu was poure for me  
. hu þu was schent 7 schomet for me, 7 atte laste wið pineful deað  
henged orode (WLd 28.308-317).*

You asked me to see how you fought for me, so that I would not be afraid of worldly poverty, or humiliation from wicked people's mouths when I am guiltless, or bodily sickness and torment of the flesh, when I see how you were poor for me, how you were hurt and humiliated for me, and at last, in painful death, hung on the cross [S/W 252].

The presentation of Christ as an heroic warrior is common in the anchoritic texts.<sup>617</sup> In *Wohunge* Christ is compared to the earthly lover who is chosen for his valour:

*moni man þurh his strengðe ⁊ hardischiþe ek makes him luued ⁊ zemed . And is ani swa hardi swa ar tu? Nai . for þu þe ane dreddes nawt wið þin anre deore boði to fihte aaines alle þe ahefulle deueles of helle . ... þu art zete her wið swa unimete mihti þ wið þi deorewurde hond naillet on rode, þu band tu helle dogges . ⁊ restes ham hare praie þat tai hefden grediliche gripen ⁊ helden hit faste for adames sunne . þu kene kidde kempe robbedes helle hus (WLd 23.119-127, 23.135-24.144).*

many a man through his strength and bravery also makes himself beloved and longed-for. And is anyone as brave as you are? No. For you did not fear to fight alone with your own dear body against all the awesome devils of hell. ... And besides all this you are so immeasurably mighty that, with your precious hand nailed to the cross, you bound the hell-dogs and deprived them of their prey, which they had greedily grabbed... and held fast because of Adam's sin. You brave and famous champion, you robbed hell's house [S/W 249-50].

Here Christ is the warrior who harrows hell "with one hand tied behind his back."

Christ is also presented as the "champion" who harrows hell, overcomes the devil and protects the virgin martyrs in the saints' Lives (eg. SM 60 [S/W 294-295]; SJ 49 [S/W 316]).<sup>618</sup> In these texts we find the idea of Christ as warrior merging with the idea

<sup>617</sup> The image of Christ as warrior is found in earlier Anglo-Saxon literature, for example in *The Dream of the Rood*, and retains many of its heroic elements as it is incorporated into the anchoritic literature. See Alison Finlay, "The Warrior Christ and the Unarmed Hero," in Kratzmann and Simpson (eds.) *Medieval English Religious and Ethical Literature: Essays in Honour of G.H. Russell*, (Cambridge, 1986), pp. 19-29.

<sup>618</sup> In *Seinte Katerine*, it is Katherine who becomes the "warrior" who takes on a battle for her lover and lord, who promises to guard her (SK 36 [S/W 268]; cp. SK 96 [S/W 278], 74 [S/W 274]). See the discussion of Katherine's heroic battle above,

of Christ as lover or bridegroom. However, it is in *Ancrene Wisse's* presentation of Christ as the mighty king wooing the soul that this integration is most fully developed, as the warrior is transformed into a king who displays all the attributes of the chivalric knight.<sup>619</sup>

#### THE PARABLE OF THE ROYAL WOOING

The parable of the Royal Wooing (often called the parable of the lover-knight) is the most frequently anthologized, and perhaps the most profoundly misunderstood, passage in *Ancrene Wisse*, epitomizing the problems which plague the reading of the spousal metaphor in general. It is important to read this episode not only, or even primarily, in the light of the medieval romance tradition (as is usually done), but in the context of the theological climate of the twelfth and thirteenth century and the erotic mysticism which defines the character of the anchoress's enclosure. In the section that follows, therefore, I will briefly discuss the problems which have plagued the interpretation of the parable, before going on to analyse the

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pp. 161f.

<sup>619</sup> Cp. Rosemary Woolf, "The Theme of Christ the Lover-Knight in Medieval English Literature," *RES* ns 13 (1962), pp. 3-4.

text both in the context of *Ancrene Wisse* vii and in light of the mystical nature of the anchoritic life described above.

## PROBLEMS OF INTERPRETATION

### 1. Relation to the Romance Tradition

The attempt to read this passage solely in the context of chivalric romance has led to some serious misinterpretation of the function of the parable in the *Ancrene Wisse* as a whole. It is true that the author of *Ancrene Wisse* assumes a certain familiarity on the part of his readers with courtly romance.<sup>620</sup> Robertson assumes that it is this familiarity with the romance tradition which leads the author of *Ancrene Wisse* to emphasize an emotional commitment to Christ, and that this emotional commitment is inferior to and at the expense of an intellectual commitment. She claims:

The idea that women read romances led to the further idea that women could define their relationship to Christ as literally that of a lady and her knight.<sup>621</sup>

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<sup>620</sup> See Woolf, "Christ the Lover-Knight," pp. 1-2; and Sr. Marie de Lourdes Le May, *The Allegory of the Christ-Knight in English Literature*, Diss. Catholic University of America, Washington, D.C., 1932 (Xerographic Reprint by University Microfilms Inc, Ann Arbor Mich., 1963), pp. 3-4.

<sup>621</sup> Robertson, *Early English Devotional Prose*, p. 72.

This focus on emotion rather than logic led to a subordination of theology to relationships within a traditional female sphere, i.e., marriage. The result, Robertson concludes, is that

The courtly details of the Christ-Knight allegory simply underscore the dependence and passivity assigned to women in Christianity.<sup>622</sup>

Ultimately, however, the parable of the Royal Wooing must be read in light of the affective mysticism of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries as well as the chivalric romance tradition which flourished alongside of it. The way in which the wooing metaphor is expanded and developed in *Wohunge* is a clear indication that this metaphor is to be read primarily in terms of the passion meditation and the union with Christ which flows out of it discussed above in Chapter Five. Indeed, the interpretation of the parable given by the author in *Ancrene Wisse* is a passion meditation focusing on the image of the knight's shield, which represents Christ's body and is itself represented by the crucifix. The presentation of Christ as the knight of romance is always subordinated to its context in the passion, and the parable of the Royal Wooing is itself a form of metaphorical passion meditation,

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<sup>622</sup> Robertson, *Early English Devotional Prose*, p. 72. This argument is all of a piece with Robertson's general contention that *Ancrene Wisse* and the texts of the Katherine Group, texts written by men for women, were grounded in misogynist assumptions about women's limited potential in the religious sphere (see above, pp. 38f. and below, pp. 411f.). Robertson's conclusions concerning the dependent and passive nature of the mysticism of *Ancrene Wisse* is due to her misunderstanding of the role of the lady in the parable and of the role of the parable in its context as a whole (see the analysis of the parable below, pp. 375f).

presenting as it does the motivation for Christ's passion in the framework of the spousal metaphor.

The theological and devotional context of the image of the Christ-knight is thus of paramount importance. The emphasis on an emotional relationship with Christ which Robertson faults for denying women the active, intellectual mystical experience available to men, derives not primarily from the romance tradition, but from the affective mysticism of Bernard himself and those who followed him.<sup>623</sup> As Woolf points out, the development of more stress on a personal and emotional relationship between man and God in the twelfth century parallels the emerging emphasis on the humanity of Christ and his great deed of love on the cross. The parallel between the theological stress on Christ's love, displayed on the cross, and the concept of chivalry in Arthurian romance is evident from the twelfth century on.<sup>624</sup>

However, it is by no means clear that the courtly romance tradition definitively influenced the devotional presentation of Christ as the lover-knight. In fact, it has

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<sup>623</sup> Le May attempts to argue that the development of the Christ-knight metaphor is modelled on the sermons of Bernard, even though the metaphor itself is not found in Bernard's writings (*Christ-Knight*, pp. 12-17). Shepherd points out that Le May's evidence is less than convincing (*AW Six and Seven*, p. 55, n. to 21.1ff); however, the fact that she can find any evidence at all in the face of the total absence of the metaphor in Bernard's sermons is testimony to the close parallels between the devotional application of chivalric conventions to Christ and the affective mysticism of the twelfth century.

<sup>624</sup> Woolf, "Christ the Lover-Knight," pp. 1-2. See also *English Religious Lyric*, pp. 44-55.

been argued that the influence runs the other way, and that it is the devotional tradition which is determinative for the development of the chivalric knight of romance.<sup>625</sup> While the influence of chivalric romance on the metaphor of the Christ-knight should not be summarily dismissed, the fusion of the idea of the warrior Christ with the metaphor of the divine lover into a single theme need not owe a great debt to the romance tradition. The idea of the crucifixion as a battle in which Christ wins back the love of his adulterous wife Israel occurs in Augustine,<sup>626</sup> and Shepherd cites numerous sources for the allegory of God as a royal wooer of the individual soul.<sup>627</sup> Shepherd notes that the allegory was common in eastern patristic and monastic writers, but seems to have become popular in the west only in the twelfth century. *Ancrene Wisse*, he suggests, shows modifications which might be traced to chivalric and courtly conventions, as the king becomes a royal knight and the soul becomes the high-born lady of romance.<sup>628</sup> Certainly, there are elements which are clearly influenced by the conventions of romance literature, such as the

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<sup>625</sup> Rygiel discusses the reciprocal relationship between romance literature and theology ("Structure and Style," pp. 52-53). Riehle, *Middle English Mystics*, points out that many of the "romance images" found in the anchoritic texts are, in fact, drawn from the Song of Songs (see below, pp. 398f.). See also the discussion in Southern "From Epic to Romance" in *The Making of the Middle Ages*, (New Haven, 1953), pp. 219-257.

<sup>626</sup> See Woolf, "Christ the Lover-Knight," p. 3.

<sup>627</sup> *AW Six and Seven*, p. 55, note to 21.1ff.

<sup>628</sup> See also Woolf, "Christ the Lover-Knight," pp. 41.



messengers with sealed letters in the simile who are sent ahead of the king, but these depend upon typology and theological symbolism for their meaning. In fact, images from courtly romance are more commonly found in other anchoritic texts than in *Ancrene Wisse*.<sup>629</sup> At the same time, in *Seinte Katerine*, which makes abundant use of the spousal metaphor and "romance" images, the author is careful to dissociate Katherine from the romance tradition. In his description of Katherine's scholarship and wisdom the author of *Seinte Katerine* emphasises that:

*ne luuede ha nane lihte plohen ne nane sotte songes; nalde ha nane ronnes ne nane luue-runes leomin ne lusmin, ah euer ha hefde on hali writ ehnen oder heorte* (SK 8.38-40).

