THE TEXTUAL CONTEXT

OF THE

VERNON MANUSCRIPT

A Thesis Submitted to the College of

Graduate Studies and Research

in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements

for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

in the Department of English,

University of Saskatchewan,

Saskatoon

By

J. Robert Duncan

Spring, 2000

Canad̈ä

PERMISSION TO USE

Table of Contents

Abstract

This dissertation comes out of my interests in the occasionality of medieval texts, and in the ways medieval theories of textually and literature could be applied to vernacular literature of fourteenth-century England. I wanted to study how these theories could be applied to a medieval manuscript, and the Vernon is an ideal candidate for this. At first glance it seems to a unorganized collection of texts that do not belong together: some are contemplative, some teach basic religious values; some are allegorical, others are narrative; and some are treatises, others are emotive lyrics.

Throughout the dissertation, I examine how the genesis of the manuscript can be explained in term of medieval theories of literature. These theories define concepts of structure and genre that are far removed from our own and these reveal more underlying cohesion to the manuscript than there first seems to be. Medieval scholars defined structure in non-linear, relational ways. They define genre as modes of presentation and reception, which are closely related to the occasion of the manuscript. These reveal that the Vernon manuscript is not a loose gathering of vaguely related texts, but rather a carefully organized compilation of texts that define a program of religious instruction for a particular community of secular or semi-secular believers. The manuscript's title, Sowlehele, or Spiritual Healing defines this program.

The Vernon is written for a community. The texts in the manuscript are removed from their original intended audiences and presented as part of a program that teaches basic, orthodox, religious instruction to a group of people at various levels of religious knowledge. One of the primary aims of the texts and the manuscript is to teach its readers to follow the middle life, which encourages them to incorporate religious practice into their secular lives

and to strengthen their communities through this. The Vernon thus satisfies the desire that late fourteenth century people had for religious instruction in the vernacular and the church's need to maintain orthodoxy in those turbulent times.

Chapter 1: The Vernon and its Contexts

1.1 Introduction

The Vernon manuscript is a large collection of religious verse and prose written in the late 1380s or early 1390s in the area around Worcestershire. It is a remarkable manuscript that brings together almost all of what modern readers would consider the major texts of Middle English religious literature: *Piers Plowman*, *The Pricke of Conscience*, *The Northern Homily Cycle*, *The South English Legendary* and works of Rolle and Hilton. However, the Vernon is more valued by modern critics for its collection of lyrics, miracles, religious romances and minor prose works.[1] The value of the manuscript is attested to by the volumes of Vernon texts that have been published over the last century or more, such as Horstmann and Furnivall's *Minor Poems of the Vernon Manuscript* and Norman Blake's *Middle English Religious Prose* (which contains a number of the minor prose works in the Vernon). None of these publications or critical surveys look much beyond these minor works. Modern critics considered the Vernon to be an inferior edition of its texts[2] because the scribes either adapted to their own dialect, or because the texts are late and greatly altered editions. So the unique texts of the Vernon are more valued than those that are found in many other manuscripts or are considered canonical by modern readers.

---

[1] The Vernon is also valued among art historians as the first and one of the few English examples of the realistic style of illustration that was popular on the Continent at the time. This appears in the illustrations for *The Miracles of Our Lady*. See Kathleen Scott, *Later Gothic Manuscripts* (London: Harvey Miller, 1996) 46. Margaret Rickert first made this claim for the Vernon in her volume for the *Pelican History of Art*, *Painting in Britain: The Middle Ages* (London: Penguin, 1954) 206.

[2] An exception to this is Skeat's parallel text edition of *Piers Plowman*, which uses the Vernon as the base for the A-Text (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1886).

The modern reception of the Vernon manuscript thus reveals a great deal about the assumptions and values of modern critics of medieval literature. Their attitude over the past century or more has been generally reductive. Editors attempt to reduce poems to their "best text", whether this exists in one manuscript or as a collation from various manuscripts, as we see with the works of Langland or Chaucer. Critics thus tend to remove a text from a particular instance of its appearances, and attempt to restore it to a hypothetical original state that supposedly best reflects the author's intention. This attitude to medieval texts is based on modern ideas of the author as the creator of a text and its sole arbiter of its meaning. In this sense a manuscript is seen more as a repository of texts rather than as a text in itself. However, critics like Alistair Minnis have shown that the medieval author is one type of writer among many, and that most writers whom we would call authors thought of themselves as something else: compilers, collectors or scribes, for example.[3] In this sense, then, a manuscript can be seen as a text that, while it contains other texts, does have its own unique textuality that binds the it together. A manuscript's textuality is distinct from the textuality of its individual texts because it is written for a particular place and time. This textuality is rhetorical in that the manuscript is written for a particular audience with a specific sense of occasion. Thus, the study of a medieval manuscript will reveal a great deal about medieval attitudes to texts and about the audiences that read them. It will show how and why a text was used for a particular occasion. The Vernon is an excellent example of this process.

---

[3]Minnis discusses these ideas in his *Medieval Theory of Authorship*, 2nd ed. (London: Scholar Press, 1984). I will discuss his arguments in more detail throughout this work.

The comprehensiveness of the Vernon makes it ideal for such a study. It contains a breadth of religious writings that would appeal to a broad audience. However, it was written in the late fourteenth century, a time when such texts could not exist without controversy. This is the period of the Lollard movement and the movement towards vernacular religion, of which Lollardy is really an expression. Conservative factions, troubled by both the specific and general movements, sought ways to control vernacular texts. The textuality of the Vernon is defined by this controversy. The patrons or the compiler have created an orthodox manuscript that provides its audience with a book that satisfies their desires to seek religious instruction on their own while reinforcing their orthodoxy. The Vernon is in fact part of a larger project. It has a sister volume, the Simeon manuscript, which appears to have been identical in every way to the Vernon (the Simeon is badly damaged, so it is difficult to say for sure), and both manuscripts took at least four years to write.[4] Together, these manuscripts make a strong statement and the process of their textuality is well worth studying.

A number of modern critics have studied medieval attitudes to textuality. Some examples of these are A.J. Minnis, who studies medieval theories of authorship; J.B. Allen, who studied the place of literature in the spectrum of medieval learning; and Mary Carruthers, W.A. Pantin and others who have studied medieval reading practices and attitudes to texts. Rita Copeland has studied the place of vernacular texts in the literary

---

[4] See Ian Doyle's introduction to *The Vernon Manuscript: A Facsimile of Bodleian Library Oxford MS Eng. Poet A.1* (Cambridge: Brewer, 1987) 6 for estimates of the date. Doyle's estimate assumes that the main scribe of the Vernon worked full time every working day of the year.

traditions handed down from the classical period and adapted by medieval scholars. There are many other examples, and some of these theories of reading practices will be referred to throughout this work. While these critics have laid a lot of the groundwork, few critics have taken up their work and applied it to medieval literature. This is in part because the research of Minnis, Allen and the others is based on the writings of continental and usually theological scholars, and it can be hard to determine how familiar a writer in England was with the writings of a scholar from the continent who lived more than a century earlier. Can we assume that the writings of Aquinas, the Victorines, and others became part of an intellectual milieu, and that at least the ideas of their writings were understood by the writers of the Vernon and the texts in it? Part of my aim in this thesis is show that these continental theories can indeed be applied to a vernacular text like the Vernon.

1.2   Description of the Manuscript

The Vernon is a remarkable text, not only for its comprehensiveness, but also for its physical presence. Both factors help to define its textuality. It is the largest extant manuscript of Middle English. Originally, it was between 422 and 496 leaves long (only 350 remain). Its pages measure 544 x 393 mm and it weighs 22 kg. It is a large and heavy text, difficult to carry, store and read. The binding of the manuscript is medieval, so the order of the quires is probably as the compiler intended. Ian Doyle estimates that the cost of manufacture for the Vernon would have been between £33-43, about one quarter the annual income of a small religious house such as those in the area around Worcestershire,

and about half the income of a private house.[5]

The book is a professional work, both in terms of its appearance and its selection and arrangement of the texts. It is written on a fine vellum in a clear and neat Anglicana hand. It is also well decorated. There are a number of illustrations, though these are a small part of the manuscript. There are coloured capitals, vinets and scroll work on every page. The texts appear to have been organized with some care and most are clearly rubricated (in some cases space is left for rubrication that is not filled in). Finally, there is a table of contents at the beginning of the manuscript and page numbers throughout, all of which make it easier for readers to find their way through the work. The professionalism of the Vernon appears to indicate that this manuscript was created for a purpose. It is not a sort of personal collection of favourite texts put together over time as the texts were found (as some manuscripts appear to be). Rather, the Vernon appears to be part of a project to create at least two books of this nature for specific purposes.

The bulk of the Vernon was written by one scribe, called Scribe B (by order of appearance in the manuscript). He wrote most of the Vernon, but also contributed to the Simeon. The other scribe of the Vernon, Scribe A, made his contribution after Scribe B. He wrote the first quire of the Vernon, which contains a table of contents and Aelred of Rievaulx's *De institutione inclusarum*, as well as some of the rubrication throughout the manuscript. Doyle estimates that it would have taken Scribe B about four years to complete

---

[5] See Doyle, *Facsimile* 15. Doyle calculates the cost based on the combined costs of the Vernon and Simeon (I just divided the total in half). This total cost may not be a useful figure since it may have been shared by the two destinations for the books or by more than one patron.

his work on both the Vernon and Simeon.

It is possible to determine an approximate date for the Vernon based on internal allusions and the known date of some of the texts. These suggest the late 1380's or early 1390's. One of the Vernon Refrain Lyrics, "A Warning to be Ware", refers to an earthquake in 1382. A number of other texts were not written before the 1380s, including Book I of Hilton's *Scale of Perfect* and the A-Text of *Piers Plowman* with John Butt's conclusion, which the Vernon may have contained (the last leaves of *Pies Plowman* are missing). The 1380s are then a minimum date. The Simeon has texts that may have been written in the 1390s, which suggests a much later date for the manuscripts.[6]

The dialect of the manuscript places it in the area around Worcestershire. The *Middle English Dialect Project* places the manuscript around northern Worcestershire. Others broaden the location to include Warwickshire, Shropshire, Staffordshire or Herefordshire.[7] Doyle suggests that the manuscript was copied at Bordesley Abbey (a Cistercian house), which may have been the only abbey in the area with the wealth and resources to produce the manuscripts.[8] Even so, the production of the manuscript would have been a financial stretch and may have required additional donations by wealthy benefactors. Doyle has other reasons for suggesting Bordesley. Some illustrations in the Vernon seem to depict Cistercian monks. Many of the texts are Cistercian in origin (Aelred of Rievaulx's *De institutione inclusarum*, which is also known as *Informatio ad sororem suam*) or about notable Cistercians, especially St. Bernard of Clairvaux (including *The*

---

[6] See Doyle, *Facsimile* 11, for the dating of the manuscript.
[7] See Doyle, *Facsimile* 11.
[8] Doyle, *Facsimile*, 14-15.

Lamentation between Our Lady and St. Bernard and *The Saying of St. Bernard* and a life

of St. Bernard among the saints' legends).[9] However, J. Ayto and A. Barratt, in their edition

of *De institutione inclusarum*, point out that this evidence is "unconvincing" because

Bernard was well known outside Cistercian circles. They argue that *De institutione*

inclusarum was intended for a non-Cistercian audience and has been found to be owned by

people from a variety of religious orders.[10] The manuscript may have been produced by a

Cistercian house, but not necessarily for a Cistercian audience.

The destination of the Vernon is difficult to determine and this will be a subject of

much of this work. Certain definite statements can be made about the possible audience of

the Vernon. The manuscript was most likely not meant for lay brethren (lay folk who lived

in a monastery). Such orders were in decline at the time of the Vernon, especially in the

Cistercian houses. Bordesley had only one lay brother in 1380/81.[11] Also it was probably

was not read by higher orders of the clergy, or else the manuscript would have had Latin

texts. The manuscript could have been read among lower orders of the clergy, among nuns

or novices. There are a number of texts that indicate a female audience, including *De*

institutione inclusarum and *Ancrene Riwle*. The manuscript could also have been read by

---

[9] Kari Sajavaara discuss these contents in "The Relation of the Vernon and Simeon Manuscripts", *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 68(1967): 439.

[10] See the introduction to *De institutione inclusarum*, ed. J. Ayto and A. Barratt, EETS os.287 (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1984) xvii.

[11] Colin Platt, *The Abbeys and Priories of Medieval England* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1989) 151-52. Platt's argument is based on the archaeological research of Phillip Rahtz and Susan Hirst, *Bordesley Abbey, Redditch, Hereford, Worcestershire: First Report on Excavations, 1969-73* (BAR British Series, 1976) 22. For general information on the lay brethren and Cistercian houses, see David Knowles, *The Religious Orders in England*, 2 vols. (Cambridge, Cambridge UP, 1954), 2. 125-7. Doyle refers to this on *Facsimile* 14.

a more secular audience. There are a number of texts that point to this as well, including *How to Hear Mass*.[12] We cannot judge the audience of a text copied in the late fourteenth century by the original intended audience of the text. As more people sought texts for private religious instruction in the vernacular, they turned to works that had originally been written for religious groups, like nuns.

The Vernon's companion volume, the Simeon manuscript (BL Additional MS.22283), is almost identical to the Vernon. Both have much the same material. Parts of each were written by the same scribes. Both manuscripts were probably written at the same time, as part of the same commission. The Simeon has suffered more damage over time and now has only 172 leaves (of possibly 382), but it was likely similar in size. The Vernon is somewhat finer in presentation; the Simeon does not have illustrations in the surviving pages and the text is laid out less neatly.[13] It is a parallel text to the Vernon since its texts seem to have been copied from the same exemplars as the Vernon's texts—that is, the Simeon was not copied from the Vernon or vice versa. The manuscripts have fairly similar contents. Among the texts the Vernon has and the Simeon lacks are most of the texts at the end of the Vernon, including *Ancrene Riwle* and *Piers Plowman*. Among the texts the Simeon has or had and the Vernon lacks are a version of *The Book of Vices and Virtues* and a number of short prose meditations.[14]

In its size and presentation, we see that the Vernon is a professionally produced and

---

[12] Doyle draws attention to this ambiguity on *Facsimile* 11.

[13] Doyle, "The Shaping of the Vernon and Simeon Manuscripts", *Studies in the Vernon Manuscript*, ed. Derek Pearsall (Cambridge: Brewer, 1990) 11.

[14]See Sajavaara 435-6. There is no table of contents for the Simeon, so it is impossible to say for sure how different the selections of texts actually are.

formally presented manuscript. It and the Simeon are unique books in that they have a single focus on religious texts. The material in the Vernon often appears along side romances and other secular texts in other manuscripts, which gives the manuscript a particular sense of purpose: it was created as part of some sort of programme, with a firm intention on the part of the compiler to bring Sowlehele to the audience.[15]

1.3   Current Criticism of the Vernon

The Vernon has always been a well-known manuscript, but editors and critics began to take serious note of it only in the late nineteenth century. The value the critics have found in the manuscript has changed over the last one hundred and fifty years. Horstmann, Furnivall, Skeat and others saw the manuscript as a good source of individual texts. More recent critics are likewise interested only in the unique texts in the Vernon. In this section, I will provide a brief survey of these critical attitudes to Vernon.

Nineteenth-century scholars were primarily interested in editing texts from the Vernon. In general, critics were more interested in the minor works in the Vernon than in the major texts like the *Northern Homily Cycle*, *Pricke of Conscience*, *Scale of Perfection* and such. But scholars went to a great deal of effort to bring the other texts in the Vernon to press so that, except for these major texts, almost everything in the Vernon has been published. The primary collections of Vernon texts are Carl Horstmann's volumes of *Altenglische Legenden* (1875-81), which contains a great deal of the legendary material from the Vernon; Horstmann's *Yorkshire Writers* (1895-96), which contains much of the

---

[15] The Lincoln Thornton MS is an example of such another manuscript.

prose; Horstmann's and F.J. Furnivall's EETS volumes, *Minor Poems of the Vernon Manuscript*, which contain complete editions of Parts 2 and 5 of the Vernon and most of the texts in Part 3. Many of the other texts are published in other volumes and in various journals. The texts have been published for the most part as they are found in the Vernon, with few corrections. This was the era of the parallel text, so Horstmann, Furnivall and the others often published Vernon texts beside editions from other manuscripts. The interests in medieval literature at the time were in part philological. Editors wanted to bring as many examples of various English dialects to print in the forms they were actually written so that they could be better studied. It would be wrong to assume that these editors were not interested in the texts in the Vernon for their literary value. Instead, they gave the historical and philological value of the manuscript equal status to the literary value.

Interest in the Vernon waned after the Second World War. Medieval scholars began to look for texts that they thought better reflected their authors' original intentions, and if they could not find them, they attempted to create them through collation. Interest in the Vernon declined since it was considered to contain inferior texts that were altered to the scribes' dialect and sometimes badly edited. However, interest in the Vernon did not entirely disappear. Critics who wrote about medieval lyrics and prose found the Vernon a rich repository both because it contains many unique texts and because it contains such a comprehensive collection of these texts. Rosemary Woolf talked about many of the Vernon lyrics in her works on medieval lyrics, and Blake edited some of the prose in his volume, *Middle English Religious Prose*, and numerous articles appear in the journals about these texts. At the same time there was some interest in the Vernon as a manuscript, but except

for some comparisons of the Vernon to other manuscripts (such as Sajavaara's article on

the Vernon and the Simeon), this interest never really went beyond mentioning the Vernon

in lists of interesting medieval English manuscripts.[16]

Understanding of the Vernon was advanced considerably in 1987, when A.I. Doyle

and the Brewer Press produced a facsimile of the manuscript. This was accompanied a few

years later by a companion volume, *Studies in the Vernon Manuscript*, edited by Derek

Pearsall. Pearsall outlines some of the reasons for these publications in his introduction to

Studies in the Vernon Manuscript. The Brewer Press has published a number of facsimiles,

and Pearsall attributes this in part to advances in technology and photography. But there is

more to it than this. A. I. Doyle and others, Pearsall says, recognized:

> that manuscripts offered, not answers to questions already formulated in
> more exclusively literary terms, but a whole range of questions of their own
> about literary works–about the nature, definition, ordering and arrangement
> of texts, about composition and revision, about ordering by genre, about
> scribal participation, reader response, the use of illustrations, the
> significance of the hierarchy of decoration–which needed to be addressed in
> the interests of a more fully historical understanding.[17]

Critics had begun to look at manuscripts in less New Critical literary terms, and in a more

historical way. Critics are now concerned with the practice of book-production, with the

occasion of a text and with the historical nature of authorship and writing, and the

definitions and place of literature in society, as can be seen in any of the texts in *Studies in*

the Vernon. They now seek out the historical context of literature, and so manuscripts are

---

[16]See Derek Pearsall, *Old English and Middle English Poetry*, The Routledge *History of English Poetry*, vol. 1. (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1977) where he produces just such a list.

[17] Pearsall, introduction to *Studies in the Vernon Manuscript*, ix.

given greater attention as texts in their own right.

The essays in *Studies in the Vernon Manuscript* in many ways reflect Pearsall's statement. Many of contributors write about the structure and arrangement of texts in the Vernon, the presentation and editing of individual texts, and the relationship of the Vernon to its audience. However, as will be seen from the survey of the articles below, many still reflect an older bias for best texts and authorial intention.

Some of the essays in *Studies in the Vernon* examine the Vernon as a whole. These are general surveys of the manuscript and its contents. A.I. Doyle, in "The Shaping of the Vernon and Simeon MSS", compares the two volumes. He speculates that the Simeon, which does not contain the illustrations in the Vernon, and is somewhat less fine in appearance, was a "slightly cheaper stable-partner", which suggests a different audience for the two manuscripts.[18] Doyle, however, admits that the evidence for the audiences of the manuscripts is scanty and does not dwell on the possible audiences. N.F. Blake, in "Vernon MS: Contents and Organization", surveys the contents of the manuscript and the way they are assembled into five parts. He argues that the texts all teach basic Christian values without any sense of controversy and heresy. Based on this and the contents, and the lack of Latin texts, Blake suggests the manuscript was intended for a community of women, such as nuns.[19]

Blake touches on the audience in his article, and other contributors go into greater detail. S.S. Hussey surveys the texts in the fourth part of the manuscript, where all the prose

---

[18] Doyle, "The Shaping of Vernon and Simeon MSS" 11.
[19] Blake, "Vernon MS: Contents and Organization", *Studies in the Vernon* 57-8.

texts are, in "Implications of Choice and Arrangement of Texts in Part 4". Hussey argues

that, while some of the texts are addressed originally to contemplatives, many of them are

more about the life of devotion that all Christians should lead. The texts of Part 4 "do not

exhibit a deliberate and sustained progress towards the contemplative life."[20]

Other articles in the collection attempt to understand the Vernon by studying similar

manuscripts. P.R. Robinson looks at "The Vernon MS as a Coucher Book". A coucher (or

ledger) is a large book that would rest on a lectern because it was too large to hold.

Couchers were often used as source books for public reading, exemplars or reference works.

Robinson argues that such collections were popular in the late fourteenth century and that

the Vernon may have formed a "library copy or reference collection of contemporary

religious and moral works which may itself have served as an exemplar."[21] Thorlac

Turville-Petre discusses "The Relationship of the Vernon and Clopton MSS". Both

manuscripts come from the same area of England and contain similar texts, including *La

estorie del Euangelie*. The Cloptons were a wealthy, conservative family in the

Worcestershire area (one member was a sheriff who persecuted Lollards). Their manuscript,

and many others like it, suggest an orthodox religious community, and Turville-Petre

suggests that the Vernon and Simeon came out of this community.

The remaining articles in *Studies in the Vernon* examine individual texts or groups

of texts in the Vernon. Thomas Heffernan, in "Orthodoxies' Redux: The *Northern Homily*

---

[20] Hussey, "Implications of Choice and Arrangement of Texts in Part 4", *Studies in the Vernon* 74.

[21] Robinson, "The Vernon MS as a Coucher Book" *Studies in the Vernon* 27. See also Doyle, *Facsimile* 13.

Cycle in the Vernon Manuscript and its Textual Affiliations", argues that the *Northern Homily Cycle* is evidence of the orthodoxy of the Vernon because, while the Wycliffites were translating the Bible, the Homilies merely paraphrase it. Avril Henry looks at the *Pater noster* diagram and the *Speculum vitae*, in "'The Pater Noster in a table ypeynted' and Some Other Presentations of Doctrine in the Vernon Manuscript." She argues that these pieces present religious doctrine as much through the way they are written as through their message. The manuscript is organized to be better suited to an audience with basic religious needs.

Carol M. Meale and C.W. Marx write about some of the Marian texts in the Vernon, in "The Miracles of Our Lady: Context and Interpretation" and "The Middle English Verse 'Lamentation of Mary to Saint Bernard' and the 'Quis dabit'". Meale argues that the legendary stories of Mary, and their accompanying illustrations, are not ends in themselves, but rather point to the higher meaning of the nature of Mary. Some of the miracles allude to Mary only indirectly: the reader is invited to contemplate the nature of Mary through the exemplary female figures in the stories. Marx, in his examination of the dialogue between Mary and St. Bernard, and its sources in the "*Quis dabit*", shows how the text moves from a revelatory genre in its continental versions to a simple vision that teaches basic doctrine in the Middle English version. Marx also shows how the Middle English version often appears with other texts that are in Part 3 of the Vernon, suggesting that the Vernon uses these texts in fairly typical ways.

The religious romances of the Vernon are examined by A.S.G. Edwards, in "The Contexts of the Vernon Romances", and Karl Reichl, in "The King of Tars: Language and

Textual Transmission". Edwards, like Marx, shows how the texts of Part 3, where the romances appear, form a network that extends through various other manuscripts. The romances are typically associated with collections of didactic texts, as befits their moral nature. Reichl compares the Vernon version of the *King of Tars* to the version in the Auchinlek manuscript in a long textual study that shows the work was transmitted in a written form between the two manuscripts, rather than through an oral tradition.