[she] did not delight in any frivolous games or foolish songs. She did not learn or long for any love songs or love stories; but she always had her eyes or her heart on Holy Writ [S/W 263].

Like Katherine's metaphorical romance with Christ, the parable of the Royal Wooing is not dependent on the romance tradition for either its genesis or its significance.

## 2. Context

A further factor which has contributed to the misinterpretation of the presentation of Christ as lover-knight in *Ancrene Wisse* is the tendency of commentators to isolate this passage from its context, both in Part vii and in the

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<sup>629</sup> See below, pp. 398f.

*Ancrene Wisse* as a whole.<sup>630</sup> The metaphor of the Royal Wooing comes near the beginning of Part vii, which is the climax of *Ancrene Wisse*, presenting as it does a treatment of the love which defines the inner rule and which is "the source, guide, and goal of the anchoritic life."<sup>631</sup> It is clearly meant to be read in the light of all that has come before concerning the nature of the anchoritic life and the mystical relationship with Christ which the anchoress seeks in her enclosure. In addition, the rest of Part vii must be read as an elaboration upon this metaphor, not just the expository passage found immediately following it. As we shall see, the point of the metaphor is to elicit a *response* from the anchoress, a response which is delineated throughout the entire chapter.

The story of the Royal Wooing is presented in the author's discussion of why God ought to be loved, and illustrates the way in which God has earned the anchoress's love in the wooing of her soul. Woolf points out that *Ancrene Wisse's* emphasis on the knight's wooing before the battle is unique, noting that most treatments of Christ as the lover-knight stress the situation after the battle. *Ancrene Wisse* does not, however, ignore the aftermath; in fact it is the lady's response after

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<sup>630</sup> For example, although Robertson considers the *parabole* in her discussion of AW vii, she treats it as an isolated episode, discussing it almost exclusively in the context of courtly romance. In addition, this passage is often selected for specific comment on its own, without any reference to the context in which it occurs (eg. Bradley, "In the Jaws of the Bear," p. 135; Rygiel, *Middle English Mystics*, p. 52; Woolf, *English Religious Lyric*, p. 46; and Stevens, *Medieval Romance*, pp. 127-128).

<sup>631</sup> Rygiel, "Structure and Style," p. 47.

the battle which is the entire point of the passage. For example, the conventional image of the lady mourning over the pierced arms of her slain knight<sup>632</sup> can be paralleled to *Ancrene Wisse's* description of the hanging of the shield/crucifix in the church. The importance of the lady's response is emphasized by the tri-partite structure of the parable noted by Rygiel, which focuses attention on the lady's response through the use of rhetorical questions. Rygiel suggests that parable contains three episodes, each of which reflect the three-fold pattern of action/response/call for judgement (expressed in a rhetorical question), although the pattern is slightly forced in the third episode.<sup>633</sup>

In order to fully understand the significance of the parable, however, its place in the larger context of the discussion of the reasons why God ought to be loved must also be considered. In addition, the reasons for loving God are delineated for one reason: to spark a response in the anchoress as she kindles the fire of love in her heart. Therefore, the love of the anchoress for Christ in response to his love-deed on the cross must also be examined.

Briefly, the structure of the section concerning why God ought to be loved can be outlined as follows:

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<sup>632</sup> Described by Woolf, "Christ the Lover-Knight," pp. 5-6.

<sup>633</sup> "The Allegory of Christ the Lover-Knight in *Ancrene Wisse*: An Experiment in Stylistic Analysis." *Studies in Philology* 73 (1976), pp. 356-357; but see the more detailed outline of Part vii as a whole in "Structure and Style," pp. 48-49.

A. God's Great Love-Gift (AW 197-200 [S/W 190-192])

1. God's Gift of Himself (AW 197-198 [S/W 190])
2. Christ as a Man Who Woos, I (AW 198-200 [S/W 190-192])
  - a. Simile of a King (AW 198 [S/W 190])
  - b. The Parable of the Royal Wooing (AW 198-199 [S/W 190-191])
    - (1) Introduction: the scene is set
    - (2) The Wooing from Afar
      - (a) The king sends gifts and aid.
      - (b) The lady is unmoved
      - (c) The rhetorical question ("what more do you want?")
    - (3) The Wooing in Person
      - (a) The king comes himself
      - (b) The lady is unmoved
      - (c) The rhetorical question ("is this contempt not strange?")
    - (4) The Final Battle
      - (a) The king gives his life and is restored
      - (b) The lady's response is not specified
      - (c) The rhetorical question
  - c. The Interpretation of the Parable (AW 199-200 [S/W 191-192])
    - (1) The Allegorical Interpretation
      - (a) The king/Christ
      - (b) The battle/crucifixion
      - (c) The shield/body/cross
    - (2) The Magnitude of Christ's Love
      - (a) The price of love
      - (b) Meditation on the shield/crucifix

B. The Superiority of Christ's Love (AW 200-204 [S/W 192-194])

1. The Four Loves (AW 200-202 [S/W 192-193])
  - a. Between Friends
  - b. Man and Woman
  - c. Mother and Child
  - d. Soul and Body

2. Christ as a Man Who Woos, II (AW 202-204 [S/W 193-194])
  - a. Christ's Great Love
  - b. Christ's Wooing Speech
    - (1) Love as a Gift
    - (2) Love as a Purchase
    - (3) Love Taken by Force

C. The anchoress's Response (AW 204 [S/W 194-195])

1. The Rhetorical Question
2. The Fire of Love

The parable of the Royal Wooing is only one part of a long section explicating Christ's great love-gift upon the cross using the metaphor of wooing. The "wooing" section is framed by an introductory paragraph summarizing the ways in which God has earned the anchoress's love (like the king in the parable, *he haueð muchel idon us, 7 mare bihten*; "he has done much for us, and promised more" AW vii.197, f.104b.26-27 [S/W 190]) and a concluding paragraph outlining the only appropriate response. This final paragraph also serves to introduce the next major section of the text, which discusses the anchoress's response in terms of the "enkindling" image<sup>634</sup> (AW vii.205-207 [S/W 195-196]) before going on to make clear that the anchoress must actively choose who and what she will love (AW vii.208 [S/W 197-198]). The next section of Part vii thus continues the discussion of the anchoress's response to Christ (and therefore the lady's response to the king). This highlights the importance

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<sup>634</sup> See Rygiel, "Structure and Style," p. 52. The "enkindling image," or the image of the fire of love, will be discussed below, pp. 390f.

of the context, not only in terms of the discussion of the reasons why God ought to be loved, but in terms of the whole of part vii.<sup>635</sup>

#### ANALYSIS OF THE PARABLE

The parable of the Royal Wooing serves to illustrate the great love-gifts which Christ has given to the anchoress. He gave all he had for the profit of her soul, and more: *ʒef us. nawi ane of his, ah dude al him seoluen* ("he gave us not only of his own, but gave his whole self" AW vii.198, f.105a.6-7 [S/W 190]). The parable is introduced by a simile, comparing Christ to a king who loved a noble, yet poor, lady, sending messengers with sealed letters (the Old Testament patriarchs and prophets), and finally coming himself, writing love-greetings with his own blood with which to woo his lady (AW vii.198 [S/W 190]).<sup>636</sup> The author of *Ancrene Wisse* then offers the parable of the Royal Wooing as an expansion of the simile.

The basic point of the parable is clear enough: Christ is the king who woos the anchoress through gifts and aid, finally giving his life for her sake. Coming as it does between the two reasons why God ought to be loved (i.e. God's great gift of love and the superiority of Christ's love), the parable both illustrates God's great gift

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<sup>635</sup> See the outline of AW vii, below pp. 430f.

<sup>636</sup> Contrast SK 22 [S/W 265], where Maxentius sends a messenger bearing letters sealed with his royal signet to summon scholars to challenge Katherine.

and proves beyond a doubt that Christ's love is superior to any human love. Both discussions of the reasons for loving God are followed by a description of Christ's wooing; the first by the parable, the second by Christ's direct wooing speech, in which he competes with earthly suitors.

There are, however, several points which are peculiar. First of all, the first rhetorical question in the parable itself is concerned not with the lady (what more does *she* want?) but with the reader (what more do *you* want?), suggesting immediately that the reader is to identify with the lady, and that it is the reader's response which is demanded. One of the great weaknesses of Rygiel's argument is his insistence on the reader's identification with the king, and his failure to recognize the involvement of the audience until the final rhetorical question. Although Rygiel's argument that the story is told from the point of view of the king is sound,<sup>637</sup> the sympathy for the king aroused by this literary handling of the allegory is intended to spark a response from the reader (not identification), just as the king's words and actions are intended to kindle love in the heart of his lady. The fact that the king is motivated by love is clear; in fact the entire parable serves as an illustration of the extent of his love. Just so, Christ's words and actions in his incarnation show his great love for the anchoress: *Bihald zeome 7 understont iesu cristes deorewurde wordes 7 werkes. þe iluue weren alle 7 i swetnesse* ("Consider eagerly and understand Jesus Christ's precious words and works, which were all in love and sweetness" AW

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<sup>637</sup> "Allegory," pp. 352, 357.

iv.129, f.68b.19-21 [S/W 140]). The reader's identification, however, is with the lady for whom so much is done; this is, in fact, made clear in the first sentence, where the lady, enclosed within an earthen castle, is specifically paralleled with the anchoress, enclosed within her cell and within her body. The purpose of this identification is not designed, as Robertson assumes,<sup>638</sup> to provoke guilt, but rather to evoke gratitude and love. This is confirmed by what follows as the emphasis shifts from the king's wooing to the lady's response, and the imagery shifts from the lover-knight to the fire of love.

Second, there is some confusion with respect to the presentation and role of the lady. Robertson and Bradley emphasize the dependent and passive role of the lady in the parable, arguing that the love-relationship offered to the anchoress in *Ancrene Wisse* is limiting, rather than liberating, as a misogynist male author assigns his readers to a traditional role.<sup>639</sup> Robertson contends that we learn little about the lady, and that what we do learn is negative, designed to provoke guilt in the anchoress. She argues that the anchoress is cast in the role of the lady of conventional love-lyrics, but that the terms of the lyrics are reversed as all the active verbs are assigned to the king and all the passive ones to the lady. The effect of this, Robertson suggests, is to reinforce the passivity of the anchoress who, like the lady

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<sup>638</sup> *Early English Devotional Prose*, p. 72.

<sup>639</sup> Bradley, "In the Jaws of the Bear," pp. 134-40; and Robertson, *Early English Devotional Prose*, p. 72.



in the castle, can only wait passively to be rescued from the castle of her body or for her body to be redeemed through Christ's entry into it.<sup>640</sup>

Rygiel also suggests that in the parable the king does everything, the lady nothing.<sup>641</sup> However, while emphasizing that "the king is the one who acts and is acted upon in the physical world," Rygiel also points out that inasmuch as the king is motivated to act by his love for the lady, he is also deprived of volition by that love. In fact, the subject of the parable is as much the love which motivates the king to act as the actions themselves. As Rygiel points out:

One might expect that the first sentence, which begins with *A leafdi*, would be followed by one beginning *A mihti king* rather than *A mihti kinges luuve*. The switch is effective, though, for several reasons. It provides a qualification of the lady's desperate situation in terms of the King's love, which is the key fact in his relation to her and in the story. It also suggests the lack of choice on the King's part—he cannot help but love.<sup>642</sup>

On the other hand, the verbs used for the lady suggest "various degrees of passivity or helplessness *in everything but will*" (emph. mine). Rygiel continues:

The only dynamic active verbs used for her refer to activity of the will. ... The suggestion seems to be that in contrast to the king, who has the power to act in the physical world, the lady can only act in terms of the

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<sup>640</sup> Robertson, *Early English Devotional Prose*, p. 72. Regarding the weaknesses of Robertson's argument that the anchoress waits passively for Christ to enter her body to redeem it, see above, p. 341.

<sup>641</sup> "Allegory," p. 353.

<sup>642</sup> "Allegory," pp. 351-352. For a discussion of the power which love gives the anchoress over Christ, see above, pp. 346f.

will, i.e., she can only respond or not respond to the actions of the king.<sup>643</sup>

The choice of which the king is deprived thus becomes the heart of the parable's presentation of the lady, as the story focuses on her response (or lack thereof) to the king's love. The very thing which deprives the king of choice is the thing which demands a response from the lady, a response which is later described in terms of an active exercise of the will as the anchoress is faced with a fundamental choice. What that response should be is clear in the context of the parable: as Woolf points out, there is a general assumption that such unbounded love deserves a response of love and courtesy, and that anything less would be unfitting.<sup>644</sup> However, the response of love expected by the author of *Ancrene Wisse* is anything but passive, as is clear from the passage which follows Christ's wooing speech. The anchoress is faced with an active choice between earthly and heavenly love, and if she chooses the love of Christ, as indeed she must, she embarks upon an active course of kindling the fire of love in her heart. The discussion of Greek fire in particular is dominated by images of warfare, suggesting an active participation in the spiritual battle discussed in Chapter Two.<sup>645</sup>

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<sup>643</sup> "Allegory," pp. 354-355.

<sup>644</sup> "Christ the Lover-Knight," p. 9.

<sup>645</sup> For further discussion of the anchoress's life as active rather than passive, see above, pp. 134f..

The presentation of the lady in the parable of the Royal Wooing is thus a distinct contrast to the typical lady of romance. The romance heroine is only active and indeed only present during the process of courtship, when she often acts as a means of upward social movement for the knight who woos her. Once her love is won, she marries and disappears from the scene, consigned to the oblivion of the housewife, while her knight continues in his active role.<sup>646</sup> However, the role of the lady in *Ancrene Wisse* really begins only after the wooing, when she must choose Christ's love over man's, kindling the fire of love in her heart and giving herself to Christ as his bride. Once she has embarked upon her career as the bride of Christ, her active toil begins.<sup>647</sup>

A third peculiarity in the parable occurs in the final episode [A.2.b.(4).(b)], where there is a significant change in the pattern, as the lady's response is not specified. Rygiel notes this change, suggesting that the lady's response is couched in conditional terms and combined with the call for judgement of the response in the rhetorical question (*Nere þeos ilke leafdi of uueles cunnnes cunde. æf ha ouer alle þing ne luuede him her efter?*) ["Would not this same lady be of an evil sort of nature if she

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<sup>646</sup> This point was made by Michael Peterson in "Reconsidering Gender in Middle English Romance," a paper presented to the Nineteenth Annual Symposium of the Ottawa-Carleton Medieval-Renaissance Club, March 28, 1992.

<sup>647</sup> Cp. the parable of a man with a new wife in AW iv.113-114 [S/W 128-129], discussed below, p. 387.

did not love him ever after over all things?" AW vii.199, f.105b.19-20; S/W 191]).<sup>648</sup> I would argue, rather, that the lady's response is unspecified for the precise reason that the *reader* is the lady who must now respond to the action of the lover who woos her in her enclosure. To emphasize this, the author expands and explains the allegory, first with an interpretation of the parable identifying the king with Christ and the battle with the crucifixion, which merges into a meditation on Christ's shield/body/crucifix; and then with a further discussion of why God ought to be loved which demonstrates the superiority of Christ's love to earthly love, in case the anchoress has not grasped this point through the allegory. Finally, the wooing metaphor is extended as Christ himself woos the anchoress directly in a speech in which he competes with earthly lovers. Following Christ's wooing, the author repeats the rhetorical question which ends the parable in an expanded form which stresses the role of the anchoress's meditation on the story and, indirectly, on the passion:

*Nis ha to heard iheortes þ̅ a þulli wohere ne mei to his luue turnen? 3ef  
ha wel þenched þeose þreo þinges. hwet he is 7 hwet heo is, 7 hu muchel  
is þe luue of se heh as he is, toward se lah as heo is. (AW vii.204,  
f.108a.20-23).*

Is she not all too hard-hearted who with such a wooer, cannot turn to his love, if she thinks well on these three things: what he is, what she is, and how great is the love of one so high as he is toward one so low as she? [S/W 194-195].<sup>649</sup>

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<sup>648</sup> "Allegory," p. 357.

<sup>649</sup> Here the pattern of meditation on the self (and the body), meditation on Christ (and his crucified body) and meditation on Christ's love, which was discussed above in Chapter Five, recurs (see pp.308, 320).

It is only after this that the author moves on to describe the appropriate response of the anchoress in the passage concerning the fire of love.

Each of these peculiarities serves to focus the attention of the anchoritic reader further on the response which is expected of the lady, and therefore of herself. At all points, the language of the parable compels the reader into an identification with the lady. Further, the only way in which the reader can actively identify with the lady is in her response, or lack thereof, to the love of the king. Finally, the lady's ultimate response is left unspecified, leaving the reader herself to complete her identification with the lady in the parable by responding in her place. The action of the parable is thus thrust irrevocably upon the anchoress, as Christ demands her love in a direct wooing speech, which is followed by the author's appeal to enkindle her heart with the fire of love.

After relating the parable, the author offers a brief interpretation (AW vii.199-200 [S/W 191-192]). His explication is dominated, curiously enough, by the image of the knight's shield pierced in battle, an image which does not occur in the parable at all. The image of the shield is rich in meaning: the shape signifying Christ's body on the cross;<sup>650</sup> the fact that the shield has no sides signifying Christ's isolation on the cross; the shield's construction of wood, leather and paint signifying the wood of the

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<sup>650</sup> Shepherd, in his note to 22.11 (*AW Six and Seven*, p. 57), gives a possible source in Bernard's Sermon v. on Ps. 91 (PL 183, col. 196).

cross, the leather of God's body and the paint of Christ's blood.<sup>651</sup> The focus of the image is, as always, the love which Christ displayed in his passion: the shield of the Christ-knight is his body, spread on the cross with outstretched arms, an image which recurs as Christ spreads his arms wide on the cross to embrace his beloved (AW vii.205 [S/W 195]).<sup>652</sup> The image of the shield merges with the image of Christ's purchase of the soul on the cross, as the shield becomes the crucifix, hung high in the church as a reminder of Christ's great deed of chivalry on the cross. The author anticipates the anchoress's incredulous query:

*Me lauer þu seist hwerto. ne mahte he wið leasse gref hebben arud us?  
 ʒeoi iwiss ful lîhtliche. ah he nalde. for hwi? forte bineomen us euch  
 bitellunge aʒein htm of ure luue þ he se deore bohte. (AW vii.200,  
 f.106a.13-16).*

"But Lord," you say, "why? Could he not have delivered us with less pain?" Yes indeed, very easily, but he would not. Why not? To deprive us of every excuse for not giving him our love, which he so dearly bought [S/W 192].<sup>653</sup>

The author proceeds to a brief meditation on the shield/crucifix, *ichirche iset i swuch stude, þer me hit sonest seo* ("set high in church in such a place where it is soonest

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<sup>651</sup> Woolf points out other examples of the allegorization of the knight's armour, noting that it is usually not Christ's human flesh which is his armour but the outward signs of his suffering and the instruments of the passion ("Christ the Lover-Knight," pp. 11-12). However, cp. *Piers Ploughman* (B.XVIII), where Christ jousts in Piers' arms, i.e., his human flesh. For detailed discussions of the image of the shield, see Shepherd, *AW Six and Seven*, lx-bxiii; and Rygiel, "Allegory," pp. 359-361.

<sup>652</sup> See the discussion of the mystical embrace, above pp. 323f.

<sup>653</sup> See S/W I vii, n. 17, p. 399, for sources in Anselm and Bernard.

seen" AW vii.200, f.106a.24-25 [S/W 192]), in order to remind the anchoress of Christ's great love.