Finally, John Burrow and John J. Thompson examine the Vernon Refrain Lyrics in Part 5 of the manuscript. Burrow, in "The Shape of the Vernon Refrain Lyrics", examines the appearance of some of the lyrics in various manuscripts. There are similarities in the way stanzas were added or rearranged that suggest that these changes were made by one editor. These suggest possible editing by the Vernon compiler or scribe, or, more likely, that the Vernon series was copied from a similar series in another exemplar. Thompson, in "The Textual Background and Reputation of the Vernon Lyrics", comes to similar conclusions as Burrow. Thompson also argues that the quire containing the lyrics was misplaced at binding: it should have gone at the end of Part 3, where the lyrics appear in the Simeon.

The articles in *Studies in the Vernon* make an excellent attempt to fulfill Doyle's and Pearsall's wishes for increased study of manuscripts. But the volume does have some shortcomings. There is almost no attention given to the large texts in the manuscripts. The *South English Legendary*, *Piers Plowman* A, the *Pricke of Conscience*, and the major prose works are mentioned only in passing. Also, except for the refrain lyrics, few of the lyrics elsewhere in the manuscript (such as in Part 2) are discussed, nor are the allegorical texts, *specula*, and visions. Of course it would be impossible to discuss every text in the Vernon

in one volume, but *Studies in the Vernon* does show a certain imbalance in its approach to the manuscript. The romances and refrain lyrics get two essays each, but there are none for the texts I have just mentioned. The critics may still be working under the bias against the Vernon texts because they are inferior editions. This volume reflects the attitudes to the Vernon prevalent throughout the twentieth century.

1.4   The Textuality of the Vernon Manuscript

The foregoing survey of critical attitudes to the Vernon is brief and bibliographic. I will now introduce various aspects of the Vernon's textuality. Throughout this thesis I will draw various conclusions about the nature of the Vernon: its genesis, compiler and scribes; the selection, arrangement and presentation of texts; and its possible audiences and its relationship with them.

About all that can be said with reasonable certainty about the Vernon is that it is a large manuscript written in the last decades of the fourteenth century by two scribes somewhere in the Worcestershire area. But the Vernon provides many clues to its textuality that allow us to make at least educated guesses about its use. The size of the manuscript, both in terms of its physical nature and contents, indicates that it probably sat on a lectern, perhaps in a place of prominence. The size of the book is important for a number of reasons. It makes the book something of an encyclopaedia of what the compiler might have considered the best of English religious texts. It also makes the book an expensive one. The illustrations and decoration in the manuscript, though far removed from the books of hours and such manuscripts, do give the Vernon a formal appearance. The fact that the Vernon

is part of a larger project, including the Simeon manuscript, adds to the formal nature of this text. It was meant to be a prominent text, perhaps the basis for a religious programme of some sort, and perhaps the focal point of its community.

The contents of the manuscript provide many more clues for its possible original location. The texts provide basic, orthodox religious instruction in the vernacular. *The Northern Homily Cycle,* for example, is a collection of sermons for each Sunday of the year. It paraphrases and explicates passages from the gospels, but does not translate them. The Vernon also contains the "Form of Confession" and "How to Hear Mass". Both of these are texts that aid people in these services while not attempting to supplant them. "How to Hear Mass", for example, only refers to parts of the mass and tells its readers what is expected of them at that point. It does not translate the mass. The Vernon is thus an orthodox text written in a time that saw great tension between orthodox and non-traditional religious values.

The manuscript could be an actively anti-Lollard statement that attempts to turn people away from the heresy, or it could be a conventional statement of orthodoxy that tries to reinforce people's beliefs. Some critics feel the Vernon is a deliberately anti-Lollard text. Heffernan, for example, writes: "While the choice of the *NHC* intimates an interest in the laity's right to the gospels, it is a choice which, read in the context of the late 1380s, is an accommodated choice which allows of a political interpretation.... the inclusion of texts like the *NHC* and the *SEL* seems to be part of a programmatic effort designed to inhibit greater

autonomy on the part of the laity in the life of the church."[22] Heffernan argues that the

Vernon does not just present orthodox texts, but uses them to maintain the traditional

relationships between the church and the laity. It suprresses any overly liberal attitudes to

the faith. Other critics take a more moderate view. Thorlac Turville-Petre, for example,

argues that the Vernon might have been part of a greater effort "to remedy the 'defaute of

bokus' in the fight against heresy".[23] Turville-Petre sees the Vernon as a part of a trend of

vernacular religion, parallel to and more orthodox than the Lollards, but not actively

opposed to them.

Another possible indicator of the audience of the Vernon is the number of texts that

appear to be written for women. The *Ancrene Riwle* and the various texts by Rolle and

Hilton addressed to women readers are the best examples, but not the only ones. Women

figure strongly in many of the texts in part two and elsewhere. The role of Mary is perhaps

the best example, but there are other strong women in the texts, like the *Miracles of the Our

Lady*. In both the poems and the illustrations there are a number of strong women who have

roles of authority in the stories, and are often depicted as lecturing or admonishing the other

characters in the poems.[24] Another example is "Of Women Cometh This World's Weal",

one of the refrain lyrics, which praise Eve and other women for all the contributions they

---

[22]Heffernan, "Orthodoxies' *Redux: The Northern Homily Cycle* in the Vernon Manuscript and its Textual Backgrounds", *Studies in the Vernon Manuscript* 78. Heffernan later on the same page compares the Vernon to the wearing of a poppy to signify the remembrance of soldiers in a war.

[23]Turville-Petre, "The Relationship of the Vernon and Clopton Manuscripts" *Studdies in the Vernon Manuscript* 43-4. Turville-Petre is quoting John Mirk here.

[24]Meale, "*The Miracles of Our Lady*: Context and Interpretation" *Studies in the Vernon Manuscript*, 130-31 and *passim*.

have made to the world (I will talk more about this poem later).

However, the evidence for a female audience is not conclusive. While there is no text written exclusively for a male audience, in the way there are texts for female audiences,[25] this does not necessarily mean the audience was female. S.S. Hussey points out that some of the texts have been altered to address both men and women, rather than only women, as originally written. *The Scale of Perfection* and the *Abbey of the Holy Ghost* are examples of this.[26] The presence of so many texts for women readers may have more to do with the compiler's desire to include vernacular texts than with the gender of the audience. The vernacular texts exist in large part because women in various situations wanted written material and could not understand Latin or French. Any compiler trying to put together such a collection of religious vernacular texts for any audience would have to include texts for women. Thus, the original audiences of these texts may not necessarily be good indicators of the audience of the Vernon.

Another indicator of the audience of the manuscript and the compiler's attitude to that audience is the title of the manuscript, "Sowlehele". The title is in a rubric at the beginning of the table of contents and it was added by Scribe A, the scribe who created the table. Thus the title was supplied sometime after the bulk of the manuscript was written. It may not necessarily represent the principles the compiler and the main scribe of the manuscript used in the selection and arrangement of texts, but "Sowlehele" represents the

---

[25]Norman Blake points this out in "Vernon Manuscript: Contents and Organization" 58-59.

[26]Hussey, "Implications of Choice and Arrangement of Texts in Part 4" 73. Hussey suggests that these changes came from the Vernon's exemplars, rather than from the scribes.

earliest interpretation of the manuscript and its meaning.

Sowlehele, or *salus anime*, has a variety of meanings. It could refer to the good of the soul, spiritual well-being or salvation in general, or, more specifically, to spiritual healing, with an almost medical sense. It could also, in more professional sense, refer to one who brings salvation or pastoral care.[27] The phrase is used throughout the Vernon, usually in the first sense, of spiritual well being. The *Middle English Dictionary* cites examples from the *Northern Homily Cycle* and the *Talking of the Love of God* for the first definition. The example from the *Talking* is: "In þin aduocatye is put þe cause of vre sunnes, to stonden at domes day vr alles Iugges mooder. In help & in Meyntenaunce of vre souls hele." The example from the *NHC* is: "Quat sa euer we ask...Our lauered grauntes it us son, Yef sawel hel be in our bon." The second definition, of spiritual healing, is also found in the *NHC*: "Men suld pray noght bot for saul-hele, Þat es forto haue endles blis".[28] The other use of Sowlehele, as pastoral care, does not seem to appear in the Vernon, but it was current at the time of the manuscript. Thus, Scribe A could have understood Sowlehele in all its senses and felt that it was an appropriate title.

The Vernon attempts to produce Sowlehele in its audience through the selection and arrangement of texts. Throughout this study, I will show how this selection and arrangement defines the forms of Sowlehele the manuscript wants to produce in its audience. Spiritual

---

[27] The *MED* definitions of "Soulehele" are "(a) Spiritual well-being; the health of the soul; the good of the soul; (b) healing of the soul, salvation ... to be healed spiritually; (c) that which brings health to the soul; also, one who brings salvation; (d) pastoral care, cure of souls; (e) in oath and pious exclamation". Most of these definitions were current in the time the Vernon was written.

[28] These quotations are from the *MED*.

healing in the Vernon is achieved through a combination of basic religious teachings and contemplation. The collection of texts in the Vernon that provide the basic religious teachings make this manuscript very much a post-Lateran text. Among the texts that provide religious instruction are paraphrases of the Bible (like the *Northern Homily Cycle* and many others), or texts that provide summaries of catechistic matters, like the sins and virtues (the versions of the *Mirror of St. Edmund* are examples), or texts that provide a better understanding of the liturgy (like *How to Hear Mass*). In addition, one of the primary modes or genres is the manuscript is the exemplary mode. The exemplary mode helps to produce Sowlehele by providing the readers with a more vivid and emotional understanding of the teaching.[29]

The Vernon also makes available to its readers texts that provide them with a source for their contemplative devotions. The forms of contemplation in the Vernon are not mystical; they do not try to draw people away from the world, but rather provide them with a way to incorporate a contemplative life with their daily lives. The contemplative texts in the Vernon take a variety of forms. They include guides to contemplation like the *Ancrene Riwle* and the works by Richard Rolle and Walter Hilton. But the Vernon also includes a number of meditative or devotional texts, like the many lyrics throughout the manuscript. These texts provide depictions of the crucifixion and the suffering of Christ and Mary in vivid and often highly personalized detail. These texts provide Sowlehele through a deeper emotional understanding of the central events of the Christian faith. The sort of

---

[29]John Burrow makes a similar argument in *Medieval Writers and Their Work* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1982) 107-18.

contemplation they provide is closely related to the post-Lateran instructional texts. The audience is not invited to withdraw from the world to pursue a mystical connection with God, but rather is moved to pity and piety through the emotional understanding of faith that these texts produce. Both forms of text are really not that distinct: they are intended for similar audiences and provide similar teaching. For the most part the texts in the Vernon provide basic teachings in Christian faith and practice. These texts appear to be suited to a lay audience that is seeking a better understanding of the faith and a way to live their daily lives in accordance with it.

The Vernon manuscript provides Sowlehele or spiritual healing in a variety of ways. As I will show throughout this work, the compiler of the manuscript has designed the book so that it provides spiritual healing both to individuals and to the communities in which they live. This audience appears to be a lay audience that is trying to find a place for faith in daily life. The Vernon provides them with a series of instructional texts that helps them to better understand their faith, and a series of contemplative texts that help them gain a more personal or emotional understanding of their faith. This mixture of instructional and contemplative texts makes this manuscript very much a book about the mixed life. Walter Hilton is one of the strongest proponents of the Mixed Life in the Vernon. He describes it in his *Epistle on the Mixed Life*, which appears in Part 4 of the manuscript:

> Þe þridde lyf, þat is medlet, longeþ speciali to men of holy churche, as to prelates and to oþur curates, þe wȝuche han cure & souereynte ouer oþur men for to kepe & rule hem, boþe heore bodies & principali here soules, in fulfillyng of þe dedes of merci, bodily & gostly. To þise men hit longeþ sum-tyme to vse werkes of actyf lyf, in help & in sustinaunce of hem-self & of her soiettes & of oþure also, and sum-tyme [forto] leue al bisynes outward and ȝiue hem for a tyme to preyers, meditations, redynges of holi

writ, & to oþer gostly ocupacions, after þei fele hem disposed.[30]

Here Hilton recommends the mixed life for men in the higher orders of the church, who must dwell in both the secular and religious worlds, but later he recommends it for secular men, such as lords, masters or children. The mixed life allows those who follow it to conduct their day-to-day lives with a sense of spirituality. The mixed life is seen as a way to improve the lives of secular people who live it by giving them a greater sense of spirituality. It is also seen as improving the society these people live in, because people will make a better contribution to society by living the mixed life. Hilton recommends the mixed life for the wealthy and powerful, who will have a great influence on their communities. The Vernon has a number of texts explicitly about the middle life, such as those by Hilton, but the combination of texts in the manuscript shows that this is a manuscript about the middle life. The middle life has an inner and outer aspect: internally it allows people to gain a better understanding of their faith and better themselves. Externally, these people will become better parts of their communities, and thus the middle life helps to strengthen social bonds. As we shall see throughout this study, then, the Vernon manuscript provides Sowlehele for a variety of reasons: it tries to give people with a better intellectual and emotional understanding of their faith, and it tries to make the social structures these people live in stronger.

---

[30] The text, from the Vernon, is edited by Carl Horstmann in *Yorkshire Writers: Richard Rolle of Hampole, an English Father of the Church, and his Followers*, 2 vols. (London: Swan Sonnenschein, 1895), 1:268.

1.5   Outline of Thesis

In the following chapters, I will study the Vernon's textuality in terms of its presentation and layout, its selection and arrangement of texts, and its audience. In the next chapter, I will survey various aspects of the Vernon's genesis, including the role of the compilers and scribes, and the significance of the title "Sowlehele". I will also examine the layout of the text and the use of illustrations. In the third chapter, I will look at the contents of the Vernon by looking at individual texts and the way they group themselves together throughout the manuscript. In the fourth chapter, I will examine the structure and genres of the texts in the Vernon. For these I will refer to medieval concepts of structure and genre because the arrangement of texts is much more intelligible in these terms. In the fifth chapter, I will examine the medieval contexts of the Vernon. I will look at other manuscripts with similar material. I will also look its relationship with the history of its time, including the Lollard movement, and by examining contemporary reading practices to determine how the Vernon might have been used. Finally, I will draw together all of these concepts to form conclusions about the textuality of the Vernon manuscript.

Chapter 2:   The Manuscript

2.1   Introduction

Modern critics tend to see a medieval manuscript as a repository of texts, rather than as a text in its own right. An anthology such as *Minor Poems of the Vernon Manuscript* presents the Vernon as a good source of minor religious poetry, and pays little attention to their place in the manuscript itself. Neither volume of the series contains any sort of introduction or preface, or much in the way of critical apparatus. There are some attempts to show where some of the texts appear in the manuscript, but these are not very consistent.[1] For example, there is no mention that items 1-29 are taken from the second part of the manuscript in the exact order they appear there, with no omissions. The only major sort of critical apparatus is one that compares the Vernon texts to other versions of them. In the second volume of the series, Furnivall includes a number of texts from other manuscripts whose only commonality with the Vernon is that they are religious pieces. The emphasis is thus on the texts, and the manuscript is only of incidental relevance.

An alternate way to study manuscripts is to look at them as texts in their own right, and that is what I will begin to do in this chapter. In later chapters I will study the choice and arrangement of texts in the Vernon. In this chapter, I will examine the formative elements of the manuscript. I will begin with the title of the manuscript, "Sowlehele", and its applicability to the Vernon, and then turn to look at the various forms of authorship or writing in the Vernon. There are various types of writers in medieval terms, including

---

[1] Furnivall is a bit more consistent about indicating the original pagination in the second volume than Horstmann is in the first, but neither is entirely consistent.

compilers and scribes, who were each considered to have a formative role in the transmission of texts. As part of this discussion, I will examine way the Vernon texts have been edited and compare the manuscript to texts with similar material. This will elucidate the contributions of the Vernon compiler and scribes to the meaning of the manuscript. Following this, I will turn to various aspects of the presentation of the manuscript, including the actual layout of the text and the use of decoration and illustrations. Each of these elements of the manuscript was considered by medieval thinkers to be a vital part of a text's meaning, so I will begin this chapter by examining some of these medieval attitudes to textuality in more detail.

2.2   Medieval Theories of Literature

The layout and organization of a text were important to medieval commentators. One model for the interpretation of these was the academic prologue, used chiefly in biblical and classical scholarship. Scholars wrote the prologues as a way of summarizing, explicating and commenting on the texts themselves. Though the prologues are removed from the Vernon in terms of genre, place, time and language, they may define the intellectual milieu of the people who put the Vernon togther.

The prologues use various schemata to describe how meaning is created in a text. Each schema divides a text into several formative elements. These schemata were adapted from other schools of philosophy. So, for example, there is an Aristotelean prologue, derived from Aristotle's description of the four causes of things. R.W. Hunt and Alistair Minnis, describe the various types of prologues used during the middle ages. One that is

perhaps most relevant to the Vernon is the Type-C prologue, which synthesizes the other

types of prologues. It lists the formative elements of a text:

Titulus (inscriptio, nomen) libri
> The title of the work.

Nomen auctoris.
> The name of the author.

Intentio auctoris (intentio scribentis)
> The intention of the author.

Materia libri
> The subject matter of the work; the materials from which the work has been composed.

Modus agendi (modus scribendi, modus tractandi)
> The method of didactic procedure employed in the work.

Ordo libri
> The order of the book.

Utilitatis
> Utility.

Cui parti philosophiae supponitur.
> The branch of learning to which the work belonged.[2]

For the sake of comparison, the Aristotelian prologue has only four headings, which replace

the Type-C headings as follows:

causa efficiens - The efficient cause. The person responsible for the text.
   - Replaces *nomen auctoris*

causa materialis - The material cause. The material of the work.
   - Replaces *materia libri*

---

[2] Minnis discusses the Type-C prologue on 19-25 of *Medieval Theory of Authorship* and the Aristotelian prologue on 28-29. Both the Type C and the Aristotelian prologue coexisted until the Renaissance.

causa formalis	- The formal cause. The structure and genre of the text. - Replaces *modus agendi* and *ordo libri,*
causa finalis	- The Final Cause, the reason the work exists. - Replaces *utilitas*

Modern critics who attempt to apply the headings of these prologues to medieval literature fall into the dangers of exegetical criticism. They run the dangers of making broad, sweeping generalizations about the literature based on schools of thought that may have no relevance for the text. However, there is a lot of evidence to suggest that vernacular writers were seeking ways to adopt the attitudes of these critics for their own work. These theories of literature were originally used to interpret scriptural writing, to extract the literal meaning from these texts. During the later middle ages, writers began to discover, or rediscover, classical authors and used these theories to extract the allegorical meaning from them: "Scriptural authors were being read literally, with close attention being paid to those poetic methods believed to be part of the literal sense; pagan poets, long acknowledged as masters of the same methods, were being read allegorically, or 'moralized'—and thus the twain could meet."[3] As these theories filtered "down" from scriptural to pagan authors they began to influence vernacular writers who saw themselves as interpreters of both traditions.

Rita Copeland explores this influence in *Rhetoric, Hermeneutics and Translation in the Middle Ages*. Copeland's central claim is that translation is an act of interpretation that is influenced by the critical traditions I have mentioned above, and exists in the nexus between rhetoric and hermeneutics. This concept of translation has its roots in classical

---

[3]A.J. Minnis, and A.B.Scott, eds. and trans, *Medieval Literary Theory and Criticism, c.1100-c.1375: The Commentary Tradition*, Revised ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991) 4.

teaching and the dichotomy of rhetoric and grammar. Rhetoric, the discipline of producing

persuasive arguments, and grammar, the discipline of linguistic study and hermeneutics or

interpretation, overlap in many ways, and it is in this overlap that translation appears. On

the one hand, it can be a linguistic or interpretive exercise; on the other hand, it could be a

rhetorical production, an art form in itself.[4] In this sense, translation is not merely a transfer

of a text from one language to another, but rather the creation of a new text that interprets

the other. This leads to Copeland's other main point, that translation is an act of

appropriation: "Medieval arts commentary does not simply 'serve' its 'master' texts: it also

rewrites and supplants them."[5] Copeland argues that vernacular writers use translation and

the critical tradition it is part of to cast themselves as *auctores*.

Copeland defines medieval translation as existing on a spectrum between what she

labels as primary and secondary translation. A primary translation is a form of exegesis, a

commentary on the work it translates. A secondary translation is an invention, a recasting

of the ideas of the original text into a new one. In some ways, primary translations are more

hermeneutical, and secondary translations are more rhetorical, but both displace the original

text in favour of the author's interpretation or recasting of it.[6]

Of course, Latin commentaries, compilations, paraphrases or adaptations were as

much a form of displacement and appropriation as vernacular translations. Translation does

not hold a special value. The chief value of Copeland's study is that it demonstrates that

---

[4]See Copeland, *Rhetoric, Hermeneutics and Translation in the Middle Ages.* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1991) 9-10 and following for a fuller discussion of this.
[5]Copeland 3.
[6]Copeland discusses primary and secondary translation throughout her work, but introduces the concepts on 6-7.

vernacular writers were as aware of these traditions as Latin writers. She goes on in her work to show how poets like Chaucer and Gower make use of the critical apparatus of scriptural commentators to give value to their own translations of classical texts. Though Copeland is chiefly concerned with courtly vernacular writers who were more drawn to the classical tradition than the scriptural, it seems likely that religious writers like those of the Vernon were as aware of the classical tradition. However, a religious writer or translator has a very different attitude to the source text from the writers that Copeland discusses. She acknowledges this herself when she discusses the Wycliffite attitudes to translation: "when translation is theorized strictly as access to a textual legacy, it is not theorized as appropriation. Indeed the two aims are incompatible with each other." And a bit later: "According to this principle, the act of translation points beyond itself to an originary authority [God] that cannot be overtaken or displaced."[7] The Vernon is not a Wycliffite text, but it does belong to the tradition that in some ways leads to the Wycliffite translation. Its chief aim is not to appropriate scriptural texts, but rather to provide a "hermeneutics of access" (to use Copeland's phrase) to those texts. This form of translation is not segregated from rhetoric and the critical apparatus of the commentators. As we shall see, the Vernon uses these to provide a very specific mode of access to its scriptural sources that is in keeping with its orthodox attitudes.

2.3 The Title of the Manuscript

Unlike many manuscripts, the Vernon has a title. It appears in a rubric at the

---

[7]Copeland 225.

beginning of the table of contents, (the "tytles"):

> Here bygynnen þe tytles off þe book
> þat is cald in latyn tonge Salus
> anime, and in englyhs tonge Sowlehele[8]

The rubric was written by Scribe A, who also wrote the table and the first quire, which was most likely inserted after the rest of the manuscript was written. As I have already discussed, the Vernon seeks to produce Sowlehele in its readers. It is an appropriate description of the manuscript according to the theories behind the medieval prologues. The title was considered to be "the key to the work that followed it".[9] The word *titulis* was thought to derive from *titan*, or sun: "just as the sun illuminates the world, the book-title illuminates the book".[10] The title of a book could summarize its meaning, themes, author, place of writing and genre of the text. Sowlehele is an appropriate title for the manuscript because it denotes the themes and meanings of the individual texts and sections in the manuscript and defines the genre of the manuscript as a whole. The texts of the Vernon all seek to improve the souls of the readers. Each of the three principle meanings of Sowlehele can be applied to the Vernon. Most of the texts in the Vernon try to provide salvation to the readers through homilies, exemplary figures, didactic texts and a variety of contemplative

---

[8]Quoted in Serjeantson "The Index of the Vernon Manuscript", *Modern Language Review* 32(1937): 227. Blake, in "Vernon Manuscript: Contents and Organization", seems to think this title applies only to the first part of the manuscript ("The index does introduce the first part as 'þe book þat is called in latyn tonge Salus Anime. and in englyhs tonge Sowlehele' and as it does not identify VGL as a separate text, it makes all the legends seem like independent texts in a single collection." [50]). But this rubric appears just before the index and refers to the entire index, not the first part of it.

[9]Remigius of Auxerre, *In artem primum Donati*. Quoted in Minnis, *Medieval Theory of Authorship* 19.

[10]Remigius of Auxerre, *In artem primum Donati*. Quoted in Minnis, *Medieval Theory of Authorship* 19.

texts. Other texts seem to provide spiritual healing: some of the authors of the individual texts describe their audience or themselves as being in a state of sin and needing some help to attain salvation. Other texts seem to be addressed to people who should provide pastoral care. The texts on the middle life are examples of this: they show somebody who has authority over others how to make themselves righteous so that they may govern others better. In the context of the late fourteenth century, pastoral care could have a broader meaning: people could seek their own pastoral care in vernacular writings. The Vernon could very well be about all three forms of Sowlehele.