The interpretation of the parable thus maintains the focus on the cross as the parable flows into a passion meditation. As the anchoress contemplates the shield/crucifix she meditates on the magnitude of Christ's love which prompted him to take such extreme measures to win her heart, *his crihtschipe þ he dude o rode*:

*his leofmon bihalde þron hu he bohte hire luue. lette þurltn his scheld openln his side. to schawln hire his heorte. to schawln hire openliche hu inwardliche he luuede hire. ⁊ to ofdrahen hire heorte. (AW vii.200, f.106a.26-106b.2).*

His beloved should see by it how he bought her love, letting his shield be pierced, his side opened to show her his heart, to show her openly how deeply he loved her, and to draw out her heart [S/W 192].<sup>654</sup>

The anchoress is thus to "read" Christ's body hanging on the cross, as she would read a love-letter, the greetings which Christ sends to his beloved written in his own blood (AW vii.198 [S/W 190]).<sup>655</sup> This becomes explicit in *Wohunge's* expansion of the passion meditation in AW vii, where the anchoress declares:

*A swete iesu þu oppnes me þin herte for to cnawe witerliche ⁊ in to reden trewe luue lettres . for þer i mai openlich seo hu muchel þu me luuedes . Wið wrange schuldi þe min heorte wearmen siðen þ tu bohtes herte for herte . (WLd 35.546-553).*

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<sup>654</sup> The image of Christ's passion as a shield also occurs earlier in AW iv.151 [S/W 155] (see above, p. 208).

<sup>655</sup> Savage and Watson note that this, with the passage from *Wohunge* quoted below, is the earliest appearance in English of the "idea of Christ's body as a book from which letters of love can be read" which is popular in later medieval devotion (S/W WLd n. 15, p. 421).

Ah! sweet Jesus, you open your heart to me, so that I may know it inwardly, and read inside it true love-letters; for there I may see openly how much you loved me. Wrong would it be to refuse you my heart, since you have bought heart with heart [S/W 255].

As always, the focus is on the *response* of the anchoress.

The interpretation of the parable and meditation upon the shield/cross is followed by a passage comparing Christ's love to the four main kinds of earthly love, in order to demonstrate the second reason why God ought to be loved: the superiority of Christ's love (AW vii.200-202 [S/W 192-193]. Three of the four loves focus upon the passion: Christ's love is superior to love between friends, for he gave his body to redeem his beloved; it is superior to the love between a mother and child, for the third healing bath, which sanctifies and gives meaning to the other two, is the bath of his blood, marking his hands to show that he can never forget his love;<sup>656</sup> it is superior to the love between the soul and the body, for he was willing to part his soul from his body to join ours together in heaven.

The one love which does not focus upon the passion is the love between man and woman. Instead, the discussion of this love focuses upon the choice which the anchoress must make, between Christ and the devil with whom she is tempted to prostitute herself through sin. This is, at first glance, curious, since the presentation of Christ as the anchoress's lover focuses to such a large extent upon the passion as

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<sup>656</sup> This passage contains a powerful image which compares the knotting of a belt as an aid to memory with the deliberate piercing of Christ's hands as a physical reminder of his love. See below, p. 398.



the proof of his great love. However, in this context the superiority of Christ's love is portrayed in order to evoke a response of love from the anchoress, a response which is described in terms of choice. It is thus appropriate that in comparing Christ's love to the love between a man and a woman the author focuses upon the anchoress's choice between Christ and the devil.

The image of the anchoress whoring with the devil through sin is a common feature of the anchoritic texts. Through sin, the anchoress makes herself the devil's darling (AW iv.110 [S/W 126]), married to "those seven hags," the seven deadly sins (AW iv.112 [S/W 128]). The anchoress who succumbs to sin is the devil's whore (HM 36 [S/W 240-241]; I iv.115 [S/W 130]; WLd 27.276-279 [S/W 251-252]), breaking her marriage with Christ (HM 38 [S/W 241]). It is for this reason that Christ tests her through temptation, so that she may be crowned as his beloved when she has proven her fidelity (AW iv.94 [S/W 115]).

The testing of the anchoress's fidelity is illustrated in the parable of the man with a new wife, who is indulgent at first but, when he is confident of her love, becomes stern with her faults, which he has previously overlooked. When she has proven her love under his discipline, he becomes loving again. So, too, Christ first courts the anchoress to draw her into love, then tests her love through temptation and hardship. To the anchoress who is steadfast, immeasurable joy comes after the testing (AW iv.113-114 [S/W 128-129]).

Bradley criticizes this passage as a blatant instance of sexist imagery; however, she isolates the passage from its context and dismisses it summarily.<sup>657</sup> In fact, the passage is included in Part iv of *Ancrene Wisse* (on temptation) to illustrate why temptation may be strongest not, as the anchoress might assume, at the beginning of her enclosure, but when she has built up her resistance to temptation through her devotion to Christ and is able to endure more. The author makes a similar point in *Ancrene Wisse* iv.113 [S/W 128-129], where he compares the anchoress to Israel during the Exodus. Just as God first performed miracles in Egypt to deliver Israel from Pharaoh's hand, before allowing her to be tested in the wilderness, so *ure laerd speareð on earst þe zunge 7 te feble. 7 draheð ham ut of þis world, swoteliche 7 wið liste* ("our Lord at first spares the young and the feeble, and draws them out of this world gently and with art" AW iv.113, f.59b.5-7 [S/W 129]). It is only when he sees that they are fit that he teaches them to fight and to suffer. Finally, he gives them sweet rest and comfort. Although it is true that in the parable it is the husband who corrects the wife, and not *vice versa*, this is only to be expected since the husband and wife are allegorizations of Christ and the anchoress respectively. The parable is an illustration, not of the spouse's mistreatment of his wife, but of his forbearance; not of undue criticism, but of the trust between husband and wife which enables honesty and correction.

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<sup>657</sup> "In the Jaws of the Bear," pp. 132-134.

In the comparison of Christ's love to that between a man and woman in AW vii, the author goes one step further. An earthly husband would refuse to recognize a wife who prostituted herself with other men; however, the anchoress is assured that even after many years of infidelity, Christ will welcome her back, restoring the virginity of her soul when she returns to him (AW vii.201 [S/W 192-193]).

Having conclusively demonstrated that Christ's love *passed alle 7 ouerkimed þe fowr measte luuen þ me ifind on eorðe* ("wholly surpasses and transcends the four greatest loves found on earth" AW vii.202, f.107b.2-3 [S/W 193]), the author returns to the wooing image in a speech in which Christ woos the anchoress directly, competing with earthly suitors with all the force of his superior love behind his words.<sup>658</sup> If the anchoress is to give her love as a gift, who better to bestow it upon than Christ, who is fairest, noblest, richest, wisest, most courteous and most generous? If it is not to be given but can only be bought, who will offer a greater price? Finally, if her love is not to be given or even sold, Christ will take it by force, threatening her with the fires of hell should she refuse:

*zef þu art se swiðe anewil. 7 swa ut of þi wii. þ tu þurh nawi to leosen  
forsakest swuch biþete, wið alles cunnes selhðe, lo ich halde her heatel  
sweord up o þin heaued todealen lif 7 sawle. 7 bisenchen ham ba in to  
þe fur of helle. to beon deofles hore schentfulliche 7 sorhfulliche world  
abuten ende. Ondswere nu 7 were þe zef þu const aþeln me, oðer zette  
me þi luue þe ich zime se swiðe. nawi for min, ah for þin ahne muclehe  
biheue. (AW vii.203-204, f.108a.12-19).*

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<sup>658</sup> See above, pp. 358f.

If you are so totally stubborn and so out of your wits that even with nothing to lose you refuse such an offer with every kind of happiness—then see! I hold here a cruel sword up over your head, to divide body and soul and plunge them both into the fire of hell, to be the devil's whore shamefully and sorrowfully, world without end. Answer me now, and defend yourself against me if you can! Or give me your love that I long for so much, not for my, but for your own great profit [S/W 104].

The phallic sword with which Christ threatens the anchoress in order to compel her love can be contrasted to the sword of Olibrius which threatens St. Margaret as she is faced with a similar choice. After Margaret re-affirms her choice of Christ as lover, reiterating his superior attractions and refusing Olibrius' offer of "love," Olibrius urges her to retract her words, threatening her with the violence of his sword, and offering her the alternative of being his beloved and wedded wife, ruling as his lady at his side. The choice between wife and whore is reversed, as by choosing to be an earthly wife, Margaret will make herself a whore in the spiritual sense. The threat of the sword by which Olibrius attempts to force his will upon her is thus a symbolic rape which parodies the divine ravishing of the soul in the *Ancrene Wisse* passage.<sup>659</sup>

Again, the emphasis is on the choice which the anchoress must make, between Christ and the devil: she can choose to be bride or whore. As Savage and Watson point out:

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<sup>659</sup> For a discussion of symbolic rape in the saints' Lives of the *Katherine Group*, see above p. 163f.

After the account of the "four loves," the lover-knight returns and woos not, this time, a lady of romance but the anchoritic reader in a speech which can be considered the climax of *Ancrene Wisse*. ... everything that has been discussed in the last five parts comes down to a single simple decision: to hear the voice of God or not to hear it.<sup>660</sup>

### THE FIRE OF LOVE

Having presented Christ's forceful wooing, the author of *Ancrene Wisse* proceeds to examine the response of the anchoress. All Christ's wooing in his incarnation and passion is to one end:

*þe soðe sunne iþe undertid wes for þi istihen on heh, o þe hehe rode. forte spreaden ouer al hate luue gleames. þus needful he wes 7 is apet tes dei to ontenden his luue. 7 his leoues heorte* (AW vii.204, f.108a.25-28).

For this the true sun was lifted up on high at noon on the high cross, to spread his hot rays of love over everything; so eager he was, and is to this day, to kindle his love in his beloved's heart [S/W 195].

Thus the author introduces the image of blazing fire which will dominate the ensuing discussion. The anchoress must kindle the fire of love in her heart: to do so, she must choose. She must be either hot or cold, for there is no room for lukewarm love in the heart which is the bower of Christ. So too, in *Hali Meidhad* 38 [S/W 241-242] the anchoress is told that the heat of the Holy Spirit burns brightly without consuming, and that the humble widow or wife who repents her sins with bitter

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<sup>660</sup> AW vii, n. 25, p. 400.

weeping and, like Mary Magdalene, loves God the more deeply for having been forgiven, *in an heate of an honthwile beoð imelt mare ant iʒotten i Godd* (is "more melted and merged in God in the heat of a moment" HM 38.32-33 [S/W 242]) than is the lukewarm proud virgin in a lifetime.

The treatment of the fire which the anchoress is to kindle within her heart begins with a consideration of the story of the woman of Sarepta, the city whose name means "kindling" (AW vii.205 [S/W 195]).<sup>661</sup> As the woman in the story gathered two pieces of wood for her fire, so too the anchoress must kindle the fire of love in her heart with the two pieces of wood which form the cross. Through her meditation upon the body of Christ hanging upon the cross with his arms spread to embrace her and his head bent for a kiss she will find love for Christ in her heart, and he will come and lodge within her as Elijah lodged with the woman of Sarepta.

The fire of love is an image found throughout the anchoritic texts, often associated with the brightness of Christ, the true sun, as it is in *Ancrene Wisse* vii. For example, in *Ureisun* the anchoress prays:

*Iesu al feir . a zein hwam þe sunne nis buten ase a scheadewe . ase þeo  
þet leoseð hire liht, ⁊ schineð a zein þine brihte leore uor hire  
þeosternesse . þu þet zeouest hire liht . ⁊ al ðet leome haueð . alihit mine  
þeostri heorte . ʒif mi bur brithnesse . ⁊ brithte mine soule þet is suti . ⁊  
make hire wuorðe to þine swete wuninge . Ontend me wið blase . of þine  
leitinde luue . Let me beon þi leofmon . ⁊ ler me for to ʒuon þe liuinde  
louerd (UrG 5.11-20).*

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<sup>661</sup> See Shepherd, note to 26.32f, (*AW Six and Seven*, p. 64) for a similar interpretation in Hugh of St. Victor and other twelfth century writers. Shepherd notes that the allegory derives ultimately from Augustine.

Jesus all fair, beside whom the sun is only as a shadow, like one who loses her light and is ashamed of her darkness next to your bright face. You who gave light to her and to all that have light, lighten my shadowy heart. Give my chamber brightness, and brighten my soul, which is dirty, and make her worthy to be your sweet dwelling. Kindle me with a blaze of your fiery love. Let me be your lover, and teach me to love you, living Lord [S/W 322].

This succinct passage combines many of the images found in the discussion of the anchoress's love for Christ: the need to prepare her heart to become the chamber or bower in which Christ dwells, the blazing fire of love, and the union with Christ which that fire signifies. The passage goes on to affirm the need to turn from the world to Christ, contrasting fleshly and spiritual love, which *ne muhen onone wise bedden in one breoste* ("can no way lie together in one heart" UrG 5.28-29 [S/W 322]). Thus this passage emphasizes the choice which faces the anchoress, just as the author of *Ancrene Wisse* will do in the ensuing discussion.

The fire of love is also associated with the presence of the Holy Spirit, as it is in the discussion of Greek fire.<sup>662</sup> In *On Lofsong of ure Louerde*, the anchoress's union with Christ is dependent upon the fire of the Holy Spirit burning within her heart:

*wið þe lai louerd of þe holiȝost . þ is þi feder luue 7 þin . tend mine heorte 7 uorþern al þat is baluful . þer inne 7 fed hit so forðward . þ hit ontende me euere iþine bilieue 7 in þine luue (LLo 15.164-167).*

With the fire of the Holy Spirit, Lord—who is the Father's love, and yours—inflame my heart and burn away all that is hurtful in it, and feed

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<sup>662</sup> See below p. 395.

it busily that it inflames me always in your faith and in your love [S/W 328].

This connection is clearly made in *Seinte Margarete*, as the fire which burns her outward flesh is transformed into the sanctifying flame of the Holy Spirit and the blazing love of Christ (SM 74 [S/W 301]).<sup>663</sup>

The image of the fire of love continues to dominate the discussion of the anchoress's response to the love of Christ in *Ancrene Wisse* vii as the author moves on to the extended discussion of Greek fire (AW vii.205-207 [S/W 195-197]).<sup>664</sup> Greek fire, a liquid incendiary used in siege warfare, is allegorized as the love of Christ, made of *reades monnes blod* ("a red man's blood"), i.e., *iesu crist ireadet wið his ahne blod o þe deore rode* ("Jesus Christ reddened with his own blood on the dear

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<sup>663</sup> See above, p. 263.

<sup>664</sup> For a reference to Greek fire in *Moralia super Evangelia*, and other references, see Dobson, *Moralities*, pp. 11, 182. Ian Bishop cites a further reference in a secular Latin love lyric ("*De Ramis Cadunt Folia*") and discusses the different applications of the image in these texts and *Ancrene Wisse* ("Greek Fire" in *Ancrene Wisse* and Contemporary Texts," *NQ* 26 (1979), pp. 198-199). See also Shepherd, note to 27.11f, p. 65, for a discussion of the history of Greek fire and its basic ingredients. Shepherd traces the use of Greek fire in siege warfare from its first appearance in the late seventh century, when it was spoken of as used by the Greeks against the Arabs (hence the name "Greek" fire). It was an incendiary liquid, poured by the defenders of a castle or city on their attackers, which could, according to Mark the Greek, be extinguished by urine, sand or vinegar. The three basic ingredients were naphtha, pitch and sulphur. The "blood of a red man" is an unusual ingredient, although Shepherd does find one parallel, a discussion of Greek fire inserted into the Latin *On the Birth of Gawain*. In this passage, Greek fire is made from the blood of a red man (i.e. a young man with red hair and freckles) and the blood of a dragon. This text is, however, dated in the second quarter of the thirteenth century, slightly later than *Ancrene Wisse*.



cross" AW vii.205, f.108b.26, 109a.1-2 [S/W 195]). Christ's blood, shed on the two pieces of wood described in the meditation on the woman of Sarepta, will kindle Greek fire in the anchoress's heart. However, she must guard herself carefully against the only things which can quench it: urine (sin and, more specifically, the flesh's love); sand (idleness); and vinegar (a heart made sour by spite or envy). Here the author deliberately ties the discussion of spiritual love and union with Christ to the guarding of the senses and inner feelings, discussed in detail in *Ancrene Wisse* ii and iii.<sup>665</sup> In fact, as Savage and Watson point out, the long meditation on the passion at the end of Part ii (AW ii.56-63 [S/W 87-92]) is more or less recapitulated in the discussion of urine, sand and vinegar (AW vii.205-206 [S/W 196]).<sup>666</sup> The ultimate purpose of the guarding of the senses is the kindling and protection of the fire of love within the anchoress's heart. The image of Greek fire also recalls the anchoress's spiritual combat.<sup>667</sup> Greek fire is thrown down on enemies in order to overcome them; so too, the anchoress's prayers and tears for her enemies, prompted by her love for Christ, will kindle their hearts with love and so overcome them (AW vii.206-207 [S/W 196-197]).

The final paragraph of the discussion of Greek fire contrasts the love of the flesh (the urine which can quench Greek fire) with the spiritual love signified by

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<sup>665</sup> See above, Chapter One.

<sup>666</sup> S/W AW vii, n. 35, p. 402.

<sup>667</sup> See above, Chapter Two.

Greek fire.<sup>668</sup> The anchoress who loves her own flesh too much, or loves another person in the flesh so that she yearns for them too greatly will not receive the sweet comfort of the Holy Spirit. The author points out that even the sweet and holy flesh of Christ had to be withdrawn in order for the disciple to receive the Holy Spirit, and, again using the device of the rhetorical question calling for a judgement which has characterized *Ancrene Wisse* vii, he focuses the attention of his readers upon the choice with which the anchoress is faced:

*Hwen iesu cristes ahne deciples hwil þ̅ ha fleschliche luueden htm neh ham, foreoden þe swetnesse of þe hali gast. ne ne mahte nawt habben baðe togederes, demeð ow seoluen. nis he wod oðer heo þe luueð to swiðe hire ahne flesch. oðer eani mon fleschliche. swa þ̅ ha ȝirne to swiðe his sihðe oðer his speche (AW vii.207, f.110a.4-9).*

When Jesus Christ's own disciples, while they loved to have him near them in the flesh, went without the sweetness of the Holy Spirit, and could not have both at once, judge for yourselves: is not he or she mad who loves her own flesh too much, or loves anybody else in the flesh so that she yearns too greatly to see him or hear him speak? [S/W 197].

The final consideration of Greek fire thus reiterates the *choice* which forms the basis of the anchoress's response to the love of Christ, as she is faced with the

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<sup>668</sup> The contrast between fleshly and spiritual love can also be seen in the contrast between the fire of lust and the fire of love (see, for example, above p. 341). The image of the fire of lust is found throughout the anchoritic texts (eg. AW ii.51 [S/W 84], iv.153 [S/W 156-157], vi.188 [S/W 183]; HM 8 [S/W 228]) and is often connected with the fire of hell (eg. AW ii.107 [S/W 124], iii.130 [S/W 140], v. 157-158 [S/W 160-161], v.166 [S/W 167]). The fire of sin is also kindled by anger which quenches the fire of charity (AW iii.64 [S/W 93], iii.66 [S/W 95]; cp. also SM 72 [S/W 300]) and which is clearly associated with lust in *Seint Katherine* and contrasted with righteous anger and the fire of the Holy Spirit which inflames Katherine and the scholars who are martyred (SK 70-74 [S/W 274], 10-12 [S/W 263]).

mutually exclusive alternatives of earthly and heavenly love, conditioned by the cumulative effect of the preceding episodes to make the only appropriate response. The discussion of the anchoress's choice brings the author back to the purity of heart which began Part vii, and which defines the inner rule (AW I.7 [S/W 48]). Love is the ultimate authority, and through love the anchoress can make all that she touches her own. Love gives the anchoress power over Christ, binding him so that he cannot do anything without love's leave (AW vii.208 [S/W 197-198]). Love gives the anchoress intimate knowledge of Christ: *luue is his chamberleng. his Conseiler. his spuse. þ he ne mei nawt heole wið, Ah teleð al þet he þencheð* ("love is his chamberlain, his counsellor, his spouse, from whom he cannot hide anything, but tells all that he thinks" AW vii.209, f.110b.21-23 [S/W 198]). Love is the lady, the rule above all others which regulates the heart.<sup>669</sup>

### ROMANCE IMAGES

The image of the blazing fire of love further illustrates the need to read images often associated with the conventions of chivalric romance in their theological and devotional context. The same is true of other "romance images" in the anchoritic

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<sup>669</sup> See the discussion of inner and outer rules in AW I.6-7 [S/W 48], discussed above, pp. 18f., where the relationship between the inner rule (love) and the outer rule is described as that of a lady and her servant.

texts. Images common in the conventions of courtly romance are, in fact, more common in other texts of the *Katherine Group* and the *Wooing Group* than in *Ancrene Wisse*. For example, throughout *Seinte Iuliene* Eleusius is presented as a parody of the conventional lover of romance.<sup>670</sup> Riehle discusses the metaphors for love in English mystical writings of the twelfth to fourteenth centuries, pointing out that all of these images derive from the Song of Songs and need not owe a great debt to courtly romance. Among the images discussed by Riehle are: the perfection and beauty of the lover, the mystical kiss, the mystical embrace, love play between God and the soul, love-longing, tears, the wounds of love, the arrows of love, the love-letter, the love-knot or bonds of love, the image of the lover knight, the dove nesting in the rocks (as an image for the soul seeking refuge in the wounds of Christ), and the application of such terms as *derling*, *lemman*, and *sweting* to Christ.<sup>671</sup> All of these images are found in the anchoritic texts; some have been discussed above.<sup>672</sup>

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<sup>670</sup> See above p. 354.