2.4   The Writers of the Vernon Manuscript

I have thus far referred to the scribes and the compiler of the Vernon, without much attention to the implications of these terms. By scribes, I mean the two people who put quill to parchment and wrote the manuscript. By compiler, I mean the person or persons who directed the project of the Vernon and Simeon manuscripts, found the exemplars, chose the texts to include and decided on their order. There may not have been one person who had this particular role, and this person may have been one of the scribes, or they may have shared in the duties of the compiler. Thus I use the term "compiler" abstractly, referring more to the role of compiler than to any person or persons. I have also assumed that the compiler and scribes are male, since the manuscript, as most critics agree, came from a male religious house. Such a house would have had access to the exemplars and the skilled

scribes, illustrators and others needed to produce such a text.[11]

The roles of scribes and compilers were important in the middle ages. They are two of the four types of authors described by Bonaventure in the famous passage from his commentary on Peter Lombard's *Sentences*:

> For someone writes out the words of other men without adding or changing anything, and he is called the scribe (*scriptor*) pure and simple. Someone else writes out the words of other men, putting together material, but not his own, and he is called the compiler (*compilator*). Someone else writes the words of other men and also his own, but with those of other men comprising the principal part while his own are annexed merely to make clear the argument, and he is called the commentator (*commentator*), not the author. Someone else writes the words of other men and also of his own, but in his own forming the principal part and those of others being annexed merely by way of confirmation, and such a person should be called the author (*auctor*).[12]

Each type of writer is defined by their relationship to other authors: scribes copy the work of other authors, *auctores* use the works of others to support their own. Though they were not equal to an author, the scribe and compiler were treated as important figures in the transmission of a text. Few medieval writers considered themselves to be authors. The term was more of an honorific, "an accolade bestowed upon a popular writer by those later scholars and writers who used extracts from his works as sententious statements or *auctoritates*".[13] Compilers and scribes transmit the works of authors to different audiences.

The work of A.J. Minnis and other scholars has brought the medieval compiler to greater attention in recent years. Richard and Mary Rouse trace the history of these terms.

---

[11]See Doyle, *Facsimile* 14-15 for a discussion of the destination. I discuss this issue in chapter 1 in more detail.

[12]Quoted from Minnis and Scott 229.

[13]Minnis, *Theory of Authorship* 10.

The word *compilatio* comes from a root meaning "to rob" or "to plagiarize". The meaning changed throughout the middle ages, and came to connote "to borrow"or "to arrange or structure borrowed ideas", and finally become a synonym for "to compose" (Chaucer and Lydgate use *compilen* in this sense).[14] Throughout the middle ages the word *compilatio* was synonymous with *summa, florilegium, collectus, compositus, editus* and *factus*.[15] The term compiler implies a certain "creativity". The compiler sets the writings of authors in original settings that serve the needs of the readers. The compiler can thus add structure to the ideas and wisdom of the authors.

Minnis differs, in emphasis, from the Rouses in his discussion of *compilators*. He bases his definitions of the terms on academic prologues to the Bible and descriptions of the types of writers in that text. Many of the books of the Bible were seen to be *compilationes*, while others are *collectiones*. The difference is that "whereas a *compilatio* had an orderly arrangement of materials, a *collectio* had not."[16] The distinction is important for the Vernon. Some could, and have, argued that the manuscript is a collection, with little sense of order or design.[17] I would argue that it is a *compilatio* with a plan and design.

---

[14] R.H. Rouse & M.A. Rouse, "*Ordinatio* and *Compilatio* Revisited", *Ad Litteram: Medieval Texts and Their Medieval Readers*, Mark D. Jordan & Kent Emery, Jr., eds (Notre Dame, U of Notre Dame P, 1992) 119-20.

[15] Rouse and Rouse 120. They cite examples from the thirteenth century and earlier of the words being used interchangeably.

[16] Minnis, *Theory of Authorship* 97. he bases this argument on Nicholas of Lyre who describes it in his *Biblia glosata*, iii, 1895, iv, 2415. Lyre argues that Wisdom and II Machabees are *compilationes* and the Psalter, Proverbs and Book of the Twelve Minor Prophets are *collectiones*.

[17] Blake, for example, argues in "Vernon MS: Contents and Organization" that there is little structure to the manuscript. He does see some loose organization of texts, but not much more than this.

Can the Vernon properly be seen as a *compilatio* or a *collectio*? It can be argued that the texts in the Vernon are in the order they were in because that is how they came from the exemplars or because some te·rtr fit better into the Vernon's two-column pages and others onto the three-column pages. This would make the compiler more like a scribe. However, a closer look shows that this is not the case. If the texts were copied in groups from exemplars, then the exemplars may have gathered the texts in their order for a particular purpose. The compiler of the Vernon may have recognized that value of this order and incorporated it into his text. If texts with similar line lengths are grouped together, it may be because genre and form were closely tied together in medieval literature. Certain genres required appropriate verse forms. Thus we find in the Vernon that all the lyrical texts that are grouped together share similar genres and subject matters (as for example the lyrics in praise of Mary and Christ in Part 2). The prose texts are also an example of this: the compiler has brought together prose texts that all share a similar topic, the mixed life. The Vernon is thus a *compilatio* that seems to borrow from other *compilationes* and has an order in its own right.

The scribe had one purpose, according to medieval writers: "For someone writes the materials of others, adding or changing nothing, and this person is said to be merely the scribe."[18] The scribe of the Bible or the texts of the Church Fathers of course had to be exact. However, this sentiment is more of an ideal for scribes of vernacular works than a reality. Chaucer's famous addresses to his scribes in *Troilus and Criseyde* and in his short poem

---

[18] St. Bonaventure, Commentary on Peter Lombard's *Libri sententiarum*. Quoted by Minnis in *Theory of Authorship* 94.

"Chaucer's wordes unto Adam, his owne scriveyn" demonstrate this. In *Troilus*, Chaucer worries that scribes will "myswrite" and "mysmetre" his words "for ther is so grete diversite / In Englissh and in writyng of oure tonge" (V. 1793-94).[19] Vernacular scribes were expected to be as precise as scribes of the Bible, but the dialects of the vernacular languages made this impossible. The scribes of the Vernon are a case in point. Both scribes were careful to adapt the text they were copying to their own dialect, or the dialect of their readers. The uniformity of the dialect throughout the manuscript suggests to Doyle that this editing was the scribes' doing; it did not come from the exemplars.[20] But beyond this, the scribes appear to make very few changes to the texts. There is no evidence that they have added or removed anything from them. Though many of the Vernon and Simeon texts are distinct from other versions, the differences may come from the exemplars.

The compiler and scribes of the Vernon manuscript thus have a large role in the text. The compiler arranged the texts to fit into the structure they are in, a structure that appears to be the best for bringing Sowlehele to its audience. The scribes then edited the texts to suit the dialect of the audience. The texts in the Vernon are thus carefully arranged and edited to best suit the needs of a particular audience.

2.5   The Presentation of the Vernon Manuscript

The presentation of a text includes the handwriting, layout and decoration. All of these elements combine to establish the meaning and audience for a manuscript.

---

[19]Quotation from *Riverside Chaucer*, 3rd ed., Ed. Larry D. Benson (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987).
[20]Doyle, *Facsimile* 11.

Presentation can also affect the meaning and interpretation of texts: rubrication can break a text into sections and alter its structure, decoration and illustrations can provide commentary on a text that may affect the way it is read. Many vernacular manuscripts were written with little thought to presentation. They were often written for greater utility, and their appearance reflects this. The Vernon is an exception: it is a carefully and formally presented manuscript, as the following discussion will show.

2.5.1 Handwriting

A.I. Doyle describes the hand of the main scribe of the Vernon (Scribe B) a "steady set round anglicana".[21] He goes on to characterize this hand as a somewhat old-fashioned one, uninfluenced by the secretary style, which was becoming more popular at the time. The handwriting is generally neat and consistent throughout both the Vernon and Scribe B's contributions to the Simeon. Considering the amount of writing and the years it would have taken, Doyle calls Scribe B's work "a very considerable achievement of penmanship as well as of patience."[22] Scribe B may have been conservative for his time, or perhaps he was older than Scribe A and developed his hand earlier.[23] Scribe A shows more signs of contemporary influence: Doyle describes it "as practised as and probably more rapid than B, but less uniform, with some pronounced individual characteristics".[24] The style of this hand is

---

[21]Doyle, *Facsimile* 11.

[22]Doyle, *Facsimile* 12.

[23]Doyle speculates that he may have developed his hand in the middle of the fourteenth century, as opposed to Scribe B, who probably developed his in the late fourteenth or, some suggest, early fifteenth century. Doyle cites J.A. Herbert as one who believes it developed in the early fifteenth century. See *Facsimile* 12.

[24]Doyle, *Facsimile* 11.

slightly later than that of Scribe B's, but it may be a mistake to assume that A made his contribution some length of time after B. Scribe A may have been a younger person, with different training, or Scribe B may have been writing in a deliberately conservative style because the handwriting is more legible. If the latter is true, then Scribe B went to some effort to make a clearly written text that could be easily read by a large number of people.

2.5.2 Layout of Pages

The layout of the Vernon is ideally suited for a large number of long texts. Each page of the Vernon contains about 80 lines in two or three columns. The pages of the Vernon measure 54.4 by 39.3 cm. The main text occupies 41.2-42 cm vertically (with about 80 lines a page) and 28.4-29.4cm horizontally (with a 14-18 mm gutter on two-column pages and a 8-11 mm gutter on three-column pages).[25] The pages have wide margins, which are absorbed by the gathering in the case of the inner margins, and provide plenty of space for rubrication and decoration all around the text in the other margins.

Figure 1 (at the end of this chapter) shows the two typical page layouts (at about one quarter the original size). The two-column page is f.50v, which is from the *South English Legendary*, and contains the end of the legend of St. Ypolite and the beginning of the Assumption of Our Lady, marked by the large capital "S". The three-column page is f.265, which contains the end of the *Speculum vitae* and the beginning of the *Pricke of*

---

[25]See Doyle, *Facsimile* 2 for details of these measurements. For sake of comparison, one page of the Vernon (single spaced) appears to be able to hold about 8 double spaced pages of this dissertation (without footnotes).

Conscience, marked by the miniature.[26]

The impression of this layout is that the texts of the Vernon appear compact without being difficult to read. The layout is versatile enough to allow for long and short texts to appear neatly on each page, while leaving plenty of room for decorations, which appear on every page. The layout of the texts in the Vernon thus balances utility with formality to create a manuscript that can hold a large number of texts of various lengths and styles and that is pleasing to the eye.

2.5.3 The Decorations

The Vernon is heavily, though not lavishly, decorated. These decorations include highlighted capitals, borders, and a few illustrations. Almost every page is decorated in blue and red shades, with some green and gold, but on most pages these decorations are limited to capitals and trailing vinets. Full border decorations tend to appear at the beginnings of each section. There are various forms of pictures, including column miniatures accompanying *La Estorie del Evangelie* and *The Miracles of Mary*, a few capitals with decorative or grotesque heads, and a large historiated initial at the beginning of *The Pricke of Conscience*. There is also a large diagrammatic table accompanying the *Speculum vitae*.

Kathleen L. Scott identifies two artists who produced the miniatures and other pictures (Illustrator A, who did *La Estorie del Evangelie*, and B, who did the *Miracles of*

---

[26]These and the other images from the Vernon in this chapter are reproduced from Kathleen Scott's *Later Gothic Manuscripts*. The tone and contrast of some of the images may have been adjusted for greater clarity.

Mary) and ten artists who produced the border decorations (Hand A-G, G^1, G^2).[27] Illustrator A and B are both quite accomplished, but B shows signs of influence from the International School (this is a point I will return to later). Among the decorators, Hands B and D are the most accomplished. Hand D seems to be London trained, while the others are more provincial in characteristic.[28]

The various forms of decorations are used typically to mark the importance of various divisions between and within the texts: divisions between texts are naturally more decorated than divisions within texts. Most of the decorations follow a similar pattern; the decorations of the *South English Legendary* are a good example. The first page of the legends, and hence of Part 1, is distinguished by a full page border. Parts 2 and 4 also have such borders; Parts 3 and 5 do not.[29] Each capital is marked by trailing vinets, but these are sparse for the minor capitals that mark different sections of each legend. The initial that begins each legend is four or more lines in size and is marked by a thick vinet that typically extends up and down the left side of the entire column where the legend starts. If the legend starts close to the top or bottom of the page, the vinet will often extend horizontally across the top or bottom margin and only part way up or down the column. If more than one legend appears on the same page (as happens often between fols. 13-18, for example), the vinets often run together, bending around the ends of the columns and looping around each other

---

[27]Scott lists the hands and where they appear in the Vernon in *Later Gothic Manuscripts* 2:22. Doyle provides a slightly different list in the facsimile (7 and end fold-out), but I will use Scott's list.

[28]Scott 2:22. Scott suggests that Hand G trained Hands G^1 and G^2.

[29]Part 5 may be a misplaced quire from Part 3 (the refrain lyrics appear in Part 3 in the Simeon). I will discuss this more in the next chapter.

in the top or bottom margins. These decorations help to demarcate the divisions between texts, making the manuscript easier to read. The decoration thus adds to both the formality and utility of the manuscript.

2.5.4   The Illustrations

The Vernon also contains a small number of illustrations, most of which are no longer extant. Most of the illustrations appear in Part 2, accompanying *La estorie del Euangelie* and *The Miracles of Our Lady*. Only fragments survive of either text. Doyle suggests that the reason the second part of Vernon was so favoured with illustrations might have been that the exemplars were illustrated or because Part 2 may have been intended as a separate volume when it was started.[30] There are also two illustrations in Part 3, including the *Pater noster* table, which graphically lays out the themes and benefits of the prayer, and an illuminated capital at the beginning of the *Pricke of Conscience*. The illustrations serve both an organizational and a thematic role.

The illustrations function in part like the decorations and capitals and help to mark the divisions between texts. The illustrations in the *Miracles of Our Lady* mark the divisions between each tale. The capital in the *Pricke of Conscience* marks the beginning of that work. But the illustrations have a much broader purpose: they often provide commentary on the story they accompany. The illustrations in *La Estorie del Evangelie*, for example, mark important points in the biblical narrative: the annunciation, angels appearing to Zacharius, Joseph and the shepherds, the nativities of John the Baptist and Christ. Each

---

[30]Doyle, *Facsimile* 9.

miniature typically appears just below the text it illustrates and draws attention to these important events. The illustrations for the *Miracles of Our Lady* illustrate the entire story in a series of scenes. The images thus have an interpretive role in the texts they accompany.

Illustrator A's work, seen in the illustrations for *La estorie del Euangelie,* is iconographic and represents an older, more conservative (but still very current) style of illustration—figure 2 (at the end of the chapter) is an example. The images have patterned backgrounds and thick frames, usually in red and blue. The figures wear red or blue, in contrast to the backgrounds, and are fairly static. Haloes are used where appropriate, and the angels have burnished gold wings. Some figures hold scrolls with the Latin text of the Biblical passages they refer to. Each miniature simply depicts the story it refers to and provides a quick, memorable summary of the biblical narrative.

The illustrations for *The Miracles of Our Lady* are rare for England, for many reasons, and may show signs of continental influence. In her discussion of these miracles, Carol M. Meale describes the typical form such illustrations take in similar English texts.[31] The illustrations generally appear in only a few books of hours. Here the stories are depicted in a series of panels rather than in one miniature. These images are flat and iconographic, like the illustrations for *La estorie del Euangelie* in the Vernon. The Vernon illustrations, on the other hand, depict the narrative in a single panel, though they often use a collage of

---

[31]Some fourteenth-century examples of these, given by Meale, are the Queen Mary Psalter (BL Royal 2.B.VII, c.1310-20), the Madresfield Hours (Madresfield Court, Earl Beauchamp MS M, c.1320-30), the Taymouth Hours (BL Yates Thompson 13, c.1325-35), the Smithfield Decretals (BL Royal 10.E.IV, c.1330-40), Egerton 2781 (c.1340-50), the Carew-Poyntz Hours (Cambridge, Fitzwilliam 48), and a series of MSS made for the Bohun family (Egerton 3277, ?1361-?1373; Bodleian, Auct.D.44, c.1380; Copenhagen Royal Library Thotts Saml.547, 1380-94). See Meale 126-27.

scenes without any framing. They have more of a sense of perspective in that the lines of the miniatures draw the viewer towards their most important points. As Meale says, "the work is characterized by a sense of vitality, and independence of approach."[32] These illustrations are closely related to the stories and draw attention to important characters, events and themes.[33]

The style of the drawing in these pictures is also very different from the traditional style of art in England, and indeed from Illustrator A's style. Scott, among others, says that Illustrator B of the Vernon "may have been first to set up 'a whole new concept in late medieval English illumination'."[34] The Vernon is the first extant example of the new, more realistic style in Britain. Illustrator B combines this style with the English style: "Although using black outlining and working in colour tonalities of the linear style just noted, the Vernon illustrator (Hand B) created deep facial modelling in white and the soft flowing lines of the International School."[35] Illustrator B is innovative, but he combines the new style with his own native style.

A typical example of these miniatures is the one accompanying the "Miracle of the Boy Singer", the second miracle (see Figure 3), discussed in more detail in the next chapter. The miniature is divided into five scenes, in roughly two rows, moving from right to left:

---

[32]Meale 128.

[33]Meale's example of this is the illustration for the "Jewish Boy of Bruges" legend. Mary does not appear here. Instead the boy's mother stands in for her. Her gestures direct the reader to both the piety of the boy, by the way she points at his praying hand, and to the sins of the father, by the way her other hand points to him in admonishment or instruction. See Meale 129.

[34]Scott 1:46. The quotation is from Margaret Rickert, *Painting in Britain: The Middle Ages*, The Pelican History of Art, 2nd Ed., 1965.

[35]Scott 1:47. See also 2:21.

(1, top right) the Jewish man leads the boy into his house; (2, top middle) he cuts the boy's throat; (3, top left) he throws the boy into a privy, a startlingly black circle; (4, bottom right) the child's mother asks for help from the mayor and bailiff; (5, bottom left and left margin), the bishop pulls a lily from the boy's throat. The mayor and bailiff, on the right edge, and the bishop and lily, on the left edge, frame the picture. The boy's facial expressions are important in the miniature since they draw attention to the miracle. In all scenes, even 2 and 3 where he is being killed and thrown into the privy, his eyes and mouth are open to show he is singing. But the main focal points of the miniature are the bishop and the mother. The mother directs the mayor's and viewer's attention to the murder: her right hand points to the knife cutting the boy's throat in scene 2. The bishop draws attention to the miracle itself by holding the huge white lily he pulled from the boy's throat. Around the bishop and the boy (in scene 5) are scrolls with the texts of the songs the boy sings in the story. The scroll with "Alma redemptoris mater" trails off to the top of the page, like an upper extension of the vinets trailing from the miracle's initial capital.

Most of the miniatures for the *Miracles of the Our Lady* depict Mary interceding in the narrative. This miniature does not have Mary appearing directly, but she does appear symbolically in the form of the lily, which is prominent in both the miniature and the story.[36] The artist has exaggerated the lily so that it is almost larger than the boy from which it was pulled to emphasize its role in the story. The boy's mother also seems to be a Marian figure. In the absence of Mary herself in either the stories or the illustrations, women are

---

[36]The first miniature in *La Estorie del Evangelie*, the Annunciation (f. 105r B), shows Mary with a lily beside her.

sometimes depicted in an authoritative role.[37] The mother is given a more prominent role in this version of the legend than in some others, and the miniature reflects this prominence. She is one of the more dynamic figures in the picture. Her left hand is cupped to her mouth as she calls out to the mayor, in a commanding gesture. The mother's right hand points insistently to the murder, and the Jewish man's house in general. The image is a dynamic, moving depiction of the legend that draws attention to Mary's role in the story and the role and emotions of the mother.

There are two illustrations in the third part of the manuscript, one accompanying the *Speculum vitae* and the other at the beginning of the *Pricke of Conscience*. The illustration accompanying the *Speculum vitae* is listed as a distinct item in the table of contents ("the *Pater Noster* in a table ypeynted"), but is linked to the *Speculum*. As Avril Henry shows, the capitals in the left hand column of the diagram are linked by vinets and flourishes to the decorated "A" beginning the *Speculum Vitae*.[38] The table is thematically linked to the *Speculum;* both describe the *Pater noster* as a series of petitions to God the father for gifts from the Holy Spirit. The table of seven petitions of the *Pater noster* lead to the seven gifts of the holy ghost and the seven virtues, and help to counteract the seven vices. The table depicts these connection through a series of interconnected shapes that contain Latin and English text. The *Speculum vitae* describes similar connection. Though the connections are somewhat different in the two works, the table has a similar relationship with the *Speculum*

---

[37]Meale discusses the mother in the "Jewish Boy of Bourges" miracle, who also seems to stand in for Mary (129).

[38]Avril Henry, "'The *Pater Noster* in a table ypeynted' and Some Other Presentations of Doctrine in the Vernon Manuscript", *Studies in the Vernon* 91.

as the illustrations in Part 2 do with their texts. It is a summary of the ideas in the *Speculum.*[39]

The Trinity initial, the historiated initial to the *Pricke of Conscience* (see the three-column page on Figure 1), may have a different role from the other illustrations. It depicts God holding a crucifix, surrounded by angels. A monk is kneeling before the image holding a scroll reading, "misere mei deus secundum magnam misericordium". It was drawn by Illustrator A.[40] Though the trinity is an appropriate illustration for the *Pricke of Conscience*, the illustration may have more to do with patronage. The monk, dressed in white, seems be Cistercian, and some have suggested that this may mean the Vernon was either comissioned by a Cistercian house or destined for one. Scott argues that "kneeling figures usually represent patrons rather than authors ... and, in the case of monastic figures, can often be taken to be representative of the order or house rather than the original patron".[41] This illustration suggests a Cistercian origin for the Vernon, and though the patrons of the manuscript may not have been Cistercian, they were certainly closely linked to them and may have identified themselves with them.

There are two other white-clad monks in the manuscript, depicted mourning in the miniature for "The Quinsied Monk" legend (f. 126v A). Scott argues that the monastic associations of the manuscript are ambiguous. One example is the dark-clad monk in the miniature on (f.126r C), accompanying the miracle of "The Fornicating Monk". Interestingly, the miniature depicts the monk fornicating with a priest rather than a nun (as

---

[39] See Henry 91.
[40] Scott 1:21.
[41]Scott 1:23.

in the story). Illustrator B is usually careful to follow the story, so this miniature may be something of an inter-monastic insult, almost Chaucerian in quality. Scott further argues that the page border for the Trinity Initial shows columbines, and the use of these with a picture of a monk is common to Benedictine manuscripts.[42] The weight of evidence, however, favours a Cistercian origin.

The decoration of the Vernon manuscript provides a great deal of evidence about the possible reasons for its production and its intended audience. The style of decoration, in particular, is quite suggestive. The Vernon is in many ways a transitional work: its decorations combine both fourteenth- and fifteenth-century styles (similar to the handwriting). Illustrator B, marks the first appearance of the fifteenth century style in England (it emerged earlier on the Continent, where it became the dominant style). This new style made use of modelled figures, with drapery and facial features expressed through shading, with more animation and vitality in the gestures. This use of modelling and animation had begun to replace the two-dimensional style of earlier art, such as that in the illustrations for *La estorie del Euangelie*. The realistic style did not take an immediate hold in England. The old two-dimensional art continued to endure with some influences of the new realism. So, for example, where a fourteenth century artist might have favoured simple figures on a burnished gold background, surrounded by lavish border work, and the realistic style might have favoured realistically rendered figures on simple patterned backgrounds and minimal border-work, the fifteenth-century English style might combine simple figures

---

[42] Scott discusses the Trinity initial on 2:23.

on simple patterned backgrounds with minimal border-work.[43] The art of the Vernon

manuscript stands at the point of this transition between the fourteenth- and fifteenth-

century styles.

What is significant about the Vernon is not so much that it is the first example of

the new realistic style in Britain, but that it is one of the few examples of it. The reasons

why the realistic style never caught on in England are worth going into since they reveal a

great deal about the Vernon. Scott writes about the English reaction to the realistic art:

> One possible contemporary response to the new 'real' images in books was
> to eliminate them (and other images) completely, as the Lollards apparently
> did. Another response was to make them more identifiably 'image-like',
> therefore less seductive, less dangerous. The second response, that of a
> nearly all-powerful orthodoxy with its still very potent imagery, was the one
> to be perpetuated in book illustrations throughout the [fifteenth] century.[44]

Scott is writing about trends in book production in the decades after the Vernon was

produced. The orthodox factions in the Church ultimately adopted the same stance to

images in books as the Lollards did for different reasons. At the time of the Vernon,

however, the orthodox factions had not yet solidified their opposition to the new style and

the producers of the Vernon manuscript were thus able to use it. But the compiler is careful

in how this style is applied in his manuscript: it is significant that the new style is not used

for *La estorie del Euangelie*. The compiler used the more conservative style to depict scenes

from the Bible, and the newer, more realistic style for the worldly and historical settings of

the *Miracles of Our Lady*. The compiler may have recognized the controversy surrounding

---

[43]Scott says more about the nature of these styles and the origins of them on 1:23
and 47.
[44]Scott 1:46-7.

the new style and ensured that his illustrators used only the more modern styles in the appropriate place.

2.6   Conclusion

Mary Carruthers describes the importance of all the elements of presentation in her *Book of Memory*. Some medieval writers distinguished between the *painture* and the *parole* of a text, the picture and the sound. *Painture* referred not only to the images in the text, but to the image of the text, the way it looked on the page, and the way it worked with its decorations, ink colour and images: "the visual presentation of a text was considered, at least by the learned, to be part of its meaning, not limited to the illustration of its themes or subjects but necessary to its proper reading, its ability-to-be significant and memorable."[45] Carruthers gives numerous examples of medieval writers discussing this. Chaucer uses this image in the *House of Fame*:

> Whan any speche ycomen ys
> Up to the paleys, anon-ryght
> Hyt wexeth lyk the same wight
> Which that the word in erthe spaik,
> Be hyt clothed red or blak,
> And hath so very hys lyknesse
> That spok the word, that thou wilt gesse
> That it the same body be,
> Man or woman, he or she.   [1074-82][46]

---

[45]Mary Carruthers, *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture*. (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1990) 224.

[46]Quoted in Carruthers 225 (though the text is from the *Riverside Chaucer*) Other examples of this medieval discussions of *painture* that Carruthers gives are Richart de Fournival, *Li bestiaire d'amours* and *Li response du bestiaire*, the introduction to Dante's *La vita nuova*, and John Lydgate's "The Fifteen Joys and Sorrows of Mary". See Carruthers 223-225.

These are part of the Eagle's words to Chaucer at the end of Book 2, just before he sets him down in the House of Fame. The Eagle describes how the words of a person on Earth ascend to the House of Fame and materialize into an image of that person. But the people materialize in alternating red and black, like the major capitals in a manuscript. The people who enter the House of Fame become a sort of manuscript. The *House of Fame* has many similar images: in the first part of the dream, for example, Chaucer seems to be wandering through a manuscript looking at miniatures from the *Aeneid*.

The purpose of *painture* is to make a text more memorable, as Scott suggests: "religious images should be seen as signs of another reality, as 'rememoratijf and mynding signes', as 'seable rememoratijf signes', or as listings, like 'kalendars', that remind us of other truths and lead to acts of devotion and meditation".[47] *Painture* makes a text more memorable, as Carruthers argues:

> 'Representation'... was understood not in an objective or reproductive sense as often as in a temporal one; signs make something present in the mind by acting on memory. Just as letters, *litterae*, make present the voices (*voces*) and ideas (*res*) of those who are not in fact present, so pictures serve as present signs or cues of those same *voces* and *res*.[48]

Painture helps to convey the meaning of the text, and makes it more memorable. As the reader contemplates the texts in the manuscript, all the elements of the presentation, including the illustration and decoration, and perhaps even the layout on the page, combine to make the text more memorable and thus make the reader more receptive to the message of the text. Reading is thus an ethical activity. Carruthers cites examples from Hugh of St.

---

[47]Scott 1:45. The first two quotations are from *The Repressor of Over Much Blaming of the Clergy by Reginald Pecock*, 1, London, 1860, 148, 209.
[48]Carruthers, 221-22.

Victor and others to show how reading and memorizing were thought to make a person better. Hugh defines a three-stage reading process: in Carruthers' words, "First, one focuses on the example, next one acts in imitation of it, and then one internalizes the imitation so that one's own vital power (*virtus*) is permanently changed."[49] Reading a good book can make a person a better person, and a book can aid in this process by making it easier for the reader to memorize its contents.

It could be argued that the Vernon manuscript is attempting to create Sowlehele in its reader through a similar process to that which Hugh of St. Victor describes. It could be trying to create Sowlehele in all senses of that word: by trying to bring salvation to every reader in general, spiritually heal those readers who are in a state of sin, and in doing so provide a form of pastoral care. We will need to examine the Vernon's contents and organization in more detail before drawing any firmer conclusions, but the Vernon does as much a source of Sowlehele as it is a source of it. As such, we begin to see how the manuscript takes on as important a role as the texts within it.

Carruthers is careful to distance herself from the exegetical critics in her analysis of the ethics of reading. The exegetical critics argue that all medieval literature is ethical because it promotes charity. Charity is an intrinsic part of the text. Carruthers describes her own argument as more rhetorical: the ethics of reading occurs only in context. As Carruthers puts it, while exegetical critics believe that texts "normalize an occasion",

---

[49]Carruthers 186. Carruthers discusses these ideas throughout her fifth chapter. Hugh of St Victor discusses these ideas in the preface to his Chronicle, *De Tribus Maximis Circumstantiis Gestorum*, which Carruthers reproduces in Appendix A of her volume.

rhetoric "occasionalizes a norm".[50] In rhetorical terms, a text is taken from its original context and adapted and presented to meet the ethical needs of an immediate audience.

Rita Copeland expands on this definition of rhetoric in her study of Augustine in *Rhetoric, Hermeneutics and Translation in the Middle Ages*. In works like *De doctrina christiana*, Augustine argues that the words of the Bible can be ambiguous and require readers to find the intended meaning in them. Copeland argues that this "transfers responsibility for making meaning from the writer to the reader".[51] This is even true of the Bible:

> Of course, meaning in Scripture is unitary, and is produced, not by the reader, but by God. But that meaning can be expressed ambiguously, so that it is up to the reader to judge carefully and to be equipped with the fundamentals of doctrine (signs and things, *caritas*) and with the *techne* of exposition.[52]

This seems very much to be the intention of the producers of the Vernon manuscript. They hope to help their readers to better understand their faith. They are not trying to supplant the authority of the priests, but rather to give the readers the tools (the *"techne"*) to gain more from the teachings of the clergy.

In terms of its rhetoric, we see that the Vernon is at least as important as its individual texts. I have stressed throughout this chapter the care the scribes took in copying the texts, and the formality with which they are presented. Scribe B especially has given the texts uniformity in both the dialect and handwriting. The compiler has seen to it that the

---

[50]Carruthers 181. Carruthers discusses her response to exegetical critics and the rhetoric of ethics on 180-182.

[51] Copeland 158. The passages from *De doctrina christiana* that she is referring to are quoted on pages 157-58.

[52]Copeland 158.

texts are well (but not elaborately) decorated and carefully laid out to make them as readable as possible. The presentation of texts in the Vernon thus helps to impart Sowlehele to their readers. In the next chapters I will examine the ways in which Sowlehele is presented through the selection and arrangement of texts.

2.7 Images
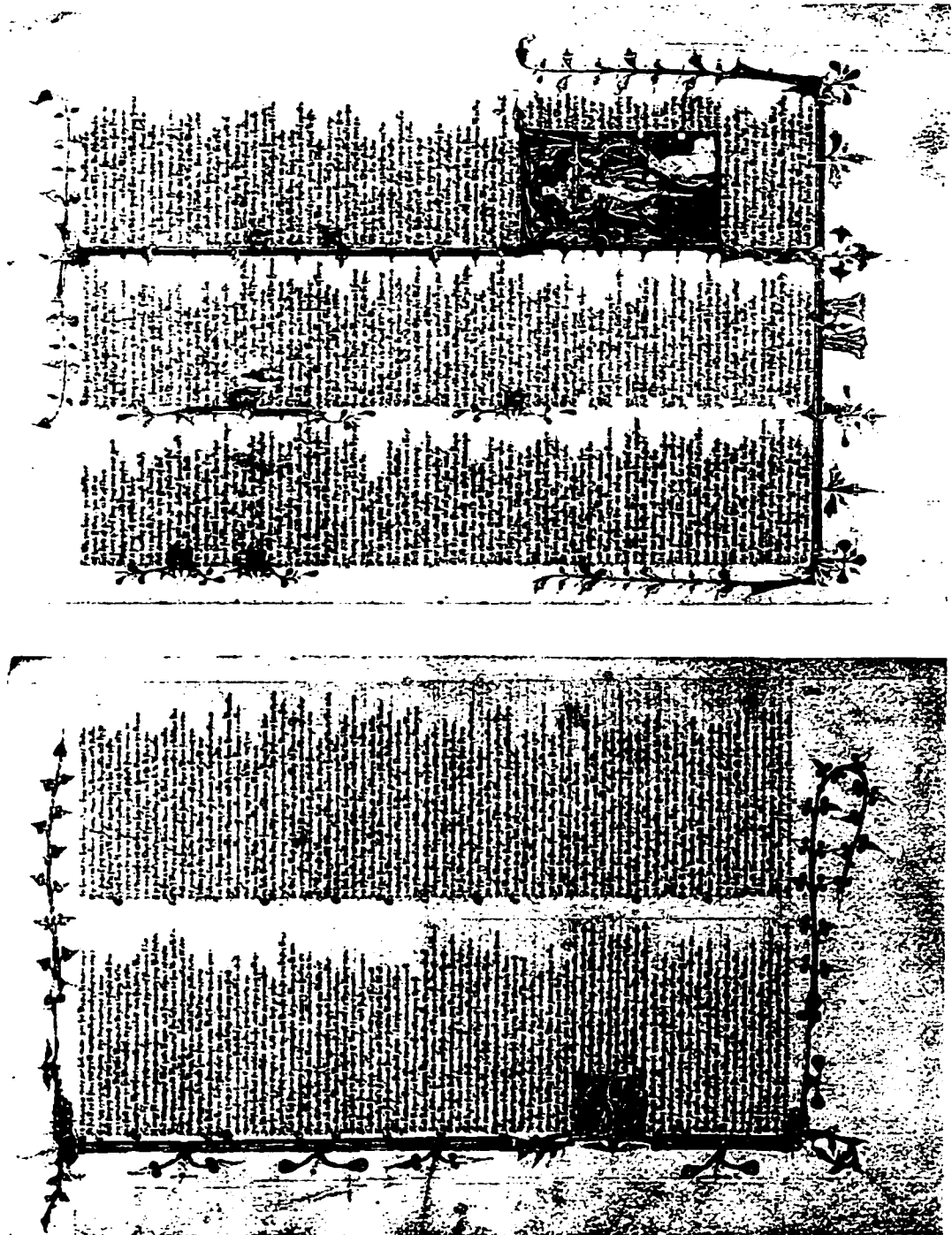
Figure 1 Typical 2- and 3-column pages in Vernon MS. F.50v and f.265. Approx. 25% actual size.
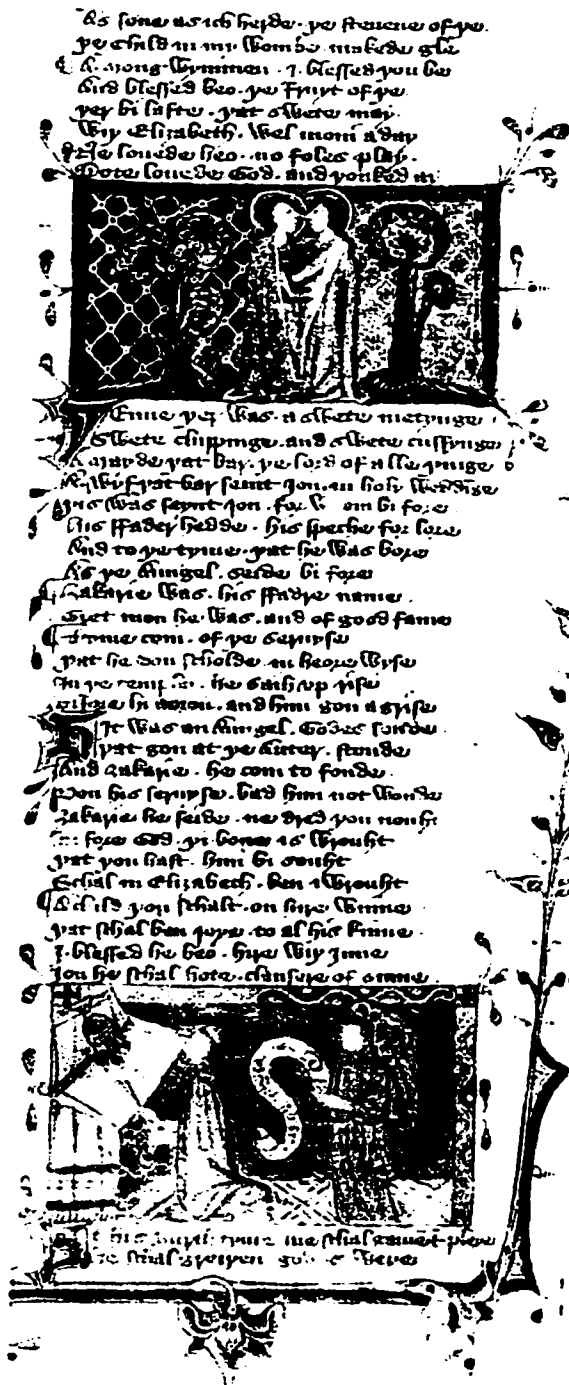
Figure 2 Images from *La estoire del Euangelie.* The Visitation and The Angel appearing to Zacharias. F.105.
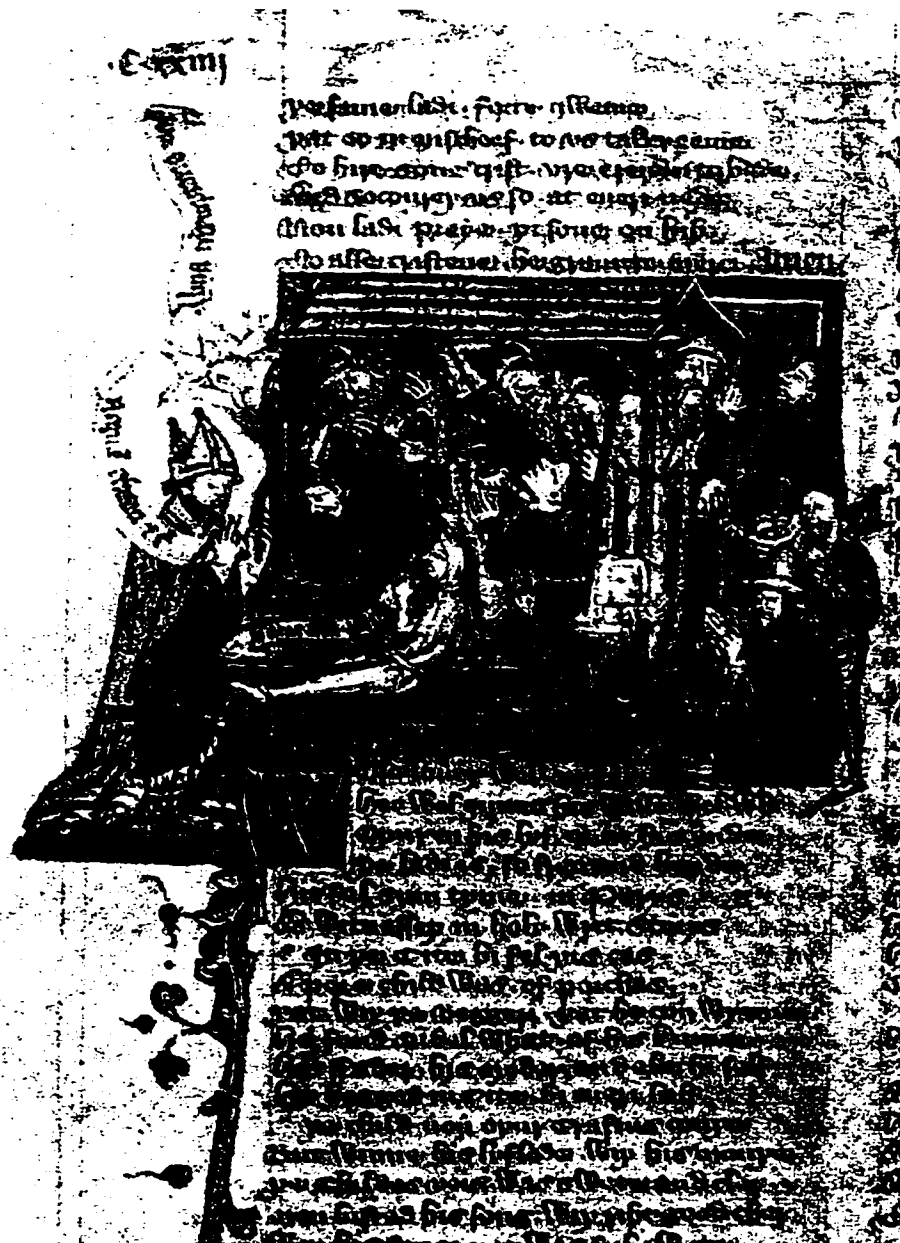
Figure 3 Illustration for "Miracle of the Boy Singer" from *The Miracles of Our Lady*. F.124v. Scenes are to be read from right to left, with three on the top row and two on the bottom row.

Chapter 3:   The Selection of Texts

The compiler of the Vernon carefully selected texts that best define Sowlehele and meet the spiritual needs of his readers. He then arranged this selection, grouping similar texts together to suit the different tastes and needs of his audience. In this chapter, I will determine the principles behind the selection and arrangement of the texts. My intention here is not to survey every text in the Vernon manuscript. I will concentrate on texts and groupings of texts that seem to best define each section of the Vernon.

The selection and arrangement of texts are closely linked and it is impossible to talk about one without talking about the other. However, I will concentrate on the structure of the manuscript in the next chapter, where I will discuss how it works with genres in the Vernon . In this chapter, I want to concentrate on how each section of the manuscript in constructed out of the texts. The following table is a brief summary of the structure of the Vernon:[1]

Part	Quires	Pages	Columns	Description
Prel.	1	i-viii	2	No special rubrication or decoration. Even the MS title is in a normal size hand.
1	2-14	1-104	2 for SEL 3 for VGL	Begins with full page border Ends part way down Col. 3 on 104v
2	15-22	105-66	3	Begins with full page border, with illuminated capital, now cut out, with an empty coat of arms End is missing
3	23-41	167-318	3	Begins with full page border Ends col. 2 of 318r; 318v is blank
4	42-52	319-406	2	Begins with full page border Ends col. 1 of 406r, rest of page cut out, but seems to have been blank.

---

[1] The source for this table is the fold out page at the end of the *Facsimile*. This is only a brief summary of that chart.

5	53	407-14 (or 418)	3	No special decoration.

The table shows that each section of the manuscript forms a distinct unit, beginning and ending on its own quires. Thus each section could have been put together in any order, or even formed its own manuscript. Though the sections are distinct, there is no special rubrication for them. The table of contents does not mention the sections, and except for the page borders, there is nothing that announces the beginning of a new section. However, the demarcation between one section and another is easily apparent from the types of texts in each. A reader of the manuscript would notice the transitions from legend to lyric in Parts 1 and 2, from lyric to homily in Parts 2 and 3 and from verse to prose in Parts 3 and 4.

3.1 The Prologue

The first quire of the Vernon contains the table of contents and Aelred of Rievaulx's *De institutione inclusarum*. This quire is often considered an after-thought: the second Vernon scribe first tries to make sense of the massive book with the table and then uses the *De insitutione* to fill in the remaining pages. However, Rievaulx's work might be more than that. Scribe A does impose meaning on the manuscript by giving it its title; *De institutione inclusarum* may be another such effort. At face value, this work suggests that the Vernon was intended for a female religious audience, and in this it is not unique.[2]

---

[2]The Vernon version of the manuscript is a unique text. There is one other English translation of the Latin original (in MS Bodley 423) but it is a translation from a different version of the original and translates different parts of that. The two version could not come from a similar exemplar or be exemplars of each other.

De institutione is addressed directly to a woman in a convent who wants to live the life of a recluse. She is addressed throughout as "sister". The text is broader in its terms than this: the exempla the author provides to support his discussion of chastity are usually about men who are unchaste or seeking to be chaste. But the author is clearly interested in what is best for the female recluse he is writing to. For example, in Chapter 13, he discusses the lives of Martha and Mary, the common biblical source for the active and contemplative lives. He tells his reader that she should choose the life of Mary, the contemplative life, and shun the life of Martha. *De institutione* is not the only text in the Vernon to speak in such terms—there are others in Part 5—but in general the compiler seems to favour the middle life.

In its treatment of contemplation, however, *De institutione* is typical of the Vernon. The text opens with a long discussion of chastity and meekness. These discussions are not wholly directed towards female recluses because they do not preclude the possibility of marriage. After this the author turns to contemplation. The form of contemplation he discusses involves the woman's going off by herself and thinking about the events of the gospels. The author in fact loosely paraphrases the gospels, interlaced with a comment on the significance of each event on which the sister should meditate. For example, when Mary Magdalene approaches Christ after the Resurrection, the author writes:

> Suster, I pray þe tak good heede; for þoo it was fully igraunted to Marie Magdeleyn and here felawes þat arst was put in delacioun. *Accesserunt namque et tenuerunt pedes eius.* As þe gospel seyþ, þo þey went to and klepte Ihesu aboute his feet.[3]

The author draws the sister's attention to Mary Magdalene's humility before Christ, and

---

[3] Aelred of Rievaulx, *De institutione inclusarum* 50-51. This text is edited from the Vernon.

points this out to her as a model that she should follow.

The form of contemplation in *De institutione* is different from what we see in works like *The Cloud of Unknowing*. It is not a transcendental form of contemplation, but a very practical one, grounded in scripture. It is designed to encourage people to become more righteous through the teachings of the Bible. This is the standard form of contemplation in the Vernon, as we will see in the following pages. It may be that this, more than the actual audience of *De institutione*, is the reason why the text is included here. The compiler may have been more concerned with bringing what he felt were the best sorts of contemplation for his audience to his readers and selected this text as a good and thorough example of it.

In addition to contemplation, *De institutione inclusarum* is stylistically similar to the rest of the manuscript. The use of Latin quotations to anchor the English discussions in authority is common. There are some psalm extrapolations in Part 2 that quote the first lines of each psalm. The *Northern Homily Cycle* and *Piers Plowman* also use this technique. Furthermore, *De institutione* uses a great number of exempla to support the discussion. The author often quotes stories of corrupt monks and such throughout. As we shall see, this use of exempla is typical of the manuscript.

In all, *De institutione* serves as as good an introduction to the Vernon as the title Sowlehele does. It may in fact have a similar status since both texts were added after the rest of the manuscript was organized and copied. Scribe A or the compiler could have intended the work as an introduction, along with the table of contents. *De institutione* may give us some idea of the audience of the manuscript. It introduces the forms of contemplation the compiler wants his readers to follow, and the styles of writing that best convey this message

to the intended audience.

3.2 Part 1: The Saint's Legends

Part 1 of the Vernon manuscript contains the *South English Legendary* and the collection of twelve legends known as the *Vernon Golden Legend*. Though there is no overall title to the collection, its unity is obvious both through the similarity of the pieces and the fact that the collection follows the order of saints' days through the year. This organization is typical for the *South English Legendary*. Most cycles begin with the New Year and proceed through until December 31. The order of the legends can become confused and the list of saints covered can vary, but the overall structure remains constant. In some collections, legends that were left out of the cycle for one reason or another are gathered together at the end. The *Vernon Golden Legend* may be an example of this.[4] One feature of this collection of the *South English Legendary* that does set it apart from others is the inclusion at the beginning of a paraphrase of the Old Testament up until the birth of Christ. The Vernon is not unique in this regard, but the paraphrase is rare.[5]

The *South English Legendary* is written on two-column pages and the *Vernon Golden Legend* is written in three columns. The verse forms of the two collections are the same. This transition is unusual for the Vernon: all the other sections are exclusively in two-

---

[4]For an example of the order of some versions of the Legendary, see appendices 2-5 of the introduction to *The South English Legendary* ed. Charlotte D'Evelyn and Anna J. Mill, 3 vols, EETS os.235, 236 & 244 (Oxford UP, 1956-59) 3: 29-36.