<sup>671</sup> *Middle English Mystics*, Chapter III, "The Song of Songs and metaphors for love in English mysticism," pp. 34-55. Riehle gives several examples of the terms *derling*, *lemman*, and *sweting* applied to Christ in *Ancrene Wisse* and the texts of the *Katherine Group* and the *Wooing Group* (p. 37); more could be found, as these terms abound.

<sup>672</sup> For the perfection and beauty of the lover, see above pp. 353f.; for the mystical embrace and the mystical kiss, see above pp. 308, 323f. and pp. 321, 327f.; for the image of the love-letter, see p. 384; for the image of the dove, see above pp. 142, 348; for the image of God's love play with the soul, see above p. 312. The images of the wounds of love and the arrows of love can be contrasted to the wounds and arrows of sin and lechery, discussed in Chapters Two and Three.

The image of the love-knot is found in *Seinte Katerine*, as Katherine describes herself as knotted to Christ in an indissoluble bond (SK 78 [S/W 275]).<sup>673</sup> The knot which binds Katherine to Christ is contrasted to the "tangled knots" (*cnosti cnotten*) of conventional wisdom, which Katherine unties (SK 60 [S/W 272]). In *Hali Meidhad* the author reminds his readers that the knot of marriage, like the knot of love, is indissoluble; the knot of marriage, however, does not bring joy, but sorrow and misery.<sup>674</sup> The image of the knot is used in *Ancrene Wisse* vii in quite a different way, as the author compares Christ's love to the love between mother and child (not man and woman):

*Mei moder he seið forȝeoten hire child? ant þah heo do, ich ne mei þe forȝeoten neauer. ... Me cnut his gurdel to habben þoht of a þing, ah ure lauereð for he nalde neauer forȝeoten us, dude mearke of þurlunge, in ure munegunge i ba twu his honden. (AW vii.202, f.107a.17-19,21-24).*

"Can a mother," he says, "forget her child? And even though she does, I cannot forget you." ... People put knots in their belts to remind them of something; but our Lord, so that he would never forget us, put the marks of piercing on both his hands to remember us [S/W 193].<sup>675</sup>

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<sup>673</sup> Cp. SM 76.8-11 [S/W 302], where Margaret prays to be united to Christ in a similar bond through her torture by submersion: *Festne wið fulluht mi sawle to þe seoluen. ... ant bring me to þi brihte bur, brudgume of wunne* ("Bind with baptism my soul to yourself, ... and bring me to your bright chamber, bridegroom of joy").

<sup>674</sup> Cp. HM 8 [S/W 228], where maidenhood is described as the seal which seals the anchoress to Christ, the title through which she is wedded to him, and SM 50 [S/W 290], where Christ sets his seal upon Margaret and her virginity.

<sup>675</sup> For a close parallel in Peter of Blois, *Twelve Benefits of Tribulation*, see Shepherd *AW Six and Seven*, 24.20f.n., p. 61.

The knot which is tied in a belt to aid the memory becomes the deliberate piercing of Christ's hands, an eloquent reminder of the love-knot which binds us to him.

The comparison of Christ's love to that of a mother is also the context of the use of the image of God's love play with the soul in *Ancrene Wisse*. For example, in the parable of the man with a new wife, the early years of the anchoress's enclosure when she is not strongly tempted, allegorized as the period of courtship, are described as ball play (AW iv.112 [S/W 128]).<sup>676</sup> Similarly, in another passage God is compared to a mother playing with a young child when he allows the anchoress to be tempted:

*he pleieð wið us as þe moder wið hire zunge deorling. flið from him 7 hut htre. 7 let him sitten ane. 7 lokin zeorne abuten cleopien dame dame. 7 wepen ane hwile. 7 þenne wið spredde eames leapeð lahhinde forð. cluppeð 7 cusseð 7 wipeð his ehnen. Swa ure lauerd let us ane iwurðen oðer hwile. 7 wiðdraheð his grace. his cunfort 7 his etne. þet we ne findeð swetnesse i na þing þ we wel doð. ne sauur of heorte. 7 þah i þ ilke point ne luueð us ure lauerd neauer þe leasse. ah deð hit for muche luue. (AW iv.118-119, f.62b.7-16).*

[he] is playing with us as the mother with her young darling. She runs away from him and hides herself, and lets him sit alone and look eagerly about crying "Mother! Mother!" and crying for a while; and then with open arms she jumps out laughing, and hugs and kisses him and wipes his eyes. So our Lord sometimes lets us be alone and withdraws his grace, his comfort and his support, so that we find no sweetness in anything that we do well, nor savour in our hearts. And yet at the same moment our Lord loves us none the less, for he does it out of his great love [S/W 132].

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<sup>676</sup> See above, pp. 387f.

The yearning of the anchoress for Christ when his grace is so withdrawn is also described in the image of love-longing. The anchoress's ascetic life is compared to the yearning of a wife for her absent husband in a delightful parable illustrating the value of suffering for Christ's love:

*zet seið moni mon. hwæt is godd þe betere þah ich pini me for his luue?  
 ... A mon þe were feor ifearen. ⁊ me come ⁊ talde him þ̅ his deore spuse  
 se swiðe murnede efter him. þ̅ heo wið uten him delit nefde i na þing. ah  
 were for þoht of his luue leane ⁊ eltheowet. nalde him betere likin. þen þ̅  
 me seide him þ̅ ha gleowde ⁊ gomnede ⁊ wedde wið oþre me:.. ⁊ iluede  
 i delices? Alswa ure lauerd þ̅ is þe sawlc spus þ̅ sið al þ̅ ha deð þah 'e  
 hehe sitte, he is ful wel ipaiet þ̅ ha murneð efter him ⁊ wule hihin toward  
 hire mucheles þe swiðere. wið zeoue of his grace oðer fecchen hire allunge  
 to him to gloire ⁊ to blisse þurh wuniende. (AW vi.187, f.99a.28-99b.1,  
 3-13).*

"Yet," says many a one, "How is God the better for it when I torment myself for his love?" .... If a man was travelling far off, and someone came and told him that his dear wife was grieving for him so much that she had no delight in anything without him, but was thin and pallid in the memory of his love, would he not like this better than if someone said to him that she was radiant, and playing and flirting with other men, and living in pleasure? Just so our Lord, who is the soul's husband, whc. sees all she does though he sits on high, is very well-pleased that she grieves for him so much, and will hurry towards her all the more quickly with the gift of his grace, or take her completely to him, to glory and lasting joy [S/W 182-183].

The yearning of the anchoress for Christ's love is the delving for the treasure in the heart (AW ii.59 [S/W 89]).<sup>677</sup> Finally, her longing to be with God whom she loves

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<sup>677</sup> See above, pp. 66f.

is the third bitterness which the anchoress suffers in her enclosure (AW vi.191 [S/W 185]).<sup>678</sup>

Christ's longing for the anchoress's soul is also described in terms typical of the bridal mysticism surveyed by Riehle. Christ's pain on the cross which he endured for her love is described as a stabbing in his soul, causing him to sigh in grief (AW ii.60 [S/W 90]); his thirst on the cross is his yearning for the soul's health, unquenched by the vinegar of a bitter heart (AW ii.62 [S/W 91]).<sup>679</sup> Finally, just as the anchoress on earth longs for her beloved in heaven, so Christ in heaven longs for his beloved on earth and yearns for her coming (SM 80 [S/W 303]).

The bitterness of love-longing is contrasted with the sweetness of the anchoress's union with Christ. The sweetness of a devout heart is bought by bitterness, just as the spouse of the Song of Songs ascends to the hill of incense by the mountain of myrrh. The Marys' anointing of Christ with myrrh also symbolizes the bitterness which becomes the sweetness of love, as Christ stretches himself towards the anchoress *as þing þ ismired is. ⁊ makeð him nesche ⁊ softe to hondlin* ("as one who is anointed, and makes himself smooth and soft to touch" (AW vi.191-

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<sup>678</sup> Savage and Watson note the mystical quality of this love-longing: "Anguish at having to go on living, still not fully united with Christ, is an emotion that is frequently described as characterizing the highest spiritual states" (AW vi, n. 32, p. 396).

<sup>679</sup> Contrast Maxentius' thirst for blood, prompted by rage and lust (SK 118 [S/W 281]).



192 [S/W 185-186]).<sup>640</sup> The image of the sweetness of Christ and his love permeates the anchoritic texts, merging with the erotic imagery of eating as Christ's sweetness is both tasted and felt (AW ii.49 [S/W 82]; cp. SK 78 [S/W 275]; UrG 5.1-20, 7.77-88 [S/W 322-323]). Christ is the honey-drop, sweeter than honey in the mouth, the heart's balm and the soul's sweetness (WLd 20.1-21.36 [S/W 247-248]; cp. UrG 5.4-5 [S/W 322]). He is the sweetest to smell (SK 34, 78 [S/W 267, 275]; SM 50, 62 [S/W 290, 295]), the softest to touch (SK 34 [S/W 267]; UrG 5.7 [S/W 322]).