[5] Examples are MS Egerton 1993 and MS Trinity College Cambridge R.3,25. See Horstmann's introduction to his edition of the *South English Legendary* (EETS 87) for a description of the various manuscripts of the collection.

or three-column formats. It is possible that this transition is meant to indicate that the *Vernon Golden Legends* are distinct from the *South English Legendary*. They are not incorporated into the church calendar and the scribe may have wanted to make this clear to the reader by changing the format.[6] This transition also reveals something of the nature of the compiler: he could easily have inserted the *Vernon Golden Legends* into the appropriate spots in the larger collection, but he appears to be more interested in preserving the integrity of the text from which he copied. Whatever the reason, the compiler clearly does not see himself as an editor of texts.

The purpose of the *South English Legendary* is of course to depict exemplary figures who are both ideals that readers can try to emulate and intercessors to whom they can pray for comfort and aid. But the tone of the legends sets them apart from other works that provide similar edification. The legends are not dissimilar to romances. Their narrative structures, depictions of historical details, battles, fabulous events and such are all analogous to romances. Klaus P. Jankofsky argues that the legends strive to entertain their audience, much like the romances.[7] However, the purpose of the *South English Legendary* goes far beyond entertainment. At the beginning of the cycle, in the prologue (which appears after the Old Testament history in the Vernon), the narrator speaks of Christ in the imagery of romance:

Suþþe oure swete Louered him sulf to þis bataille aly3te

---

[6] The transition from two to three columns appears to occur mid-quire (the leaves at the transition are lost, so it is impossible to say for sure). The transition thus seems to be deliberate, and not the result of binding two separately written quires.

[7] Jankofsky, "Entertainment, Edification and Popular Education in the *South English Legendary*", *Journal of Popular Culture* 11(1977): 709.

And nam mannes fleyss and blod in wan he wolde fiȝte

...

His cosyn sein Ion þe Baptist armed him þo þere
Anon as an hardy kyng his baner lette arere.   [Prologue 39-40, 47-8][8]

Like a squire, John the Baptist arms Christ, who goes to battle for humankind. Later, the

narrator compares the saints to romance figures:

> Men wilneþ muche to hure telle of bataille of kynge
> And of kniȝtes þat hardy were þat muchedel is lesynge
> Wo so wilneþ muche to hure tales of suche þinge
> Hardi batailles he may hure here þat nis no lesinge
> Of apostles & martirs þat hardy kniȝtes were
> Þat studeuast were in bataille & ne fleide noȝt for fere
> Þat soffrede þat luþer men al quik hare lymes totere.   [Prologue 59-65]

The romances tell stories of knights and kings that are filled with lies and exaggerations

("lesyinge"); the legends are filled with true stories of saints and martyrs who were brave

in battle and never fled. The narrator is co-opting the romantic genre for his own, but still

trying to satisfy the audience's need for entertainment. Jankofsky further characterizes the

legends as both "a *simplification* of complicated theological-dogmatic problems and

hagiographic tradition" and "an explanatory, interpretive, and didactic *expansion* of subject

matter in view of the audience's knowledge and powers of imagination".[9] In other words,

the legends provide basic summaries of religious doctrine for the readers, and relate the

legends and stories to the experiences of the readers. The legends thus blend entertainment

and edification in a way that readers easily understand.

The appearance of this collection in the Vernon helps to clarify the possible

audience. The legends popularize religious teaching and present it in an entertaining way

---

[8] Quoted from the edition by D'Evelyn and Mill.
[9] Jankofsky 709.

that would appeal to a broader audience than a work like *De institutione inclusarum*. This is not to say that the legends would not have appealed to the original audience of *De institutione*, but the appearance of these texts in the Vernon does appear to indicate a much broader audience. There are many texts in the Vernon written for a female recluse like the one in *De instituione*, but there are many like the *South English Legendary* that attempt to provide Sowlehele through a combination of edification and entertainment.

3.3   Part 2: Lyrics and Miracles

The second section of the Vernon contains a series of short verse and two narrative cycles, *La estorie del Euangelie* and the *Miracles of Our Lady*. The section is the most lavishly decorated section of the manuscript, with illustrations throughout the narrative poems. Perhaps as a consequence, it is also the section that has suffered the most damage over time. Part 2 is concentrated in its subject matter, but diverse in its genres. The subject of this section is God, Christ, the Holy Ghost and Mary. The genres of the section include devotional prayers, meditations, translations and paraphrases of biblical passages and miraculous legends. The section begins with *La estorie del Euangelie*, a loose paraphrase of the gospels. This is followed by a series of lyrics, psalm extapolations (which contain the first few verses of each psalm in Latin with loose extrapolations from them that relate the psalms to Mary) and other short poems. These are then followed by the *Miracles of Our Lady*, most of which is lost, and another series of short poems that is no longer extant (the lost texts are listed in the table of contents).

The tone of these poems is highly emotive. Many of the texts express personal

appeals for mercy, grace or salvation. The authors of the lyrics go into detailed descriptions

of the sufferings of Christ and Mary and others. Such works of affective piety had become

quite common at the time of the Vernon.[10] They manifested themselves in celebrations of

the humanity of Christ, visions of the passion, and the new popularity of the feast of *Corpus*

Christi, which had arrived in England earlier in the fourteenth century.[11] Affective piety

went hand-in-hand with the educational program promoted by the Lateran IV Council. Both

movements sought to disseminate religious teaching to the masses: the post-Lateran

program sought to bring an intellectual understanding of the essential tenets of the Christian

faith. Affective piety brought an emotional understanding of faith. Affective piety is also

closely related to the contemplative movement that became popular at this time. Critics like

Carolyn Walker Bynum show many examples of female mystics practising extreme forms

of affective piety by thrashing themselves, wearing crowns of thorns and such.[12] These are

extreme examples. For most people, affective piety brought a closer connection with God.

As Bynum argues, the focus on the humanity of Christ in this movement revealed the

connection between God and the *imago Dei* in each person and provided a link with the

---

[10] David Aers surveys recent critical work on this in "The Humanity of Christ: Reflections on Orthodox and Late Medieval Representations", in Aers and Lynn Staley, *The Powers of the Holy: Religion, Politics and Gender in Late Medieval English Culture* (University Park, Pennsylvania State UP, 1996).

[11] On the rise of the feast of *Corpus Christi*, see Miri Rubin's work in *Corpus Christi: The Eucharist in Late Medieval Culture* (Cambridge UP, 1991) and "The Eucharist and the Construction of Late Medieval Identities" in *Cultural History 1350-1600: Essays on English Communities, Identities and Writing*, ed. David Aers (Detroit: Wayne State UP, 1992).

[12] See Carolyn Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1987) 209-10. See also Aers "Humanity of Christ" 32-34.

divinity.[13] These are extreme examples, but the affections were seen as a path to contemplation by people interested in pursuing that life. The Vernon contains a few contemplative texts, but the compiler seems to steer his readers away from the contemplative life. He therefore is careful to contextualize the more mystical expressions of affective piety so that the readers will pursue more of a middle life.

3.3.1 *La estorie del Euangelie*

La estorie del Euangelie is a paraphrase of the gospel story in 1,700 lines, in its complete form. The narrative seems to be drawn from both the Bible and from other non-biblical sources.[14] In its complete form, the poem narrates the events from the birth of Christ to the Pentecost. In the Vernon, only 396 lines are extant because eight leaves are missing from the manuscript at this point, but there is no reason to think the poem would not have been complete. The text originally began with a twelve-line initial that has been cut out. Doyle suggests it may have contained an illustration.[15] The vinets trailing from this initial, which still survive, contain a blank shield. The initial and shield are part of the basis for the argument that Part 2 might have originally been intended as the first of the Vernon.

The *Euangelie* begins with a preface about the purpose of books and the place of English in religious instruction, which it relates to Sowlehele. These issues may have been

---

[13] See Bynum, *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages*. (Los Angeles: U of California P, 1982) 130.

[14] See Turville-Petre 29, where he suggests that the non-biblical passages are derived ultimately from Peter Comestor's *Historia scholastica*. See also Gertrude H. Campbell's discussion of the sources in her edition of two other versions of the poem ("The Middle English *Evangelie*" *PMLA* 30[1915]: 534-35).

[15] Doyle, *Facsimile* 8.

important to the compiler of the Vernon manuscript. The author of the *Euangelie* begins by

describing what led him to write the poem:

> Sum-while ich was wiþ sunne i-bounde,
> And sunne me hath icast to grounde;
> Bote, swete Ihesu, þi swete woundus
> Leesed me haþ of harde stoundus.
> Whon I to þe tornde my þouht,
> Pynes to þole ne greueþ me nouht;
> Þy Deþ me haueþ of serwe i-brouht
> And loue to þe in me haþ wrouht.
> Þe to loue is al my blisse,
> Me longeþ sore þi woundus to kisse.   [1-10][16]

The author describes himself as existing in sin until he begins to think of Christ's suffering

on the cross. The emphasis here is on the passion rather than Christ himself: he

contemplates "þi swete woundus", "Þy Deþ", and how Christ "for me scheddest þi blod"

(18). However, this contemplation of suffering is not enough. The author realizes that he

must do more to earn salvation:

> Þi loue to winne, i wolde fonde,
> 3if I me mihte wel vndurstonde,
> Sum þing of þe to write and rede,
> Þer-þorwh of þe to winnen mede.
> And heo þat scholden hit iheren,
> Of þe Gospel mowe sumwhat leren
> Þat writen is þer-Inne of þe,
> On Englisch tonge þorwh swynk of me. [31-8]

The author knows that an understanding of Christ can be gained both through reading and

writing about him, and thus he hopes to earn salvation ("to winnen mede") by writing about

---

[16] This text is from *Minor Poems of the Vernon Manuscript*, Part 1 ed. Carl Horstmann, Part. 2 ed. Frederick J. Furnivall, EETS os.98, 117 (London: Kegan Paul, 1892 & 1901). All quotations from *Minor Poems of the Vernon Manuscript* (hereafter referred to as MPV) are cited by the poem number and line number from these volumes. The numbering of the poems is continuous across both volumes.

Christ so that others can better understand him and the story of his life.

The author next turns to contemplate the purpose of books as a way of justifying his own writing. He begins with a brief history of books and the way they taught righteousness.

First, he talks about the classical or pagan authors:

> Wyse men bi Olde dawes
> Bokes made of goode lawes,
> Hou me scholde hem wiþ rihte leden
> And wys to ben in alle heor deden;
> And þei no-þing ne wusten of þe... [39-43]

Pagan writers used books for a noble cause, to teach people justice ("rihte"). The writers may not have been Christian, but their books are still valuable. The subjects of their books were often the things they worshipped in nature: "But goddus heo maden of ston and tre" (44) and "Sonne and Mone, Day and Niht, / Sterre and al þat ʒiveþ liht" (47-8). Christian writers make use of these images in quite different ways:

> Of grete Clerkes also we fynde
> Þat Bokes made of Beestes kynde,
> Of ffoul, of Ston, of Gras, of Treo,
> And al for Mon þeron to seo,
> Solace to haue and techinge,
> And hem to holde from fool lykynge...   [51-6]

The great clerks use exemplary writings to provide solace and teaching that keep people from "fool lykynge" or concupiscence. The author of the *Euangelie* goes on to describe such writings with a brief description of the hart, adder and eagle (line 64 and following). In the earliest extant version of the poem, Dulwich College MS 22, which dates from around 1300,[17] there is a 75-line digression here about these three animals. The Vernon still has the

---

[17] For the date of the Dulwich MS, see Gertrude H. Campbell, "The Middle English *Evangelie*", *PMLA* 30(1915): 529.

line that introduced this passage—"ffor þus of hem I-write we fynde" (66)—and the

concluding comments after the fable. The author dismisses these forms of writing and

claims that his text is about something more spiritually fulfilling:

> Bote beter þyng ne mai no mon fynde
> Þan þe, lord of alle þynge,
> þat Beest and ffoul and alle wiht
> At wille beoþ vndur Monnes miht.   [69-72]

The author synthesizes the great clerks with the classical authors to write an exemplary

account of Christ. Christ is worthy of worship and this worship can heal sins.

The author states that all should learn something ("mowe sumwhat leren") of the

gospel in English in lines 35-38, quoted above. The author does not claim to translate the

gospel: readers will only learn *about* the gospel through his work, they will need to turn to

their priests to learn the gospel itself. He appears to argue that it is best for people to learn

as much as they can about Christ, and this is his justification for the paraphrase. I will talk

about other defences of the use of English as this chapter proceeds. The author of *La estorie*

del Euangelie is unusual in his defence in that he is the not as apologetic as other writers

tend to be.

The *Euangelie* introduces the second part of this manuscript and summarizes many

of the ideas about writing that may have been important to the compiler. The author of the

Euangelie finds Sowlehele through contemplation on Christ's suffering. Many of the other

poems in this section also dwell on Christ and Mary's suffering.

The *Euangelie* serves as a sort of transition between the first two parts of the

Vernon. It is a legendary text, similar in style and tone to the *South English Legendary*. In

fact, the version in Bodleian MS Additional C 38, dated around 1420, is incorporated into an imperfect version of the *South English Legendary*, at approximately the location of the Easter legends. But the *Euangelie* also provides a transition to the more meditative texts of Part 2, as we shall see.

3.3.2 "The Sweetness of Jesus" and the Short Poems

The shorter poems of Part 2 represent a wide range of genres and styles: extrapolations from the Bible or liturgy, prayers, meditations and confessions. What binds these poems together is that they are personal and emotional pleas for the mercy or the intercession of God or Mary. In the prologue to the *Euangelie* the poet states that he found solace in meditation on Christ's wounds. The poets of the shorter poems are also seeking this solace and write about this search.

The chief characteristics of these poems are that they are usually in the first person singular, they use highly emotive imagery about the sufferings of Mary or Christ, and they are not often didactic or exemplary in style. The use of the first person narrative establishes a direct connection between the poets and their subjects, Mary and Christ. This emotionalism is the source of the Sowelhele of these poems because it is through meditating on the sufferings that the poets find solace and salvation. The poets also do not attempt to teach people how to worship, and they do not use exemplum to any great extent. Their purpose is rather to provide emotional understanding of the events in the gospels through pity and sympathy.

A good example of these poems is "The Sweetness of Jesus" (MPV 21). The poet

speaks of his love of Christ:

> So lykyng loue In eorþe non is,
> In soule whos couþe him soþly se;
> Him to loue were muche blis,
> ffor kyng of loue called is he.
> Wiþ trewe loue I wolde i-wis
> So faste to him bounden be,
> Þat myn herte weore holly his,
> Þat no þing lykede me but he. [9-16]

This passage sounds almost like a love poem, and in a way it is. The imagery of love poetry

appears along side imagery for other types of love, when the speaker compares Christ to his

or her mother, father, brother and sister:

> 3if I for kyndenes schulde loue mi kinne,
> Þenne me þinkeþ in my þouht
> Bi kuynde skil I schulde bi-ginne
> At him þat haþ me maad of nouht... [17-20]

Later the poet compares the love for Christ to the love for a spouse:

> Þe loue of him passeþ, i-wis,
> Al eorþly loue þat may beo here:
> God and Mon, my spouse he is... [41-3]

It could be argued that the wording here suggests the speaker is a nun since Christ is

described as a spouse. In fact this comparison, and the comparison of Christ to family

members, is common in lyrics of the time, as Rosemary Woolf shows in her study of lyrics

of the passion.[18] Caroline Walker Bynum argues that such images are not in any way meant

to be taken literally, they are allegorized images that reveal Christ's humanity.[19]

The poem next moves into a discussion of the passion and Christ's suffering,

---

[18]See Rosemary Woolf, *The English Religious Lyric in the Middle Ages* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1968) 23-25.
    [19] Bynum, *Jesus as Mother* 134.

through which, the poet says, Christ brought love to earth. The poem becomes a meditation

on Christ's suffering here:

> His sydes blo and blodi were,
> Þat sum-tyme were ful briht of ble;
> His herte was perced wiþ a spere;
> His wyde woundes were reuþe to se.
> Mi Raunsoun, I-wis, he payed þere
> And 3af his lyf for gult of me.
> His deþ most beo to me ful dere
> And perce myn herte for pur pite.
> For pite myn herte most breke a-two,
> To his kyndenesse 3if I tok hede:
> Encheson I was of al his wo,
> He suffrede ful harde for my misdede...   [65-76]

The poet is very personal here. Christ died to save him: he "3af his lyf for gult of me",

"gave his lfe because of my guilt (original sin)". This reveals the deeply personal connection

the poet has with Christ.

> The poem becomes a prayer at the end. The poet begs for Christ's aid:

> Ihesu, for þe swetnesse þat is in þi,
> Haue Mynde of me whon I henne wende;
> Wiþ studefast trouþe my wittes wis,
> And, lord, þou schilde me from þe fende;
> ffor þi Merci for3if me mi mis,
> Þat wikkede werk my soule ne schende;
> And led me, lord in to þi blis,
> Wiþ þe to wone wiþ-outen ende.   Amen.   [113-20]

The language here echoes the *Pater noster*: the poet asks Christ to forgive him his misdeeds

and preserve him from evil. This is Sowlehele in an essential form. The poet shows that

salvation is not to be sought through the mere repetition of prayers, but rather through a

deep emotional understanding of and love for the subject of prayer, Christ. This is the aim

of most of the short poems in this section of the Vernon.

3.3.4 *The Miracles of Our Lady*

The Miracles of Our Lady form a discrete section in Part 2. The *Miracles* are illustrated and the entire collection is given a title. For the purposes of my study, I want to focus on one of these miracles, the second in the series, titled by Horstmann "The Child Slain by Jews". As offensive as this legend is, it is also the most convenient for study because of its use by Chaucer as the Prioress' Tale. The two versions of the story are so vastly different in tone and style: a comparison will reveal a great deal about the Vernon. A summary of the contents of each section will reveal how some of these differences:[20]

Vernon Version

1	1-6	Introduction about how Mary will reward those who love her. Story is set in Paris.
2	7-28	The child comes from poor family. Makes money for his parents (both of whom are alive, though we see only the mother) by singing *Alma redemptoris mater* in the city.
3	29-40	Jews in town react with envy. Plot to kill the child. One lures him into his house and cuts his throat.
4	41-54	The child keeps singing. Murderer is worried and throws child into a latrine. But child still sings and everyone about can hear him.
5	55-80	The child's mother is worried when he does not return home at appointed time. She searches about town and goes by the murderer's house. When she hears the child singing within, she confronts the murderer, but he says child was never there.
6	81-102	The mother pleads to mayor, who takes pity on her and leads a procession to the

---

[20] The Vernon and Chaucer versions of the tale are, according to Carelton Brown, part of the Group C family of the tale. See *Sources and Analogues of Chaucer's Canterbury Tales*, ed Russell Hope Robins, 2nd Ed. 1955, 477-85. See also Margaret H. Statler "The Analogues of Chaucer's *Prioress' Tale*: The Relation of Group C to Group A" *PMLA* 65(1950): 896-910.

murderer's home. They can all hear the child.

7 103-15 The murderer is forced to let mayor in to see child in the pit. The murderer is immediately judged guilty and "passed in-sonder".

8 116-28 A bishop comes and examines the child. He finds a beautiful lily in his throat with the words "Alma redemptoris mater" etched in gold on it. The child stops singing.

9 129-42 Funeral procession for child. All Paris mourns. At the Mass of the Requiem the child sings "Salve, sancta parens".

10 143-52 Epilogue and moral. Serve Mary well and you will be rewarded.

The Prioress's Tale

1 1-487 Prologue with an invocation for God's and Mary's help to tell the tale. Mention is made of how adults and children praise them, and the rewards they get. Mary is compared to a white lily here (461).

2 488-501 In a city in Asia there is a Jewish ghetto maintained by a corrupt Christian lord for profit. There is a Christian school in the ghetto.

3 502-50 A widow's child at the school hears *Alma redemptoris mater* and wants to learn it. A friend teaches it to him and the child sings it on the way to and from school.

4 551-85 Satan speaks to the Jews and they hire an assassin to kill the child and hide his body in a privy. Invocation to Mary follows.

5 586-613 Mother searches all over for the child. The Jews deny knowledge of him. When the mother goes near the privy, God causes the child to start singing.

6 614-34 All the Christians about hear this and summon the provost. He finds the child, binds the murderers and orders them drawn and quartered to appease the mother.

7 635-69 Funeral procession An abbot questions the child, who tells him that Mary herself placed a grain on his tongue so he would continue to sing. She promised to take him to heaven when the grain was removed.

8 670-83 Grain is removed. The child is buried in a martyr's tomb.

9 684-9   Prayer to Hugh of Lincoln to watch over people.

The primary difference between the stories is in their tone. The Vernon version is

a straightforward, devotional narrative. The Prioress' version of the story is equally pious,

but it blends this piety with more personal interjections by the narrator, which adds a

sentimental tone to the tale.

The simplicity of the Vernon version of the story is apparent from its introduction

and conclusion, which state the purpose of the story. The introduction simply states that

people should love Mary:

> Wose loueþ wel vre ladi,
> Heo wol quiten his wille wel whi,
> Oþur in hise lyf or at his ende:
> Þe ladi is so freo and hende.   [1-4]

If you love Mary, she will reward you either in this life or in the next. The conclusion uses

almost the same words:

> Þerefore i rede þat eueri mon
> Serue þat ladi wel as he con,
> And loue hire in his beste wyse:
> Heo wol wel quite him his seruise.   [147-50]

The Prioress' purpose is similar, but she expresses it in much grander and more elaborate

terms:

> Lady, thy bountee, thy magnificence,
> Thy vertu and thy grete humylitee
> Ther may no tonge expresse in no science;
> For somtyme, Lady, er men praye to thee,
> Thou goost beforn of thy benyngnytee,
> And getest us the lyght, of the preyere,
> To gyden us unto thy Sone so deere. [474-80]

The Prioress expresses her love of Mary in much more formal tones than the author of the

Vernon version. Chaucer's narrator makes use of invocations that seem almost epic in tone, as for example when, in the prologue, she invokes Mary's help in telling her tale:

> O mooder Mayde, O mayde Mooder free!
> O bussh unbrent, brennynge in moyses sighte,
> That ravyshedest doun from the Deitee,
> Thurgh thyn humblesse, the Goost that in th'alighte,
> Of whos vertu, whan he thyn herte lighte
> Conceyved was the Fadres sapience,
> Help me to telle it in thy reverence. [467-73]

The Prioress uses apostrophes within the poem itself, as for example when the mother finds the boy:

> O grete God, that parfournest thy laude
> By mouthe of innocentz, lo heere thy myght! [607-8]

The Prioress also takes more of a direct role in the story than the author of the Vernon text does. The author of the Vernon texts is content to let the events of the story speak for themselves, while the Prioress often provides her own comments and opinions.

The differences between the stories go beyond narrative techniques. Another difference is the child's place in society. In the Prioress's Tale, he is a "litel clergeon" (503). He attends a school and is learning his primer. He learns *Alma redemptoris mater* from an older child who has moved on to the Antiphoner. The child is in some danger of being beaten for moving ahead of his level of study, but he feels he must to sing the praises of Mary (see the stanza beginning in line 537). Chaucer may be evoking Christ here, who as a child also practised faith beyond his age. The child in the Vernon version is a beggar. He supports his parents by singing the hymn throughout the city. He sings the song so "lykynglye" (19, 29) that it puts people in "riht good chere" (16) and they give him food in

gratitude. There is a monastic quality to this life. Many of the other legends in the *Miracles of our Lady* have monks as their main characters, and the child here may be meant as a sort of ideal monks should strive for. The child in the Prioress's Tale appears to be from a wealthier family, since his mother can pay for his schooling. He could, perhaps, reflect the Prioress's own upbringing. A consequence of this is that the Prioress needs to stress the child's innocence, while the author of the Vernon text takes it for granted. The Prioress calls the child an innocent a few times (eg. 548, 566); but the other adjectives she uses to describe the child are revealing. She uses the word "litel" to describe him so much that it makes the poem appear alliterative in places ("This litel child, his litel book lernynge" 516). She calls him "smale" (501), "sely" (512), "yong and tendre" (524), among other things. The virtue of the child in the Vernon version is assumed since it comes from his poverty and his actions; the Prioress is for whatever reason emotionally involved in her story, and makes an effort to stress the child's piety and innocence.

Another difference between the two versions is in the nature of the miracle itself. The child in the Prioress's Tale begins to sing only when his mother walks by the place where his corpse is hidden. He later reports that Mary herself came to him and put a grain in his throat. In the Vernon text, the boy sings while his throat is cut and does not stop until the white lily with *Alma redemptoris mater* etched on its petals is removed from his throat. The lily is a symbol of Mary,[21] and it is really the only evidence of Mary's influence in the legend. Mary's role in the other miracles in this collection is not so distant as it is here and she often does appear as a speaking character. She does not need to personally appear in this

---

[21] The Prioress describes Mary as carrying a "white lylye flour" (461).

story. The miracle here is left to stand on its own without a *deus ex machina*.

A final difference between the two texts is in the role of the child's mother. In the *Prioress' Tale*, the mother searches for the child for 21 lines (585-606), then the dead child begins to sing and all the Christian folk about join in the search. The mother fades into the background. The mother in the Vernon text searches for the child between lines 55-96. She first searches alone and is attracted to the murderer's house by the sound of her boy singing. She asks the murderer three times if he is within the house, and three times the murderer says he is not. Then she goes to the mayor of Paris and pleas for his help. This plea takes three parts as well:

> Heo pleyneþ þe Ieuh haþ don hire wrong
> To stelen hire sone so for his song;
> Heo preyeþ to done hire lawe and riht,
> Hire sone don come bi-fore heore siht,
> Heo preyeþ þe Meir par Charite
> Of him to haue freo lyuere.   [83-8]

The mother is a dominant figure in the miracle and the illustration that accompanies it. Like many of the women in the *Miracles of Our Lady*, she is a representative of Mary. She suffers the loss of her child and evokes pity and virtue in others.

The *Prioress' Tale* reflects the sensibilities of the Prioress: she is a courtly, fashionable woman whom Chaucer describes as being greatly attracted by piteous things. The Vernon version, on the other hand, is a more purely devotional text. It honours Mary and provides an exemplary figure that others should follow.

3.3.5 Conclusion

The texts in Part 2 are contemplative texts, in the same sense of contemplation that is described in *De institutione inclusarum*. This is contemplation on the central events of the Christian faith, the crucifixion and Mary's suffering, and its purpose is to help people heal themselves spiritually and achieve salvation. The narrative uses the drama and movement of narrative to create this contemplation. *La estorie del Euangelie* gives people more knowledge of the gospels so that they might better understand Christ and find salvation. *The Miracles of Our Lady* depict people in various states of sin who are guided to salvation by Mary. The shorter poems create a deep emotional bond with Christ or Mary through which the authors and readers can find salvation. All the poems seek to move the affections to provide a deep, intimate understanding of faith. Other poems in the Vernon are more didactic in their approach to faith. The texts in Part 2 provide their readers with the emotional tools to understand their faith, to prepare them for the didactic teaching in the rest of the manuscript.

The texts in Part 2 use Sowlehele as spiritual healing. The narrators of these texts typically describe themselves as being in a state of sin, which is relieved only through the contemplation described in their texts. The sins that are healed are sometimes described specifically, as in the *Miracles of Our Lady*, and others are more general, the sort of sin that typical Christians might consider themselves to be in all the time. As such, these texts could appeal to a broad audience. There is nothing in these texts that shows they are written for any particular audience. The number of poems about Mary could be taken to mean that the poems might have been aimed at a female audience, but Marian literature was popular

among all audiences. The Sowlehele of these texts is meant for a general audience.

3.4   Part 3: The Homilies

Like the second part of the manuscript, the third part contains a variety of genres and verse forms, a wider variety in fact than any other section of the manuscript. But all of these forms are bound together by a common style: the texts are more didactic and provide basic religious teachings through a combination of homily and exemplum. This section begins with the *Northern Homily Cycle*, followed by other homiletic texts. It also contains some basic guides to religious practice. There are also allegorical texts, lyrical works reminiscent of the second section of the Vernon, proverbial texts, and religious-moral romances. All of these texts teach and describe religious faith and practice, using both discourse and exempla. Individually and as a group these texts provide their audience with the basic tenets of the Christian faith. The tone in this section is not as affective or emotional as the tone in the previous section.

3.4.1   *The Northern Homily Cycle*

Part Three begins with homiletic material, including the *Northern Homily Cycle*, *How to Live Perfectly* and the *Pricke of Love* (both versions of St. Edmund's Speculum), *St. Paul's Vision of Hell*, the *Pope's Trental*, *Speculum vitae*, and the *Pricke of Conscience*. Each item describes religious practice or the reasons for it, and expands on these descriptions with exempla. The *Northern Homily Cycle* is a loose interpretation of the gospels. The versions of Edmund's Speculum are guides to basic religious practice and

contemplation. The *Speculum vitae* is a long commentary on the *Pater noster*. The *Pricke of Conscience* is a long discourse on the nature of God, Man, Heaven, Hell and Purgatory intended to inspire its readers to do good through a deeper understanding of God and creation. Most texts attempt to inspire the reader to do good through a better self-understanding (many of the texts are called "*Specula*" or "Mirrors").

The first major text in this section is the *Northern Homily Cycle*. The *NHC* is a collection of sermons for Sundays and most of the major church days of the year. It exists in three recensions, the original, unexpanded recension (UV) which contains only sermons for the dominical days and a few others, and two expanded recensions (E I and EII), which include sermons for ferial days and for the *temporale*. The Vernon-Simeon version are the only examples of the E I recension.[22] Each sermon in the collection (in the Vernon version) begins with a line or two in Latin from the Gospels. These lines are expanded on and paraphrased in English, followed by a discourse on them, drawn from the Church Fathers and other theologians (such as Augustine, Gregory and Bede). This in turn is followed by an exemplum. These exempla are often saints legends or miraculous legends such as we find in the *Miracles of Our Lady*. Hostmann prints two homilies in *Minor Poems* (items 30 and 31). The first, for the feast of *Corpus Christi* is a story of a Jewish man who witnesses a Eucharist and sees a vision of each person in the Church eating a baby. When he has a Christian explain the Eucharist to him, he converts. The other homily Horstmann prints is

---

[22]UV, E I and E II are Thomas Heffernan's names for the recensions. For a summary of the differences between the recensions, see Heffernan's "Orthodoxies' *Redux*" 81-82, and Saara Nevalina, ed., *The Northern Homily Cycle* 2 vols (Helsinki: Société Néophilololgique, 1972), 5-17.

a miracle collection (MPV 31) from Robert of Brunne's *Handlyng Synne*.

The Vernon text of the *Northern Homily Cycle* is simply titled "Þe gospeles." It contains no prologue, as some versions do. And, though the scribe leaves space for them, there are no dates for each sermon. This would make the collection difficult to use, and may even prevent readers from using it throughout the church year, unless they knew which gospel went with which day. Even if the lack of dates is an accident, it is apparent that the readers of the Vernon did not feel the need to correct the mistake. The *NHC* was used by priests,[23] and a priest might have been able to find his way through the collection. So it is possible the manuscript was used by a priest reading to the manuscript's audience. It is also possible that the readers of the manuscript simply read the cycle as a collections of legends without any reference to the place of each homily in the church calendar. There are many such collections of stories in the Vernon: *La estorie del Euangelie* and the *Miracles of Our Lady* are two examples we have encountered thus far. *De institutione inclusarum* includes another brief paraphrase of the gospels, with Latin quotations and a discussion of the significance of each event. In other words, as a collection of miraculous legends tied to gospel paraphrases and homiletic material, the *Northern Homily Cycle* is entirely typical of the Vernon manuscript.

3.4.2 The Mirror of St. Edmund

There are three versions of the *Mirror of St. Edmund* in the Vernon, two verse

---

[23]Some MSS of the *NHC* are professionally produced. Another, Camb. Dd.1.1, is a holster book of the type possibly used by itinerant priests. See Heffernan 81-82.

versions in Part 3, and a prose version in Part 4. The fact that this text was copied three times into the Vernon might seem to be the result of a mistake. It is possible that the scribe simply copied what was placed before him without doing any sort of cross-referencing. This would not be the only example of this: the scribe also copies the *Pope Trental* twice in Part 3. But, while both versions of the *Pope Trental* are almost identical, the three versions of the *Mirror of St. Edmund* are distinct enough to appear to be three separate texts on the same themes. They have different titles, different ideas about who their audiences are, and their approaches to their subject matter are distinct. The repetition of this text may thus not be a mistake, but in fact an indication that the compiler felt that the themes of these texts were so important that he wanted to copy all three versions into his manuscript.

The first version of *The Mirror of St. Edmund* in the Vernon, *How to Live Perfectly* (MPV 32), appears immediately after the *Northern Homily Cycle*. It may have been copied as part of the *Northern Homily Cycle* since there is no special rubrication to mark it as a separate entity.[24] However, *How to Live Perfectly* would be an unusual text in the *NHC*, and the lack of rubrication may be a scribal error. The second version of *The Mirror of St. Edmund*, called *The Pricke of Love* (MPV 35) appears after the *Pricke of Conscience*. Both *How to Live Perfectly* and *The Pricke of Love* are paraphrases of the same portion of *The Mirror of St. Edmund*. This section is a description of all the various foundations of Christian faith, such as the articles of faith, the ten commandments, seven deadly sins and seven virtues, and the like. The two texts, however, put different emphases on this subject

---

[24]It is not unusual for the *Northern Homily Cycle* to incorporate other texts. The Vernon version, for example, contains part of Robert Mannyng of Brunne's *Handling Sin* (printed as MPV 31).

matter. *How to Live Perfectly* is specifically addressed to people recently called to the religious life. *The Pricke of Love* has a more general audience, one seeking holiness, but not necessarily clerical.

How to Live Perfectly opens with an abstract of its contents, followed by an address to its audience about religious calling:

> Þis wordus here þat I ow say,
> To Religious men longen þay;
> þus muche ben þei forte mene,
> As ȝe schul heere al bydeene:
> "Seo," he seiþ, "bi-holde ȝe
> To what þing ȝe cleped be."
> Þat he seiþ, hem to redresse
> And to sturen hem to Parfytnesse. [51-58]

The quotation here is from Paul. It shows the purpose of this text clearly: the author wants to give his readers a view of the religious life and what is expected of each person called to it. The first part of this guide is self-knowledge: the person considering the religious life needs to know himself or herself. The author then moves on to contemplation. There are three types of contemplation here: contemplation of creatures, holy writ, and God. The author of this version passes over contemplation of creatures quickly and the scribe either did not copy the contemplation of God section, or it was not in the exemplar. The bulk of the text is taken up with contemplation of holy writ and describes the articles of faith.

The Pricke of Love begins with a familiar sounding rubric:

> Here beginneþ þe Prikke of Loue,
> Þat profitable is to soule be-houe.

"Soule be-houe" is nearly synonymous with Sowlehele. "Be-houe" implies "need", rather than "healing", but the sense is still close. Following the rubric, there is an address to the

audience, which is much more inclusive than the address in *How to Live Perfectly*:

> God þat art of miȝtes most,
> ffader and Sone and holigost
> þow graunte hem alle þi blessyng
> Þat herken wel to þis talkyng,
> ffor, lewed and lered, more and lesse,
> Hit wol ow teche holynesse;
> To loue God wiþ fyn chere
> Hit wol ou teche, my leue and dere.
> ffor mony a tyme ȝe cone me preye
> Þer-of a lessen ow to seye;
> ȝoure dulnesse sumwhat to scharpe
> ȝe han me preyed for to carpe.
> ffor bisynes of worldli þing
> To monye hit is a gret lettyng,
> And eke ȝor owne frelote,
> Þat makeþ ow ȝeore heui to be
> Of or-self and ȝoure liuinge,
> Þorw þe ffendes entysyng.
> Þerfore þis bok to ow I make,
> ȝoure discoumfort for to slake....   [1-20]

The author claims that he has written this for his audience, which is made up of learned and

unlearned people, from all classes ("lewed and lered, more and lesse") who have often come

to him seeking private religious instruction. The audience is seeking a place for religion in

their busy lives:

> Þis may be ȝor halyday werk,
> Hit wol a-vayle boþe lewed and clerk.   [29-30]

The work is intended to be read on Sundays, when the readers may not be engaged in other

things. After this address, *The Pricke of Love* is divided into two sections, one on

meditation, and the other on contemplation. The first, on meditation, corresponds to the

section on self knowledge in *How to Live Perfectly*. The section on contemplation covers

the three forms of contemplation a bit more completely than *How to Live Perfectly*, but still

emphasizes contemplation of holy writ.

The treatments of contemplation in the two texts are distinct. The discussion of self-knowledge is an example. The rubrication for this first section reveals this difference. In *How to Live Perfectly* it is called "Videte vocacionem vestram", after 1 Corinthians, 1:26 "Behold your calling". The author describes religious calling. *The Pricke of Love* breaks this section into two, called "Meditacion of þi-self knowyng" and "Meditacion of þe Soule ". This section is much longer in *How to Live Perfectly*, about 240 lines compared to about 120 in *The Pricke of Love*. The section covers much of the same material in both texts, but the *How to Live Perfectly* has many additions, so it is about twice as long. Both texts describe the foulness of the body, the susceptibility of the soul to change, idleness and temptation, and the comfort God can provide. *How to Live Perfectly* adds passages about obedience to God, the spiritual love men should have for each other, and a few prayers to say to Christ. *How to Live Perfectly* also puts more emphasis on the dangers of idleness and the comforts of Christ than does the other text. *The Pricke of Love* puts more emphasis on the foulness of the body. The reason for this difference may be in the purposes each author has for this section. The author of *How to Live Perfectly* says he wants to reveal God's will, "To haue vs euere in holynes" (104). The author of *The Pricke of Love* says that he wants to teach self-knowledge:

> ffor þat schal make þe Meke & lowe
> And able to knowe þe grete bounte
> Of God þat sitteþ in Maieste. [44-46]

How to Live Perfectly is a text about the proper forms of contemplation and how one can achieve holiness through them. *The Pricke of Love* is about worldly pride: it seeks to make

its readers humble so that they might be better able to find salvation.

The next sections, about the Contemplation of Creatures and Contemplation of Holy Writ, are handled in similar ways in both texts. *The Pricke of Love* adds a section about the pains of hell and rewards of heaven to the section on Holy Writ. *The Pricke of Love* adds a number of exempla throughout these sections. The section on the Contemplation of God, which, of the two versions here, appears only in *The Pricke of Love*, teaches the various prayers that should be said throughout the day. It might seem as if this section was meant more for a monastic audience, but the hours of prayer were used by the laity as well.

The different audiences make these two texts distinct, which may be why the Vernon compiler included both. This could indicate a broad audience for the Vernon, made up of both secular and religious or semi-secular readers. However, the more clerical of the two texts, *How to Live Perfectly*, is also the most heavily edited, lacking entire sections of the original, sections which appear in some form in the *Pricke of Love* and the prose version of the *Mirror*. This editing could indicate that more clerical-oriented sections of the text have been edited out, making this a text better suited to a secular audience. The Vernon scribe or compiler could have edited the texts, or it could come from an exemplar.

3.4.3 *Speculum vitae*

The *Speculum vitae* is a 17,000-line commentary on the *Pater noster*. The writer's purpose behind this work is to elucidate the deeper meanings of the *Pater noster* for lay audiences of the text. The poet describes the prayer as follows:

Short in word is this prayer,

For men it shuld lyghtlyer lere
And thurgh shortness of it be kynde
Haf it the tytter in þer mydne;
In sentence is lange to see,
For the more deuccion þerin shulde be,
For the naked letter that is not heuy;
Men shuld say by mouth anely,
And all the grett sentence of it
Vndirsand, and in hert knytt...   [176-85][25]

The writer develops a contrast here between the simple words of the prayer and its deeper

meanings. He states that the simple words increase the devotional nature of the *Pater noster*

because they allow the reader to memorize the poem more easily ("lyghlyer lere"). This

makes it easier to meditate on: the simple words bind it more tightly in the mind and heart

so that the meaning can be ruminated on.

Like *The Pricke of Love*, the *Speculum vitae* was written for a secular audience who

had need of this form of contemplation. This is seen when the author makes note of the fact

that the audience would likely prefer to be listening to romances:

I warn you frust, at the begynnyng,
That I wille make na vayn carpynge
Of dedes of armys, ne of amoure,
As dus mynstralles and ieestours
That makys carpyng in many a place
Of octouyane and of isembrase
And of many other ieestes...   [36-41]

Another indication of the nature of the audience comes when author defends his use of the

English language:

For latyn, as I trowe, cane nane,
Bot thei that hase it of scole tane.

---

[25]Quoted from John W. Smeltz, *Speculum vitae: An Edition of British Museum MS Royal 170.viii*, diss., Duquesne U, 1977.

Some cane franche and na latyn
That vsed has court and dwelled þerin,
And some cane of latyn a party
That cane franch bot fabely,
And some vndirstandys ynglych
That nouther cane latyn ne frenche,
Bot lerede and lewed, alde & yonge
Alle vndirstandys ynglych tonge.
Therfor, I holde it mast sekyr þan
To shew the langage that ilk man,
And alle, for lewede mens sake anely,
That kan no maner of clergy,
To kene þane it ware mest nede,
For clerkys cane both se & rede
In sere boks of holy wyrte.   [72-87]

This is similar to the prologue to the *South English Legendary*, but while the narrator of the *SEL* sets Christ up as a sort of hero of romance, the narrator of the *Speculum vitae* calls these romances "vayn" and wants people to read the *Pater noster* instead. The author is explicit that his poem is not meant for clerical audiences who could read about the *Pater noster* in their own books. He is writing for people with no learning, or very little, people who need to learn what he has to say.

3.4.4 *Pricke of Conscience*

The *Pricke of Conscience* appears to have a similar purpose as the *Speculum vitae*, though its project and tone are more like that of the versions of *The Mirror of St. Edmund.* It attempts to teach its readers to know themselves through its descriptions of creation, heaven, hell and purgatory. The author of the *Pricke of Conscience* says he uses English for its emotional effect:

Yf þai rede or here, til þe hende,

Þe maters þat er þar-in contende,
And undirstand þam al and trow,
Parchaunce þair hertes þan sal bow,
Thurgh drede þat þai sal consayve þar by,
To wirk gude werkes and fle foli.
Þarfor þis buke es on Ynglese drawen.
Of sere maters, þat er unknawen
Til laude men þat er unkunnand,
Þat can na latyn understand,
To make þam þam-self firt knaw
And fra syn vanytese þaam draw,
And for to stir þam til right drede
When þai a tretisce here or rede,
Þat sal prikke þair conscience with-yn,
And of þat drede may a lofe bygyn
Thurgh comfort of ioyes of heven sere,
Þat men may aftirward rede and here. [330-47]²⁶

The author wants to inspire fear of God through his poem which he hopes will guide his readers to salvation. He hopes that the use of English will contribute to this since it will make his text more accessible.

The *Pricke of Conscience* uses a vision to provide religious teaching. Many of the texts in Part 3 use the same technique. Like the Speculum-Poems, the *Pricke of Conscience* attempts to teach self-knowledge, but it uses images of heaven and hell to inspire desire for salvation and fear of damnation. This is a direct appeal to the affections, and a form of exemplum that we will see repeated throughout Part 3.

---

²⁶ Quoted from *The Pricke of Conscience*, ed Richard Morris (Berlin, A. Asher, 1863; Rpt. New York: AMS Press, 1973). This edition is based on manuscripts in the British Museum. Morris' base text is MS Cotton Galba E.ix, but he does refer to the Simeon text throughout.

3.4.5 The Dialogues

There are seven dialogues in the third section of the Vernon, three immediately following the homiletic material (*The Debate Between the Body and the Soul*, *The Lamentation Between Our Lady and St. Bernard*, *A Dispute Between a Good Man and the Devil*) and four later on (*A Dispute Between the Child Jesus and the Masters of the Law*, *A Dispute Between a Christian and a Jew*, *A Dispute Between Mary and the Cross*). The first three dialogues do mark a change in direction for this section. They teach the same sort of themes as the homiletic texts, but cast in a more dramatic and emotional setting.

A good example of the debate material is *Body and Soul*, a debate that dramatizes many of the elements discussed in the meditative or self-knowledge sections of the two versions of the *Mirror of St. Edmund*. This debate is a dream vision in which the dreamer sees the corpse of a knight lying in state. The knight's spirit appears and accuses the body of leading it astray into a life filled with pride and self-satisfying pleasure. The body argues that it is merely a vessel for the soul, and not responsible for its own actions. The vision ends with the soul being carried off to Hell by a horde of devils. The Soul apparently loses, but the point of the debate is that there is really no victor in this debate, since both body and soul contribute to sin. The soul argues that body leads it away from virtue with its lust for pleasure, but the body argues that the soul is the source of all thought and has the ability to make choices. These arguments are presented in a lively debate that uses alliteration, graphic imagery and rhetorical devices. Among the two debaters, the soul seems most familiar with traditional rhetoric, using formulas like the *Ubi sunt* passage in his first speech. The body uses fewer flourishes and favours proverbs. The debate reflects the nature

of the two debaters: the soul uses the higher form of argument than the body because it is the higher and more reasonable faculty.

Body and Soul, as I have said, dramatizes some of the ideas discussed in the homiletic material that went before it. It is similar to the self-knowledge sections of the versions of the *Mirror of St. Edmund*. The other dialogues do the same thing. *The Lamentation Between Our Lady and St. Bernard* goes beyond *Body and Soul* to dramatize part of the biblical narrative. St. Bernard has a vision of the crucifixion in which he shares his grief with Mary. As such this text is a sort of dramatic lyric, similar to the lyrics in the second part of the Vernon. It is related to the homiletic material, which also paraphrases biblical narrative. *The Lamentation* opens with an apology from the author for the tale and for writing it in English. The author starts with a standard complaint about lay-folk's ignorance. He blames this in part on the clergy themselves:

3if Crist haue send mon wit at wille,
Craft of Clergye, for to preche,
Alle his hestes sholde we fulfulle,
As ferforþ as we mihten areche.
3onge and olde, holdeþ ow stille:
ffor broþerhed I wol ow teche—
Þe Mon þat con, and teche nille,
He mai haue drede of godes wreche.   [9-16]

The author says that if people are given the gift of clergy, they must use it to teach others. He wants *The Lamentation* to give "drede" to those who know ("con") but will not teach others ("teche nille"). The author, however, also addresses a secular audience:

Men and wymmen, 3e schuldes haue mede,
Lusteneþ alle now me I-feere;
3if I sigge mis, takeþ good hede,
And wisseþ me, þat hit betere were.   [29-32]

Men and women should benefit ("haue mede") if they listen to this story, the author says,

but if he is wrong, then they should let him know. The terms used to describe the audiences

are broad here. "Craft of Clergy" in the first quotation could refer to anyone who could read,

not only the clergy.

The author also defends his use of English to tell a story such as this one:

> Þerfore ichaue on Englisch wrou3t
> Seint Bernard witnesseþ in Latyn—
> Mon may be glad in al his þou3t
> Þat his wit haþ leid þer-In.
> Þe gospel nul I forsake nou3t,
> Þau3 hit be writen in parchemyn;
> Seynt Iones word, and hit be sou3t,
> Þer-of hit wole be witnes myn.   [11-24]

The author uses English to bring St. Bernard's "witness" to his audience so that they can

reap the benefits of the saint's wisdom. Then the author goes on to compare this text to the

gospels. To paraphrase these lines: the author says "I am not neglecting the gospels. Though

St. John's words are written on parchment and you could find them there if you sought

them".

The Lamentation is a careful balance of grief and faith, emotion and doctrine. The

grief shared between St. Bernard and Mary has a long history in medieval literature. The

poem, as C.W. Marx demonstrates, is actually based on the *Quis dabit*, a thirteenth-century

meditation, attributed to either St. Bernard or St. Augustine. This is a dialogue between a

speaker and Mary, who describes the passion and her feelings concerning it.[27] The Latin

text, Marx argues, stresses Mary's emotions. It is one of the sources of the intensely

---

[27]Marx 187-9.

emotional lyrics about Mary, lyrics such as we find in the Vernon.[28] Marx argues that *The Lamentation* refines this tradition by "balancing grief with doctrine and reassurance". Thus it moves from grief (the crucifixion) to reassurance (the resurrection) as a source of doctrine.