The imagery which is used to depict the spousal metaphor in the anchoritic works is unreservedly sensual, using meditation upon sound (Christ's loving words), touch (his softness), sight (his beauty), taste and smell (his sweetness) to evoke a passionate response in the anchoritic reader. The eroticism of this presentation of Christ as the ideal lover and spouse is not dependent upon the romance tradition for its sexual overtones, but is rather to be understood in the light of the sensual and erotic mysticism grounded in the imagery of the Song of Songs. This mysticism finds one of its earliest and most famous detailed exposition in the works of Bernard of Clairvaux. The spousal metaphors in Bernard's writings, however, are confined to a spiritual context in which there is no room for the sensual rootedness in the body which is found in the anchoritic works. For a parallel use of the erotic imagery of union with the divine lover one must turn to the writings of continental mystics such

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<sup>640</sup> Savage and Watson note that "the imagery is highly erotic, charged with the language of the Canticles," as the Marys (who represent both bitterness and the anchoress) anoint Christ with the sweetness of their love (AW vi, n. 34, p. 396-397).

as Hadewijch and Hildegard of Bingen, both of whom use unabashedly sensual images to celebrate the potential of the female body and its union with Christ. It is in the context of this celebration of feminine potential that the anchoritic texts must be read.

## CONCLUSION

The spirituality portrayed in *Ancrene Wisse* and the anchoritic works associated with it is rooted in the anchoress's own situation; a female solitary, enclosed within the four walls of her anchorhouse. The images used to express that spirituality are drawn from her experience of enclosure and from the essence of her femaleness. These two elements come together in the matrix of anchorhouse/body/heart, in which the anchoress's female body becomes identified with the anchorhouse in which it is enclosed. The spirituality of these anchoritic texts is thus deeply grounded in the anchoress's own sexuality and her perception of her own body.

The body/anchorhouse is the enclosed building in which the purity of chaste virginity is maintained in order to guard the purity of the chaste heart; it is the sanctuary to which the anchoress flees from the perils of the world; it is the anchorage which is accessible only through the window of the eye and the doorway of the heart; it is the walled city assailed through the gates of the five senses; it is the castle under siege defended by the five senses, guardians who must themselves be carefully regulated; it is the wilderness through which the anchoress journeys towards her heavenly goal; it is the prison in which the anchoress serves the sentence of penance for her sins and the sins of others; it is the grave in which she is interred with Christ; it is the cross on which she hangs with him. However, it is also the place of reward and rest, of union and communion with her lover and lord. The cross upon which she suffers with Christ is also the cross upon which she embraces him in

passionate love and longing; the earth in which she digs the pit of her grave (literally or metaphorically) is also the garden in which she cultivates the virtues of her heart. Thus, the body/anchorhouse is the heavenly city where she sings and dances with her divine spouse; it is the bower which she prepares for the coming of her Beloved; it is the inn to which Christ descends in the eucharist; it is the womb in which the Incarnation is re-enacted.

The imagery of the body/anchorhouse is thus intensely sensual and sensuous in nature. The anchoress's sojourn in her earthly body/anchorhouse can be described in terms of suffering and meditation; the suffering of her body and meditation upon her body and the body of Christ. Her meditation begins with a forceful recognition of her body and its sinfulness. She is encouraged to meditate upon the filth and slime of her body and the five senses which both guard and imperil the chaste purity of body and heart. She must painstakingly ponder the potential unruliness of her senses and regulate them wisely, that they may defend her from the attacks of the forces of hell. In her meditation, she must carefully consider her vulnerability, both physical and spiritual. As a woman, she is subject not only to the threats posed by her own desires, but also to the lusts of others. She must therefore be careful to avoid any situation that could put her at risk of inciting such desires. The image of the animal which falls into a pit, the dragon which threatens St. Margaret in a blatantly sexual manner, the phallic sword of Olibrius, the symbolic rapes of the virgin martyrs, all combine to warn the anchoress of the danger she is in. She must also

take care to tame her own desires, averting the sins of the five senses by suffering through her senses. Through meditation and asceticism, the anchoress purifies her body and the heart it encloses, preparing them for the coming of Christ.

In spite of her best efforts, the anchoress cannot entirely escape the wounds of sin inflicted by the five senses. Her physical asceticism can in part atone for her sins, but the wounds of the senses are ultimately healed only by the five wounds of Christ, inflicted in his passion. Meditation upon her own body thus shifts to meditation upon the body of Christ as he hangs on the cross; his sufferings in his five senses which heal the wounds inflicted by her own. In addition, the anchoress's meditation upon the passion of Christ enables her to endure her own suffering with equanimity, recognizing it as an imitation of Christ's agony on the cross. In her anchorhouse she hangs on the cross with Christ, portraying his suffering in her own ascetic life, healing her mutilated body and soul.

However, the anchoress's ascetic life is more than an imitation of Christ's passion; it is her union with him in suffering and love. She throws herself into his arms as he hangs on the cross in a passionate embrace which transforms agony into bliss. Meditation upon her own body and upon the body of Christ merge as she hangs on the cross with Christ in suffering and as she takes his body and blood into her own through the eucharist. In the eucharist, as the anchoress consumes the body and blood of Christ, her body and his become one. Her body is the chamber in

which she embraces her beloved, the inn which shelters him and the womb which nurtures him as the human flesh in which he is enclosed is her own.

The body which sins is thus also the means of redemption and atonement for sin, not only through suffering, but also through the re-enactment of the supreme paradox of Christianity, the Incarnation. The anchoress participates in the mystery of the Incarnation through her female flesh, in which Christ becomes Incarnate once again through her daily meditation upon the eucharist. The flesh which the medieval world would teach her to despise for its exceptional vulnerability is also venerated for its unique capacity for redemption. As in the Incarnation itself, that which is weak and shameful is that which redeems the world.

Thus, as the preceding chapters have shown, the imagery used to describe each stage of the anchoress's sojourn in her anchorhouse focuses upon her body, which is at every turn associated with the body of Christ. This thesis has examined this imagery in terms of the paradoxical presentation of the anchoress as the chaste virgin who is at the same time the passionate lover. The first four chapters focused on the issue of sexual purity. In Chapter One, we examined the image of the enclosed body, guarded by the five senses, identified with the crucified body of Christ, as he suffered in each of his five senses. In Chapter Two, the body was described as the castle assailed, attacked by lust and by those who are driven by lust. The besieged body of the anchoress is identified with the castle of Christ's body which is the anchoress's refuge, and protected by the cross upon which Christ's body hangs.

In Chapter Three, the image of the wounded body of the anchoress, torn through her ascetic life as the bodies of the virgin martyrs are mutilated by their assailants, is applied to her soul, wounded through sin. The torn flesh of the anchoress is identified with the torn flesh of Christ, as her suffering becomes an identification with the suffering of Christ on the cross by which she is healed and redeemed. The anchoress's imitation of the suffering of Christ transforms her torn flesh into the means of healing her wounded soul, as the five physical wounds of Christ restore her soul, wounded through her five physical senses. Finally, in Chapter Four, the wounded body is transformed into the adorned body as the anchoress anticipates her reward in the heavenly Jerusalem in the earthly Jerusalem which is her anchorhouse, the city built in the heart. The adorned body of the anchoress, beautified through virtue and the blazing light of chastity, is identified with the resurrected body of Christ, whose light is reflected in the heavenly maidens' garments as they follow him in a cosmic dance of unity and love.

Chapters Five and Six focused on the imagery of the anchoress as lover and bride. Chapter Five explored the imagery of mystical union with Christ, as the anchoress's body and the heart which it encloses become the arbour, nest, bower, and womb into which Christ descends. Here, the body of the anchoress is identified with the incarnate body of Christ, not only as it hangs upon the cross, but also in the physical form of the eucharist and in the manger. Finally, in Chapter Six, the spousal metaphor reintroduced the image of the body as the castle assailed in the parable of

Christ as the lover-knight. The anchoress is the bride of Christ, enclosed within her earthen castle, who is redeemed by the warrior-Christ. Here, however, the focus shifts from the battle itself to the response of the anchoress to the love which Christ proclaims through his wounded body, torn in her defense. The only possible response to such love is to give herself, body and soul, to the one who gave himself so completely for her salvation. The anchoress must enkindle her body and heart with the fire of love for Christ, so that she blazes with the light of her love in anticipation of the light of the resurrection in which she will be united with her beloved forever.

The question which remains is, then, does the spirituality reflected in the anchoritic texts, so rooted and grounded in the immediate, physical world, offer a valid and valuable alternative to the intellectual mysticism of Bernard and his school, or is it an inferior form of mystical experience, grounded in misogynist assumptions that women are essentially emotional and passive in nature and are therefore capable only of an emotional, relational mysticism which is ultimately "second-rate." It has been argued, for example, that the two most prominent female archetypes in the anchoritic literature, Eve and Mary, offer the anchoress the alternatives of temptress or submissive handmaiden. Woman as Eve incarnates the temptations of the world, the flesh and the devil. She sins through her sight, which leads her to desire, through her speech in babbling to the devil, and in persuading Adam to sin, and through her actions in provoking lust, as did her daughters Dinah and Bathsheba. Mary, on the other hand, preserves her sexual purity by keeping herself veiled and enclosed, is



silent and submissive to the will of God, and is essentially passive. She is exalted in the religious sphere, but also denies much of the anchoress's potential for growth. Woman is thus faced with the choice between scapegoat and martyr.<sup>681</sup>

However, while the Virgin Mary is held up as an example to the anchoress, far more frequent are the references to doughty female saints, such as those depicted in the saints' Lives of the *Katherine Group*, and to Biblical women such as Esther and Judith. While Esther is cited as an example of hiddenness and purity, she is also a woman who takes an active role in the redemption of her people, asserting her will and raising her voice on their behalf. Judith, an archetype of enclosure, is anything but passive, as she aggressively attacks the devil Holofernes in a bloodthirsty slaughter which vanquishes him forever. The saints whose lives are held up as models for the anchoress are aggressive spitfires, who challenge the authority of family, state, and society at large in order to assert their autonomy and their right to choose to whom they will commit their bodies and their souls. The seemingly passive enclosed life is in fact the arena for a spiritual battle which surpasses anything which the anchoress might encounter in the world.