The balance between emotion and faith here is an important part of many of the texts in this section of the manuscript. The descriptions of heaven and hell in the *Pricke of Conscience* and *St. Paul's Vision of Hell*, for example, provide emotional grounding, similar to Mary's grief, for doctrine. In this respect they are like the poems of Part 2, but with a stronger sense of doctrine and didacticism.

3.4.6   *The Castle of Love*

The Castle of Love is a fairly straightforward translation of Robert Grosseteste's *Chasteau d'amour*, and it is one of a handful of purely allegorical texts in the Vernon manuscript. This allegory is similar to that of *Piers Plowman* and may have been an influence for parts of that poem, since it uses many similar images.[29] However, there are many things that set it apart. For example, *The Castle of Love* is not a dream vision. It is a historical allegory, using biblical history as the platform for the allegory. The poem tells of the fall of humanity through Adam and Eve and the redemption of humanity through Christ.

---

[28]See Marx 187-9. He is following the discussions of this by J.A.W. Bennett's *Poetry of the Passion: Studies in Twelve Centuries of English Verse* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1982) and Rosemary Woolf's *The English Religious Lyric in the Middle Ages*.

[29]Both poems contain a dialogue between four sisters, Mercy, Truth, Peace and Right, who discuss the fate of a soul just before the harrowing of hell. See Passus 18 of the B-Text of *Piers Plowman*.

The Castle of Love blends its allegory with biblical paraphrase and sometimes translation. The allegorical devices serve as a link between this fall and the redemption, and also as a way to explain the redemption in terms that will allow the thirteenth- and fourteenth-century audiences to make sense of it in their lives. The allegory does not rely on personal experience or perspective, nor is it prophetic in the social sense, like *Piers Plowman* and other late fourteenth-century allegories: it does not concern itself with the state of society and the people who live in it and the results of their actions. Instead, this allegory is more homiletic in nature: it explains biblical narrative through imagery. Thus, it is very much like the other texts in Part 3.

The author addresses a specific audience in the introduction to the poem:

> Þauh hit on Englisch be dim and derk
> Ne nabbe no sauur bi-fore [a] clerk,
> ffor lewed Men þat luitel connen
> On Englisch hit is þus bi-gonnen.
> Ac whose is witer and wys of wit
> And ȝerne bi-holdeþ þis ilke writ,
> And con þat muchel of luitel vnlouken
> And Hony of þe harde ston souken,
> Alle poyntes he fynde may
> Of vre be-leeue and godes lay
> Þat bi-falleþ to Godes Godhede
> As wel as to his Monhede.   [MPV 38, 71-82]

The poet also refers to the education of his audience:

> On Englisch I-chul mi resun schowen,
> ffor him þat con not I-knowen
> Nouþer ffrench ne Latyn.   [35-37]

This implies an audience without much formal education, but the poet does expect a certain intelligence from them. They are able to extract "Hony" from the "hard ston", that is,

interpret the allegory. Thus the text assumes a knowledgeable but non-clerical audience.

The central image of the poem is the Castle of Love, which represents Mary. This is made clear with the introduction of the image:

> God nolde alihte in none Manere
> But in feir stude and in clere.
> In feir stude and clene siker hit wes
> Þer god al-mihti his In ches:
> In a Castel wel comeliche,
> Muche and ffeir and loueliche;
> Þat is þe Castel of alle flour,
> Of Solas and of Socour.   [663-70]

This passage uses phrases and images common in Marian literature to describe the castle. The adjectives "comeliche" and "loueliche" and the phrase "flour/ Of Solas and Socour" are examples. The individual parts of the castle clarify its nature. One example of this is the foundation:

> He [God] stont on hei3 Roche and sound,
> Þat is I-planed in to þe ground,
> Þat þer ne mai wone non vuel þing
> Ne derue no gynnes castyng. [677-80]

God chooses a solid foundation from which to fight his battle for the souls of humanity. As he does with each image in the poem, the poet explains this one, saying that this rock represents Mary's heart:

> Þe Roche þat is so trewe and trusti,
> Þat is þe Maydenes herte, forþi
> Þat neuer synne þer-wiþ-Inne com,
> Ac heo to seruen God al hire nom
> And wuste hire wiþ muche boxumnesse,
> Hire Maidenhod wiþ swetnesse.   [769-773]

The allegory of the poem is clearly explained. Its images and the language of the poem are

based on the images the people who read the poem would have been familiar with. What the *Castle of Love* does is provide an architectural image which the readers can use to help to remember these common images. The use of such images as an aid to memory is well known. It provides the reader with a way to remember the events of scriptural history, the virtues of Mary and Christ, and other aspects of doctrine.

3.4.7 The Romances

There are three romance-like texts in Part 3, *Robert of Sicily*, *The King of Tars* and *Susannah*. These poems are not like other romances: while they do contain narratives of knightly exploits and such, their primary aim is moral. The romance elements of the poems are used as exempla for the central moral teaching of the story. This moral teaching is the impetus for the rest of the story.[30]

Robert of Sicily is an exemplum on a phrase in the *Magnificat*: "Deposuit potentes de sede, et exaltavit humiles", "he may make hey3e lowe/ And low hei3e, in luytel þrowe" (45-6).[31] Robert, the King of Sicily, and brother of Valemounde the Holy Roman Emperor and a Pope Urban, asks a priest about this phrase when he hears it at mass one day and scoffs when the priest explains it to him, believing he is too powerful for such a thing to happen. To teach him a lesson, an angel assumes his form and takes his place on the throne,

---

[30] Most critics would not consider *Susannah* a romance. Susannah is pursued by two judges. When she refuses their advances, they have her tried for adultery and she is killed. Her innocence is revealed through a miracle and the judges are punished. While this is not a romance, the story is told in a similar way to romances.

[31] All quotations and references to *Robert of Sicily* are taken from Walter Hoyt French and Charles Brockway Hale, *Middle English Metrical Romances*. (1930, New York: Russell & Russell, 1964). This edition is based on the Vernon text.

while changing Robert's appearance so that no one recognizes him. The angel hires him as a court jester, until the end of the poem, when Robert becomes repentant and is restored by the angel.

The King of Tars is a romance about a virtuous woman and baptism. The virtuous daughter of the King of Tars is married to the heathen Sultan of Damascus. She does this to save her own people. She claims to follow his beliefs, but secretly practices her Christianity. When their first child is born a shapeless lump of flesh, the sultan blames his wife. But when prayers to his own gods fail to help, his wife convinces him to adopt Christianity. The child is baptized and becomes a healthy boy. Then the sultan is baptized and his skin turns white. The poem ends with the sultan and king of Tars driving all the heathens out of their kingdoms.

Edwards notes that this poem appears after the proverbs in the Simeon MS, with *Susannah* and the *Lamentations of Mary to St. Bernard*. He argues that this is in some ways a better location for *King of Tars* because all of the texts here are about Mary or about women who stand in for her.[32] The poem does, however, have some relationship to many of the texts in Part 3 because it shows the importance of one element of Christian practice: baptism. Some of the previous texts discussed the sacraments and this poem serves as an exemplum of the benefits of baptism.

The exemplary nature of these poems explains their context in most of the manuscripts they appear in. A.S.G. Edwards has catalogued these manuscripts and shows

---

[32]See Edwards "The Contexts of the Vernon Romances" in *Studies in the Vernon* 167.

that the poems most commonly appear with other religious texts, many of which are also in the Vernon. *Robert of Sicily* appears with some texts by Rolle, Nicholas Love, as well as with *The Charter of Christ, The Abbey of the Holy Ghost* and *Handlyng Sin* (selections of which also appear in the Vernon, incorporated into the *Northern Homily Cycle*).[33] The poem is almost homiletic, with a simple statement of its text, the *Magnificat,* and a long exampla, using the familiar motifs of chivalric romance. Thus, *Robert of Sicily* is bound generically to this section of the Vernon both through its homiletic nature.

3.4.8   *How to Hear Mass*

How to Hear Mass is, as the title describes, a guide to the mass for people who cannot follow it in Latin. The author makes this clear in the introduction:

> 3ong & olde, More and lasse,
>   fful go hit is to here Masse,
>   Þat Christendam haþ tan.
> Hit was mad for soule-hele,
> Þe Pater noster wiþ bedes fele,[34]
> And de profundis Is on.   [MPV 47, 1-6]

The writer goes on to describe how these prayers can best be used:

> Eueri mon boþe more and lasse
>   Schulde haue hit in his mynde,
> Hou þat 3e scholde 3or seruise seye
> And priueliche 3or prayers preye   [17-20]

The stress here on the spiritual healing of mass and its use in both private prayer and public services could easily be applied to the manuscript itself. Sowlehele is achieved through

---

[33] Edwards 163-65.

[34]"Bedes" is Furnivall's correction and makes good sense. But it is interesting to note that the manuscript reads "dedes".

standard acts of devotion. This is an argument that would have had great favour among

orthodox authorities.

This text is not a translation of the mass: it simply explains what happens during the

mass and guides the readers through those parts of the service they should participate in.

The writer is careful to defer to the writings of stronger authorities throughout the text:

> 3if I seide þis word wiþ my wit,
> Wiþ-outen witnesse of holi writ
>   Wisdam weore hit non;
> Þerfore I wole þat 3e hit witen,
> Hou þat we fynde hit writen
>   Wiþ Auctours mony on.
> Of Austin, Ambrose, Bernard, and Bede,
> 3it heore Resons wol I rede
>   A-Mong 3ow euerichon.
> Þei make muynde of mony a mede
> Þat we shul haue for vre good dede,
>   To churche whon þat we gon.   [85-96]

Throughout this text, the writer quotes these sources to authenticate his discussion of the

mass. The poem's intent then is to guide people through the mass, not to supplant it by

translating it. The poem does not translate or paraphrase parts of the mass, such as the

Creed or the *Agnus dei*, but these are parts of the service the lay readers of the poem

participate in. It makes the mass a more devotional experience for them by helping them to

understand it and take part in it.

How to Hear Mass is thus a conservative text. It goes well with the *Northern Homily*

Cycle, which provides texts for the homilies given each Sunday with the Mass. It also goes

with the proverbial texts that follow it because it provides many quotations from the great

Authors. Though *How to Hear Mass* has more structure and purpose than the proverbial

texts, these texts provide authoritative wisdom that the readers can use during their weekly practices.

3.4.9 Conclusion

Some of the texts in Part 3 of the Vernon appear to be written for a clerical audience, including *How to Live Perfectly*. But as can be seen from the addresses to the audience, most of the texts are written for people who need religious instruction in English. The texts for clerics are made to fit into this context through editing, in some cases, or just through their location in the Vernon. As with the other sections of the Vernon, this audience could be nuns or secular people.

Whatever the audience, the texts in Part 3 provide them with orthodox religious instruction. The texts here do not teach the readers scripture and liturgy, they teach about them. In other words, the texts here do not try to supplant regular religious practice and the authority of the church; they do not give the readers the ability to practice their religion on their own. Instead, they give people a better understanding of their religious practice so that they may get as much benefit as they can from it. Sowlehele here is found through a better understanding of orthodox practice.

The style of writing in Part 3 is distinct from the other sections in the Vernon. Most of the texts in Part 3 combine homiletic and discursive material with exempla. The *Northern Homily Cycle* is the model for this, and the other texts follow it in different ways. Some are more exemplary, like the romances and the *Castle of Love*, others are more discursive, like the proverbs and the versions of the *Mirror of St. Edmund*. There are some

similarities between this style and the style of Part 2: both the short, emotional lyrics and the exemplary texts appeal to the affections. However, the quality of the affective material is different. In Part 2, the writers write of their personal connection with God or Mary through an emotional understanding of the events of the Bible. In Part 3, the exemplum are usually secular fables that are narrative enactments of the moral teaching of the discursive material that accompanies them. The affective material is designed to support the didactic material and help the readers to better understand and remember it.

3.5   Part 4: The Prose

Part 4 is unique in the Vernon in that it is made up almost completely of prose, with only a few verse texts. It could be argued that the fact that the texts are prose is the reason for their grouping here. Prose texts are often grouped together in manuscripts, and there are a number of manuscripts that contain similar groupings of texts as the Vernon. But form is only a part of the reason why these texts are grouped together. Part 4 contains various genres of texts, including contemplative works, through which the reader seeks a deeper understanding of God, forms of living, in which the reader learns how to incorporate religious teaching and practice into daily life, and finally narratives, which exemplify the teachings of the other texts. Most of the forms of living encourage the readers to seek the middle life, which allows them to combine religious devotion and the forms of contemplation popular in the Vernon with their daily lives.

For the most part, the forms of contemplation in Part 4 are similar to those we have seen before. They are based on Holy Writ, or meditations on God, Christ or Mary. Many of

these texts are also about the contemplative life, and they recommend it over the active and middle lives. Some of the texts also refer to more mystical forms of contemplation. S.S. Hussey lists a number of examples of such texts in his article for *Studies in the Vernon*. For example, in Hilton's *Qui habitat*, the author writes that: "Whan þou art turned from loue of þe world to þe loue of God...þen schalt þou bi-holden with þin ei3e—What?—soþly, god."[35] However, there are only a few texts that talk about mysticism and those that do are careful about it. For example, Hilton, in *Bonum est*, which appears just after *Qui habitat* in the Vernon, says about the nature of God and the things of heaven: "no creature mai conprehende hem; þei are so deope hud in þi priue knowyng. He þat wol ronsake be his oune wit for-to knowe þe causes of hem, schal synken & be drouned."[36] Thus, the mystical forms of contemplation are mentioned in the Vernon, but generally only in passing and with a great deal of distance and care. Instead the authors favour the more practical forms of contemplation, which are grounded in the Bible, and can be incorporated into the daily practices of the audience of the manuscript.

Many of the texts in Part 4 are also addressed to an exclusively female audience. Some of the texts are edited (either in the Vernon or its exemplars) to include men. So "Ghostly sister" in the *Scale of Perfection* becomes "Ghostly brother and sister".[37] But most of the original addresses do survive: the women Rolle wrote his works for are still referred to by name or title. For example, the *Ancrene Riwle*, like *De institutione inclusarum*, is

---

[35]Quoted in Hussey 71. Hussey catalogues the other instances of mysticism on 70-72.

[36]Quoted in Hussey, 71.

[37]Hussey, 68.

written for women in an abbey, and it does not obscure this.

While these elements of the texts in Part 4 may define the audience, they do not necessarily mean that the Vernon was written for female contemplatives. As Hussey argues, the popularity of these texts, especially those of Rolle, went well beyond the original audience, as evidenced by the manuscripts they appear in.[38] Another indication of the nature of the audience lies in the other texts in this section of the manuscript, which favour the mixed life. The overall message of Part 4 is the mixed life or about contextualizing contemplation and devotion into the active life. This is done through the primary genre of the section, the form of living.

3.5.1 Rolle's *Form of Perfect Living*

One of the first forms of living in Part 4 is Rolle's *Form of Perfect Living*.[39] The title of the piece says much about it: "Her beginneþ þe fourme of parfyt liuyng þe wȝuche holi Richard þe hermit of hampulle wrot to a recluse þat was clepet Margarete". This guide to the contemplative life is explicitly written for a woman, Margaret of Kirkby, who appears to be embarking on the life of a recluse. Rolle does spend some time discussing the active life in this epistle, but for the most part he praises the contemplative life:

> ...I trow stidfastly þat þe confort of Ihesu Criste and swetnesse of his loue
> with þe fyre of þe Holy Goste þat purgeþ al syn, shal be in þe and with þe,
> ledynge and lernynge þe how þou shalt þynke, how þou shalt prey, what þou
> shalt worche, so þat in a few yers þou shalt haue more delite to be by þyn on

---

[38]See Hussey 69.

[39]This has been published as *The Form of Living* in *Richard Rolle: Prose and Verse*, ed. S.J. Ogilvie-Thomson, EETS 293, (London: OUP, 1988). The text here is based on MS Longleat 29. But it documents readings from the Vernon in the notes.

and spek to þi loue [and] þi spouse Ihesu, þan if þou were lady of a thousand
worldes.   [6]

Contemplation is seen as a self-generating process. Once the recluse contacts the love of

Christ and the fire of the holy spirit, she will be able to go deeper into the contemplative

life. The images of love and delight here are typical both of contemplative literature and

literature for nuns.

Rolle favours the contemplative life, but he is careful to point out that there are

dangers in both the contemplative and active lives:

> These wrechednes þat I of told ben nat only in worldisshe men and wommen
> that vsen glotony or lecherie and other oppyn synnes, bot þei ben also in
> sum men þat semen in penaunce and in good lif. For þe deuyl, þat is enemy
> vnto al mankynd, whan he seth a man or a womman amonge a þousand
> turne ham holy to God, and forsake al þe vanite and þe richesse þat men þat
> loueth þe world coueiteth, and seche þe ioy lestynge, a thousand wiles he
> hath in what manere he may deceyue ham. And whan he may nat brynge
> ham in to sych synnes þe which myght make al wondre on ham þat knewe
> ham, he begileth many so priuely þat þai can nat oft tymes fele þe trape þat
> hath take ham. [3]

Contemplatives can be as easily deceived by the devil as anyone else. Thus, many

contemplatives only seem like contemplatives, even to themselves. Rolle goes on to

explore the ways to prevent this from happening. The chief remedy against the devil is love

of God and fellow humans. It is through this love that the contemplative finds the strength

to fend off the devil and find the love of God and the Holy Spirit. In some ways, then, *The*

Form of Perfect Living anticipates the middle life by encouraging its readers not to isolate

themselves entirely from the world.

3.5.2 Hilton's *Epistle on the Mixed Life*.

Another form of living, and a significant one, is Hilton's *Epistle on the Mixed Life*.[40]

The rubric in the Vernon states:

> Here beginneþ a luitel Boc þat was writen to a worldli lord to teche him hou he schulde haue him in his state in ordeynd loue to god and his euencristene.[41]

Hilton describes for the various forms of living and which is the appropriate one for this

powerful lord and his fellows. The contemplative life is best for prelates and curates who

must forsake the world and all its possessions. The active life is best for workers and

peasants who need to stay busy to keep from sin. As we can see in the passage from the

Epistle quoted in chapter 1, the mixed life is best for the wealthy and powerful. It is also of

benefit to the worldly lords, such as the addressee of this text:

> Also hit longeþ generali to sum temporal men þe wȝuche han souereynte wiþ muche hauyng of worldly godes, and also han as hit were a lordschipe ouer oþur men to goueme & susteyne hem, as a fader haþ ouer his children, a Maister ouer his seruantes, and a lord ouer his tenauntes; þe wȝuche men also han receyued of þe ȝift of vr lord grace of deuocion, & in parti sauour of gostli ocupacion. To þise also longeþ þis medled lyf, þat is boþ actyf & contemplatyf. For ȝif þise men stondynge þe charge & þe bond þat þei han take, wolde leue vtturly þe bisynes of þe world, þe wȝuche ouȝte skilfulli be vsed [in] fulfillyng of heor charge, and hol[i] ȝeue hem to lyf contemplatyf, þei do not wel, for þei kepe not þe ordre of charite. For charite, as þou knowest, liþ boþe in loue of god & of þin euen-cristne, and þerfore hit is resonable þat he þat haþ charite vse boþe in worchinge, now þat on now þat oþur. [268-9]

The mixed life is appropriate for people who have sovereignty over others because it both

---

[40]The Vernon version of this text is found in Horstmann, *Yorkshire Writers* 1. 264-92. Quotations are from this text.

[41] The text, edited from the Vernon, is edited by Carl Horstman in *Yorkshire Writers*, 1:264-92.

teaches them how to use their worldly goods more charitably, and it teaches them how to use their authority over others. Hilton also stresses that the contemplative life is not appropriate for such people for there is no charity in it ("for þei kepe not þe ordre of charite"). Hilton defines charity as a love of God and other people. If they abandon the world, and love only God, they do not fulfill all the requirements of charity.

Hilton goes on to show his audience how they can live the middle life. Hilton wants his readers to nourish a desire for God, which will lead to a love of God (which comes after death with the uniting of the soul with God). Hilton says that people can nourish this desire through prayers, understanding of their own sins, the nature of Christ, an understanding of the catechism, contemplation of the saints and Mary and finally a desire for heaven. Finally, the best and most reliable form of meditation is:

> hit þen most syker toþe for to say þi Pater noster or þin Ave or elles þi matyns, or for to rede on þi sauter, ffor þat is evermore a syker standart and wol not fayle, who so wole cleue þerto, he schal not erre.   [289]

These are the practical forms of contemplation we see discussed throughout the Vernon manuscript. They allow people to find a place form themselves in the world, while living a devout and spiritual life.

3.5.3   The Prose *Mirror of St. Edmund*

Part 4 contains the third version of the *Mirror of St Edmund*, the only version to go by the original title.[42] Like the second version of this text in the manuscript, the *Pricke of Love*, the prose version discusses all three forms of contemplation: contemplation of

---

[42]The Vernon text can be found in *Yorkshire Writers* 1. 240-61.

creatures, which leads people to know God through his creation, contemplation of holy writ, which leads people to know God through the basic tenets of the Christian faith, and contemplation of God, which leads the author to a discussion of the daily prayers. The prose version fleshes out the contemplation of God more than the other two versions. This takes two forms: contemplation of God as man and God as deity. The contemplation of God as Man, Christ, takes the form of the hours of the day, which follow the hours of the Passion:

> þerefore I haue distynktet hem bi [þe] houres of þe day þat þou syngest at Chirche; þat non houre þe passe þat þou ne haue þin herte ocupyed. Þat to don, þou schalt witen þat eueri houre haþ double þenkyng: on of þe Passion, anoþer of oþer seson. [254]

The nine hours of the day make people aware of the events that occurred at the same times during the passion. The "double thinking" of each hour leads to a contemplation of God. The contemplation of God as deity involves meditating on the nature of God, as a Trinity, and on the "largesse" and "swetnesse" of God. This leads to a brief discussion of mystical contemplation. To know God, the must go through three levels of contemplation:

> Þe ffurste degre of þis manere contemplacion is þat þe soule turne to him-self and gedere him al wiþ-Inne him-self. Þe secunde degre is þat he seo what he is whon he is so gedered to-gedere. Þe þridde degre is þat he heue hire-self abouen hire self and enforce hire to sen god hire creatour in his oune kynde. [259]

While the author acknowledges the possibility that the reader can achieve a mystical knowledge of God, this knowledge must be grounded in a firm self-knowledge, which is the subject of most of the *Mirror*. This form of contemplation can come about only if one first understands holy writ, the practice of devotion and the nature of one's own sins.

3.5.4 *The Abbey of the Holy Ghost* and *The Charter of the Abbey of the Holy Ghost*

The *Abbey of the Holy Ghost*, and its companion piece, the *Charter of the Abbey of the Holy Ghost*, are not about the middle life explicitly. But they do provide a model through which the middle life could be practised. This is revealed in the opening of the the *Abbey*:

> My dere brother and sister, I se weel that many wolde ben in religioun but they mowe nowt for poverte or for awe or for drede of her kyn or for bond of maryage. Therefore I make here a book of relygyoun of the herte, that is of the Abbey of the Holy Goost, that all tho that mow nout been in bodylyche relygyon mow been in gostly. [89][43]

This text is for readers who want to enter the religious life, but for some reason or other cannot. In place of an actual abbey, the readers can practice a religion of the heart. This religion of the heart is the Abbey of the Holy Ghost in the allegory of the texts. It allows worldly readers to create a space in their daily lives for religious practice. In other words, religion of the heart is the middle life.

The Abbey and the *The Charter of the Abbey of the Holy Ghost* use the allegory of the abbey to create this "religion of the heart". Each part of the abbey and the different positions in the abbey represent virtues: The chapter-house of the abbey is Shrift, the dormitory is Contemplation and the chapel is Orison (see 91); the abbess is Charity, the prioress is Wisdom and the sub-prioress is Meekness (see 93). In this the two works are similar to *The Castle of Love*. *The Charter* is closer to Grosseteste's work than is *The Abbey*. Its allegory is historical in nature: it describes how the abbey was founded in Eden,

---

[43]*The Abbey* is quoted from Norman Blake, ed., *Middle English Religious Prose* (London: E. Arnold, 1972.) and *The Charter* from *Yorkshire Writers*. Both editions are based on MS Laud 210. *Yorkshire Writers* has many readings from the Vernon.

where it was betrayed by Satan, and is then redeemed by Christ. *The Abbey*, on the other hand, is a descriptive allegory. It lists the different parts and people of the abbey and their allegorical significance.