There are several objections to Robertson's argument that a spirituality grounded in the physical world, and in particular the female body, is inferior. First of all, she entirely ignores the "Wooing Group." As we have seen, this group of texts,

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<sup>681</sup> See Frost, "Attitudes," pp. 235-241. Cp. also Robertson, *Early English Devotional Prose*, who argues in a similar vein.

especially *Wohunge*, are invaluable aids in interpreting the erotic mysticism of *Ancrene Wisse*. Further, Robertson misinterprets the imagery of motherhood which is found in the anchoritic literature, viewing the imagery of impregnation as an essentially passive metaphor rather than a rich celebration of the creative and redemptive potential of the female body. Robertson thus overlooks a vital aspect of the imagery of the female body which is found in these texts, where the female body embodies and reenacts the essential mystery of Christianity. Robertson herself is guilty of assuming that the erotic mysticism which characterizes female spirituality throughout the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries is an inferior mysticism, a misogynist assumption in itself. The mysticism of *Ancrene Wisse* is more appropriate to female mystical experience, but if this is different from the mysticism experienced by men it is not necessarily inferior. One could just as easily argue that men are incapable of the kind of mysticism experienced by medieval women, and that they are in some way diminished by this lack of a relational understanding of union with a God who is defined in relational terms as love. In addition, one must recognize that the character of English mysticism as a whole is more concerned with personal devotion than metaphysics.<sup>682</sup>

Robertson also suggests that a mysticism which is grounded in "quotidian" imagery and in the anchoress's own experience is in some way inferior to the

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<sup>682</sup> H.E. Allen, "The Mystical Lyrics of the *Manuel des Pechiez*," *Romanic Rev.* 9 (1918) 162-164.

"intellectual" mysticism of Bernard and his followers.<sup>683</sup> She criticizes the authors of the anchoritic texts for their misogynist assumption that women are incapable of this "higher" mysticism, an assumption which is not evident in the texts themselves where the issue is not discussed. Again, one must question the wisdom of the comparison itself; the type of imagery found in the anchoritic texts is typical of the realism of thirteenth century devotion, if not of the mysticism of Bernard.<sup>684</sup>

Robertson's objections to the imagery of the anchoritic texts are grounded in a Platonic, one might almost say gnostic, world-view which separates the physical and the spiritual along rigid lines. The physical world, as the mere shadow of the spiritual world, is only of limited value since it can only imperfectly reflect eternal truths. For the most part, the material world and the body which is a part of it, is aligned with the forces of evil.

Robertson suggests, however, that the condescending attitude which she ascribes to the *Ancrene Wisse* author can "backfire," as by abandoning the abstract in favour of the celebration of the immediate, concrete world, the author "unwittingly" produces a co-ordination of body and soul, of God and the world. Robertson sees this as an inadvertent "subversion" of the author's misogynist views, a subversion which nevertheless gives women confidence. She concludes:

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<sup>683</sup> See Robertson, *Early English Devotional Prose*, *passim*.

<sup>684</sup> Allen, "Mystical Lyrics," p. 162, and Thomson, *Woh:zng* p. xviii.

However, although a direct address to a woman's experience does give a woman's voice legitimacy and potential power, that reach of voice finally is restricted by categories that define woman as mindless.<sup>685</sup>

As suggested in the Introduction to this thesis, however, the co-ordination of body and soul and of God and the world in *Ancrene Wisse* and its related texts, is not in fact a "subversion" of the authors' views, but reflects the deeply sacramental nature of the world as they see it. The physical world reveals the spiritual, however imperfectly; the microcosm reflects the macrocosm. The imagery which Robertson identifies as "backfiring" on the author in fact embodies a central conviction of the anchoritic texts: that the anchoress can use the physical world to her spiritual advantage, even as she flees it for her spiritual protection. Like St. Margaret, she can take control of the world around her and manipulate it for her own spiritual transformation.

The imagery of *Ancrene Wisse* and its associated texts portrays a spirituality which is profoundly feminine. This spirituality, rooted in images of the female body and in the vision of a union with Christ which is described in feminine terms as both erotic and nurturing, provides an alternative to the spirituality which characterizes male mysticism. The anchoress can draw upon resources which are distinctively her own in order to enter into a relationship with Christ that more than compensates for the human companionship which she has forsaken in her enclosure. As Elizabeth Petroff notes:

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<sup>685</sup> *Early English Devotional Prose*, p. 75.

The process of vision taught women not to sacrifice their desire but to transform it, to strengthen it by purifying it, so that finally all their most conscious desire might be directed towards union with the divine. They learned how to remain open to their desire, their yearning; through their experience of suffering on a divine scale they acquired a way of measuring and validating whatever pain there was in their unsatisfied yearning, which helped them to remain open to it.<sup>686</sup>

It is this kind of spirituality which the anchoritic texts seek to convey.

Petroff suggests that the erotic spirituality which is characteristic of feminine spirituality is, in fact, "a highly significant validation of the feminine," in its subversion of the hierarchy of male dominance. The image of the male, bleeding Christ is reinterpreted as "the feminine, the all nurturing blood, is discovered to be the origin of the efficacy of the sacrifice of Christ."<sup>687</sup> Meditation upon the passion becomes meditation on "the dialectics of desire, the interplay of aggression and surrender,"<sup>688</sup> just as it does in the anchoritic texts, as the anchoress aggressively pursues her elusive lover and she and Christ find mutual surrender in love. The anchoritic texts thus offer the anchoress a spirituality which is rooted in the very essence of her being, both as creature and as woman.

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<sup>686</sup> *Medieval Women's Visionary Literature*, p. 18.

<sup>687</sup> *Medieval Women's Visionary Literature*, pp. 18-19. This is in distinct contrast to Robertson's suggestion that women's association with blood and fluid places them in an inferior position, both physically and spiritually (*Early English Devotional Prose*, pp. 32-43 and 63).

<sup>688</sup> *Medieval Women's Visionary Literature*, p. 18.

The anchoritic texts and the women who read them offer a rich field of study. The texts are riddled with paradox, with their stress on sexual purity as a prerequisite for a relationship with God which is described in terms both sensual and sensuous, and their use of images from the everyday world to enhance a spirituality which is defined in terms of withdrawal from that world. The spirituality of the anchoritic texts focuses on the anchoress's unique situation, the reclusive devotee enclosed within the four walls of her anchorhouse and within her female body, seeking and being sought by a masculine God who woos her in very realistic terms. Christ competes with the outside world which the anchoress has rejected but can never truly escape, proving over and over his superior attractions and his immeasurable love. The only possible response to such love is to love in return—completely, unstintingly, and eternally.

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## APPENDIX A

### OUTLINE OF *ANCRENE WISSE* VII

#### I. Love Purifies the Heart (AW 195-198 [S/W 189-190])

##### A. Suffering as a Tool (AW 195-196 [S/W 189])

1. Cultivation of the Heart
2. Clear Sight

##### B. Love Outweighs All (AW 197-198 [S/W 189-190])

#### II. Why God Ought To Be Loved (AW 197-204 [S/W 190-195])

##### A. God's Great Love-Gift (AW 197-200 [S/W 190-192])

1. God's Gift of Himself (AW 197-198 [S/W 190])
2. Christ as a Man Who Woos, I (AW 198-200 [S/W 190-192])
  - a. Simile of a King (AW 198 [S/W 190])
  - b. The Parable of the Royal Wooing (AW 198-199 [S/W 190-191])
    - (1) Introduction: the scene is set
    - (2) The Wooing from Afar
      - (a) The king sends gifts and aid.
      - (b) The lady is unmoved
      - (c) The rhetorical question ("what more do you want?")
    - (3) The Wooing in Person
      - (a) The king comes himself
      - (b) The lady is unmoved
      - (c) The rhetorical question ("is this contempt not strange?")
    - (4) The Final Battle
      - (a) The king gives his life and is restored
      - (b) The lady's response is not specified
      - (c) The rhetorical question

- c. The Interpretation of the Parable (AW 199-200 [S/W 191-192])
  - (1) The Allegorical Interpretation
    - (a) The king/Christ
    - (b) The battle/crucifixion
    - (c) The shield/body/cross
  - (2) The Magnitude of Christ's Love
    - (a) The price of love
    - (b) Meditation on the shield/crucifix

B. The Superiority of Christ's Love (AW 200-204 [S/W 192-194])

- 1. The Four Loves (AW 200-202 [S/W 192-193])
  - a. Between Friends
  - b. Man and Woman
  - c. Mother and Child
  - d. Soul and Body
- 2. Christ as a Man Who Woos, II (AW 202-204 [S/W 193-194])
  - a. Christ's Great Love
  - b. Christ's Wooing Speech
    - (1) Love as a Gift
    - (2) Love as a Purchase
    - (3) Love Taken by Force

C. The anchoress's Response (AW 204 [S/W 194-195])

- 1. The Rhetorical Question
- 2. The Fire of Love

III. The Fire of Love (AW 205-207 [S/W 195-197])

A. The Woman of Sarepta (AW 205 [S/W 195])

- 1. Enkindling Love
- 2. The Wood of the Cross

B. Greek Fire (AW 205-207 [S/W 195-197])

1. The Blood of Christ (what kindles Greek fire)
2. Urine, Sand and Vinegar (what quenches Greek fire)
3. Greek Fire as a Defense
4. Fleshly Love

IV. The anchoress's Choice (AW 208-209 [S/W 197-198])

A. Earthly or Heavenly Comfort (AW 208 [S/W 197-198])

B. The Power of Love (AW 209 [S/W 198])

1. Love Makes All It Touches Its Own
2. Love Binds

C. Heavenly Joys (AW 209 [S/W 198])

V. Love Rules the Heart (AW 209 [S/W 198])