3.5.5 *Piers Plowman*

The last form of living I want to discuss is *Piers Plowman A*. Though this text is not thought of as a form of living, it is about finding a way to live in the world. The text is an odd one for Part 4, being one of the few verse texts here. But in its context *Piers Plowman* reveals the benefits of the benefits of the mixed life for individuals and for society.

Piers Plowman encourages its readers to seek virtue through descriptions of sin. The first two visions of the "fair field of folk" show characters from all orders of society acting in sin, usually in pursuit of Lady Meed. The stress here is on society as a whole, not on any particular part of society, and how it has strayed from the path set for it by Christianity. Sowelhele is thus seen here on a social scale, not a personal one. The other texts in Part 4 have generally focussed on individuals or clearly defined groups. Langland, however, directs his criticism to society as a whole.

The solution to social sin in *Piers Plowman A* is sought through individual virtue: many of the characters stress the need for the dreamer to improve himself by finding Dowel. Each vision of sin in the social sphere shows how it is produced through individual actions. However, the nature of virtue and Dowel is problematic, even for Langland. Virtue is found through *kynde knowynge*, or instinct. *Kynde knowynge* appears to be similar to the inner rule of the *Ancren Riwle* or the religion of the heart described in *The Abbey of the Holy Ghost*.

It is a sense of virtue placed in humans by God and is perfect and incorruptible. Humans

can, however, choose not to listen to *kynde knowynge* and fall into sin. Humans can also

choose the way they obey *kynde knowynge* and this creates one of the central problems of

Piers Plowman in all its versions. When Piers Plowman tears up the pardon and vows to

give up the active life for a life of prayer and devotion he confuses both Will the dreamer

and the reader. Should all people follow Piers' model to do well, or can one do well through

any sort of life? The Pardon Scene provides some clues. I choose this scene, which is

arguably the climax of the A-Text, because it brings together many of the previous events.

The early visions of the text, the discussion with Holy Church and the events around Lady

Mede, are all about people trying to find salvation. In Passus 8, the people think they have

found the way to salvation in the Pardon. Langland describes what the pardon means before

he even reveals what the pardon says. The description is summed up at the beginning of

Passus 8:

> Treuthe herde telle her-of and to Pers sende,
> To taken his teeme and tilyen the eorthe;
> And purchasede him a pardoun *a pena et a culpa*
> For him, and for his heires euer-more aftur.
> And had holden hem at hom and heren heore ley3es,
> And al that euere hulpen him to heren or to sowen,
> Or eny maner mester that mihte Pers helpen,
> Part in that pardoun the pope hath i-graunted.
>   Kynges and knihtes that kepen holi church,
> And rihtfuliche rulen the reame and the peple,
> Han pardoun thorw purgatorie to passen ful sone,
> With patriarkes in paradys to pleyen ther-aftur.   [8. 1-12][44]

The passage goes on to catalogue all the people in society and how the pardon affects them.

---

[44]Text is quoted from the A-Text in Skeat's Parallel text edition, which uses the
Vernon as the base for the A-Text.

Truth encourages all people to be true to their place in society in order to attain salvation. Such a sentiment would have been of obvious appeal to the compilers of the Vernon: the other texts in part four of the manuscript stress value of devotion in one's daily life. However, when we come to the actual revelation of the pardon, things become murkier:

> *Et qui bona egerunt ibunt in vitam eternam;*
> *Qui vero mala in ignem eternum.*
> 'Peter!' quod the preost tho 'I con no pardoun fynde,
> Bot "dowel and haue wei and god schal haue thi soule,
> And do vuel, and haue vuel hope thou non othur,
> That aftur thi deth-day to helle schaltou wende!"'
> And Pers, for puire teone pollede hit a-sonder,
> And siththe he seide to hem these semely sawis,
> > '*Si ambulauero in medio vmbre mortis, non timebo mala quoniam tu mecum es.*
> I schal sese of my sowynge,' quod Pers 'and swynke not so harde,
> Ne aboute my lyflode so bisy beo no more!
> Of preyere and of penaunce my plouh schal ben heraftur,
> And bi-lore that I beo-louh er my lyf fayle.   [8.95-105]

Piers disobeys the pardon by giving up on his place in society to become a religious penitent. There are a number of possible reasons for this decision, but it mainly seems to be the result of his disgust with the priest's ignorance. His argument with the priest over the pardon demonstrates this point: at one point he says to the priest: "'Lewede lorel! ... luite lokestou on the bible...'" (8. 123). Piers appears to feel that he would make a better priest than the established clergy since he has always lived his life by the pardon and followed it instinctively. The fact that the clergy cannot understand the pardon is shocking to him and he decides to devote his life to correcting people's ignorance. This is not to say that Langland is encouraging people to become penitents whenever they want to. Piers is an allegorical and ironic figure. He is used as a symbol of clerical ignorance at this point.

If the clergy are unable to understand such a simple pardon and maintain their privileged place in society, why should a simple plowman, who knows more about right than they do, keep to his humbler place in society?

The pardon scene is in part a conflict between the active and contemplative lives. Piers makes a radical shift from the active to the passive life. His is an extreme case, and reveals a break down in the structures of society. But he does not contradict the central ideas of the Pardon, including the idea that everyone should stay in their place in society, and to live this life in as spiritual a manner as possible. Piers Plowman shows the social and personal implications of what happens if this is not done. While this part of the text is not directly about the mixed life, it does reveal the benefits of such a life. A person living such a life would be able to avoid the problems described in *Piers Plowman* and may be able to help society avoid the same problems.

3.5.6 Conclusion

As I have said, the mixed life is the subject of Part 4. While it does contain texts that support the contemplative life in various forms, it seems clear these are really meant to support the discussion of the mixed life. We see in the texts about the mixed life many models for how the contemplative life can be blended with life in the secular world. The religion of the heart described in the *Abbey of the Holy Ghost* shows people how they can carry an abbey within them. It may then be that texts like the *Ancrene Riwle* are meant to support this discussion. They show readers how to live in an abbey, real or metaphorical. As I have said before, it is difficult to prove one way or another that Vernon is written for

any particular audience. But the middle life is the emphasis for Part 4, and it provides an excellent indication for the nature of the audience.

Sowlehele in Part 4 is about people living their lives without ever losing their love for God or desire for salvation. Instead, they can find salvation in their daily lives through their interaction with society. For example, Hilton, in his *Epistle on the Mixed Life*, discusses how "charite...liþ boþe in loue of god & of þin euen-cristne" (268-69, quoted above). He argues that the subject of his epistle cannot seek the contemplative life, else he would abandon charity, which, for a man in his position is both a love of God and a love of his fellow Christians. Sowlehele in Part 4, therefore, has social implications as well as personal ones. We can thus see that the compiler of the Vernon is as interested in the salvation of society as in the salvation of his individual readers.

3.6   Part 5: The Refrain Lyrics

To study the Vernon Refrain Lyrics as a separate part of the manuscript we need to accept a possible error in the collation of the manuscript. Part 5 seems like a late addition, not unlike the prologue. It is one incomplete quire at the end of the manuscript. While it is a distinct entity from Part 4, it is not distinguished as an individual section in the way other sections are. John J. Thompson argues convincingly that this quire in fact belongs at the end of Part 3 and was misplaced during the binding of the manuscript. These lyrics form quire 53, and according to Thompson, they should have gone after quire 41, the last of Part 3.[45]

---

[45]John J. Thompson, "The Textual Background and Reputation of the Vernon Lyrics" in *Studies in the Vernon*. The heart of Thompson's argument is on 207 and 210-11. Thompson argues that these two quires may have been lent to the Simeon MS scribes who

There is a great deal of evidence for this contention. The contents of both quires 41 and 53 are not listed in the table of contents. Both quires contain decorations from the same hands as did the prologue. These indicate that Quire 53 may not have been located until after the table was completed. Furthermore, there is a note on quire 51 stating that the next quire (52) is the last quire of the manuscript. And finally, the lyrics appear at the end of the Simeon's Part 3.

Thompson's argument is convincing, but regardless of where these poems go, they do form a distinct grouping in the manuscript. This grouping is based as much on verse form as anything else. Almost all of these 27 poems (29 in the Simeon) are refrain poems. While these do appear elsewhere in the manuscript, this cluster of refrain lyrics sets them apart. Aside from this common verse form, the lyrics also share some commonalities in subject matter and tone. Some critics disagree. Thompson argues that the lyrics have so many different subject matters and tones that they cannot be considered a group.[46] There is some truth to this if we consider all 27 poems as a whole; however, there are separate smaller groupings of tone and style woven across the refrain lyrics. Some poems discuss contemporary life–these poems contain the topical references that are the basis for the arguments about the Vernon's date. Other texts discuss death and transience, themes derived from Ecclesiastes. Another group of poetry is about women. Unlike the shorter poems of Part 2, these poems are generally seem more secular: there is a greater emphasis on morals and social obligations. It could be argued that this lost quire was deliberately put

---

returned them late in the final preparation of the Vernon. Though quire 41 was collated correctly, quire 53 was misplaced.

[46]Thompson, 202-3.

at the end of Part 4 because somebody felt that it fit better there, since Part 4 has similar, but broader, concerns. These groupings of the poems can be appreciated better from the following table (the numbers are the numbers of the poems in *Minor Poems*):

1. Lyrics 1-15: Poems praising God and his mercy and fatalistic poems about the transitory nature of the world and how all wealth and power can be taken away in an instant. These lyrics encourage various virtues (truth, charity, love of god) both in terms of their spiritual benefit and the good they can do the world.
2. Lyrics 16-18: Lyrics in praise of Mary and women.
3. Lyrics 19-20. These are the topical poems, about the earthquake of 1382 and the contemporary kings of England.
4. Lyrics 21-25. Similar to group 1. These poems emphasize personal self-control: keeping silent and acting with pity. They emphasize the social benefits of this as much as the spiritual ones.
5. Lyrics 26-27: Poems in praise of God and Mary.

I will now examine some poems from these groupings in some detail, beginning with group 1. This section is about the transitory nature of the world and humans. The poems are fairly didactic and discuss basic beliefs of the Christian faith. No. 8, "Keep Well Christ's Commandments", as well as No. 6 "Each Man Ought Himself to Know", are typical examples. No. 8 teaches material from the creed. No. 6 is almost a refrain version of the meditation or self knowledge section of *The Mirror of St. Edmund*. The poem is a homiletic description of the nature of flesh and what will happen to it at death:

> Knowe þi lyf; hit may not last,
> But as a blast blouh out þi breth;
> Tote, and bi a noþer mon tast;
> Riht as a glentand glem hit geth.
> What is al þat forþ is past?
> Hit fareþ as a fuir of heth.
> Þis worldes good awey wol wast,
> ffor synnes seeknesse þi soule sleþ.
> And þat is a ful delful deþ,
> To saue þi soule and þou be slowe,

> Wiþ þi Maystrie medel þi meþ,
>   ffor vche mon ouȝte him-self to knowe.
>   ["Each Man Ought Himself to Know", 25-36]

Life is short and the world's goods will fade away. The poem goes into more graphic detail about the affliction of the body and its decay after death, and throughout it shows how salvation can only be found from this self-knowledge, which brings about enough grief that it will encourage people to mend their ways. This is a common theme throughout the manuscript (as the repetition of *The Mirror of St. Edmund* indicates), and throughout this section. Most of the poems in Group 1 are variants on this theme. No. 9, "Who Says the Sooth, He Shall Be Shent", is about how the world is false and transient and about how people can face it only with truth. No. 12, "This World Fares as a Fantasy", opens with the image, reminiscent of Bede, comparing the passing of the world to the flight of a bird. The poem goes on to describe the way people debate the nature of creation:

> Vche secte hopeþ to be saue,
> Baldely bi heore bi-leeue,
> And vchon vppon God heo craue:
> Whi schulde God wiþ hem him greue?
> Vchon trouweþ þat oþur Raue,
> But alle heo chooseþ God for cheue,
> And hope in God vchone þei haue,
> And bi heore wit heore worching preue.
> Þus mony maters men dou meue
> Sechen heor wittes hou and why,
> But Godes Merci vs alle bi-heue,
> ffor þis world fareþ as a fantasy. [61-72]

People divide themselves into sects who claim to achieve salvation through their speculations about God and who think all other sects are mad.

Critics like Takami Matsuda and J.A.W. Bennett have argued that these poems are

based on Ecclesiastes. Matsuda discusses how this source affects the poems: "Death and transience also constitute in them an occasion which demands a didactic rather than ascetic response, so that they try to give, besides traditional homiletic warnings, more secular wisdom for gaining salvation and avoiding discomforts in life."[47] The discussions of *contemptus mundi* in Ecclesiastes were popular in the middle ages, but the preacher's attitude to the afterlife was problematic because "it appeared to lack the perspective which extends beyond death and remains sometimes ostensibly indifferent to the fate of the afterlife."[48] For example, the preacher in Ecclesiastes compares the fate of humans after death to that of animals, an idea that is picked up in the lyrics. We can see this theme in the last stanza of "This World Fares as a Fantasy", for example, where the poet describes how "Mon, hors & hounde" all pass from "nouȝt to nouȝt" (129-30). These poems are about how people should try to find salvation in the world, and the social implications of this search.

The second grouping of lyrics in this section of the manuscript is three lyrics about women in general and Mary in particular. The two poems about Mary, No. 17, "The Praise of Mary, Mother of Christ", and No. 18, "Maiden Mary and her Fleur de Lys", are similar to the other Marian lyrics in the Part 2. They praise Mary for her virtues and for her role in

---

[47]Takami Matsuda, "Death and Transience in the Vernon Refrain Series" *English Studies: A Journal of English Language and Literature* 3(1989): 193. The poems that Matsuda writes about are "Þis world fareþ as a fantasye", ""For vche mon ouȝte him-self to knowe" and "And sum tyme þenk on ȝuster-day". Bennett discusses these themes in "*Nosce te ipsum*: Some Medieval and Modern Interpretations", in *The Humane Medievalist and other Essays in English Literature and Learning, from Chaucer to Eliot*, ed. Piero Boitani (Rome, 1982).

[48]Matusda 193 (and see note 4).

Christ's life, and the poets attempt to seek salvation through her. The other poem in this group, No. 16, "Of Women cometh this Worldes Weal", is a remarkable praise for all women in general.[49] The poet here praises women as the source of this world's comfort and joy and refutes a number of arguments against women. The poet criticizes the "moni vn-witti wiht is woode, / Vn-wyslice wimmen wol dispyse" (13-14) and compares these people to birds who foul their own nests (see 17 and 73-6). The poet takes issue with those who argue that women caused the downfall of many men like Adam and Solomon (25-29), and counters that:

> Of Monnes riken þei neuer on.
> And monnes falshed weore fulfild,
> I trowe þer weore twenti aʒeynes on.... [30-32]

When reckoned against the falsehood of men, like Judas, the falsehood of women is insignificant. Furthermore, the poet argues, any falsehood done by women was caused by men: "Wimmen wrouʒte neuer no wrong / But þrow Monnes entysement" (49-50). The poet goes on to praise women, because Christ admired them (stanza 6), because they give birth, clothe their families and help to make peace between people (stanza 8). Finally the poet praises women because they enabled Christian salvation:

> ffor God and Mon was fer atwinne
>   Whon he made Monkuynde of Séé-flod:
> I wolde wite, whon þat Eue gon spinne,
>   Bi whom þat ʒoure gentrie stod?
> Hou be-come ʒe godes kinne,
>   But barelych þorw þe wommones blod?   [97-102]

---

[49]The narrator of the *Life of Adam and Eve* in Part 4 argues that women are fairer then men since they are made from men, and men are made from dirt. Hussey argues that the author is being humourous (70), which may be true, but the text is parallelled by this lyric.

The poet argues that man became kin to God only through women, namely Mary. Eve starts this process by spinning man and God closer together. Eve and Mary furthered the process of creation, because, through them, men finally achieved the image of God.[50]

The next grouping are two poems about contemporary conditions. The first of these, No. 19, "Seldom Seen is Soon Forgot", is an ode to the Black Prince and Edward III. It uses the allegory of a ship to describe how the knights, aristocracy and commons united to support him so that he could capture the king of France in 1357. The poem then turns to the then infant king, Richard II, and encourages people to support him:

> And þerfore holliche I ou Rede;
> Til þat þis Ympe beo fully growe,
> Þat vch a Mon vp wiþ þe hede,
> And Mayntene him boþ heiȝe and lowe.   [97-100]

The poet argues that in order to create a stable land with a righteous government, all must live in truth and accept their places in society.

The next poem, No. 20, "A Warning to be Ware", describes how God uses civil discord and natural disasters to warn people to live in truth. God, the poet says, "wolde bringe til a-cord / Monkuynde, to liue in treuþe ariht" (3-4), but since few will do so, he warns of the consequences through civil discord and disaster. The first warning was the Commons' revolt, which warned the lords about their pride through fear of a loss of their wealth and power. The next disaster was the earthquake of 1382, which destroyed houses,

---

[50]Caroline Walker Bynum discusses these positive depictions of women in "'...And Woman His Humanity': Female Imagery in the Religious Writings of the Later Middle Ages", in *Gender and Religion: On the Complexity of Symbols*, ed. Bynum, Steven Harrell and Paula Richman (Boston: Beacon Press, 1986) 258.

churches and castles. This is a warning against fickleness in all levels of society.

The next group of poems in the manuscript is similar to the first one in that the lyrics are about the transitory nature of the world and the necessity to prepare for death. but the poems here are more concerned with personal actions and their social consequences than the poems in group 1. These poems are directed towards the people in the upper ranks of society, whom the poets encourage to amend themselves to make their society better and to attain salvation. No. 22, "Try to Say the Best", encourages people to control their tongues and not speak ill of others. As an example, the poet encourages servants to speak well of their lords and lords to pity servants who might speak ill of them (stanzas 6 and 7). The next poem, No. 23, "Tarry not till Tomorrow", is about preparing for death now because the fortunes of people can be turned around in an instant. This poem stresses the need for lords to have mercy on those under them and to be charitable with their wealth. The third poem, No. 24, "Make Amends for they Sins", is similar to the previous one. It uses the barest skeleton of a dream vision to encourage people to mend their ways lest they die suddenly. The poet, on a walk, hears a bird singing the refrain, "ffor þi sunnes a-Mendes make!" (8) and then has a vision of the pits of hell that await anyone who does not make amends. But the poet seems to be more interested in what will happen to these people in the world. Kings can be cast down and made poor, the rich can lose their wealth, and the powerful can lose their authority to their heirs through death. The final poem, No. 25, "Suffer in Time, and that is Best", is about patience and the need to hold one's tongue in the face of other people's ill will or foolishness. The poet encourages the poor to be humble to those of high rank who do them wrong, and the rich to have pity on the poor who do them wrong. The

poet also encourages councillors to speak with wisdom and people in general to ignore foolish people. This patience and self control will make the wrong doers amend their ways.

All four of these are extrapolations of Christ's command to love thy neighbour, and an exploration of the consequences of not doing so. Neighbourliness is referred to directly in all four poems. Each lyric explores the implications of personal sin for one's neighbours, which is defined in the broad sense as society in general. There are references in these poems to the effects of sin in the afterlife, but they are most concerned with the effects of sin in this life. The virtues in these lyrics are described as making people immune to the cycles of fortune.

The lyrics in Part 5 are thus not a completely disparate group of poems. Most of them are about the social and personal implications of sin. They are not so much interested in how virtue helps people to achieve salvation, but rather about how it can help to improve the world. As in Part 4, the attitude of Sowlehele in this section is both public and personal. Sowlehele is created through a just and righteous society.

3.7 Conclusion

This chapter has been about the principles behind the selection of texts in the Vernon manuscript. Having surveyed each section of the text, we have now some clear ideas about what sorts of texts the compiler chose to include in this collection. He has collected a sizeable body of saints lives and miraculous legends, which form all of Part 1, a large part of Parts 2 and 3 and are even found in Part 4 (*The Spirit of Guy* falls into this category). These texts provide Sowlehele through these exemplary figures, which are also

objects of worship. These tales also set this doctrine in a dramatic fashion. The compiler also chose highly emotional shorter poems about God and Mary in Part 2, which provide Sowlehele by enabling the readers to form a personal, emotional understanding of the divine. In Part 3, the compiler chose a wide variety of texts, including dialogues, religious romances, proverbs, allegories, treatises and more. But all of these texts provide instruction in the fundamentals of the Christian faith through homiletic materials and exempla. In Part 4, the compiler chose a series of contemplative texts, forms of living and narrative texts like *Piers Plowman*, which as a whole show the readers how to incorporate religion into their daily lives and how to improve society.

The principles behind the compiler's selection of texts can also be seen in the styles and tones of writing in the Vernon manuscript. In general, the compiler favours a combination of homiletic and exemplary texts. Part 3 is thus a sort of model for the rest of the manuscript. While in Part 3, there is a balance between homily and narrative, other sections generally favour one over the other. In Part 1, the homily is part of the drama of each saint's life. Here it is found in the speeches of the saints and the narrator's comments on the action. But the overall tone here is exemplary: the saints are examples that people can follow. In the narrative texts in Part 2, the homily is found in the narrative comments on the tale. In *La estorie del Euangelie* we find some homily in the author's introduction, and in the *Miracles of Our Lady*, it is found in a few simple lines at the beginnings and endings of each story. In the short lyrical poems, the homiletic or discursive is blended with the exemplary. The point of these poems is to provide an emotional understanding of faith, so the styles need to be blended. In Part 4, the texts are mainly homiletic and didactic. Most

of the texts here are prose treatises or epistles on faith, but some, like *Piers Plowman*, set this didacticism in a more dramatic context.

This combination of homily and narrative mimics the style of a sermon. The style's best representation in the Vernon is the *Northern Homily Cycle*, which was used by priests for their lay audiences. Together with other elements of the texts, such as the use of English, it shows that the compiler is very much interested in the pastoral care of his audience. He teaches them the fundamentals of their faith through the homiletic texts, and provides them with examples that will help them to understand this teaching better. One of the definitions of Sowlehele is pastoral care, and in this regard the manuscript lives up to its title.

We have seen here what the compiler chose to include. To better understand the principles of his selection, we should also look at the sorts of text he chose not to include. There are no secular texts, no histories, romances, medicinal recipes, love poetry or other such things. There are some texts that do refer to contemporary history, especially among the Refrain Lyrics. These are generally conservative. Among religious texts, the mystical tradition, though present here, does not appear through some of its more extreme texts. The Vernon, as I have said before, also does not contain any heretical texts, or translations of the Bible and liturgy. But the text is also not liturgical in the more orthodox sense: it is nothing like the books of hours that were popular at this time. The compiler has thus chosen to limit his selection to the homiletic-exemplary, which forms the basis for the pastoral care of the Vernon. Pastoral care is one of the possible means of Sowlehele, so in this respect the manuscript lives up to its title.

Throughout this survey, I have quoted from or referred to many of the addresses to

the audiences of the texts of the Vernon. Some of these addresses have lead some critics have argued that the manuscript was meant for an abbey.[51] While many of the texts are addressed to just such an audience, many more are addressed to male, or secular, or wealthy audiences. Whatever, the compiler wrote this book for an audience that would need pastoral care, an audience of limited formal education (though not intelligence), who would need instruction in the fundamentals of their faith, and who would require exemplary texts to help them understand this teaching better. In the next chapters, I will define more clearly the nature of this audience.

---

[51]See Blake, "Vernon Manuscript: Contents and Organization" 58, for example. To be fair, Blake bases his claim on more than addresses: the size of the manuscript, the cost and other matters also factor in. I will discuss these other arguments in more detail in later chapters.

Chapter 4: Structure and Mode in the Vernon

In examining the contents of the Vernon in the previous chapter, I made some rudimentary observations about the structure and genre of the manuscript. In this chapter, I will examine these issues in more detail. Through the structure of the Vernon and the use of genres in the manuscript, we can gain a clearer sense both of the compiler's motivations and of the manuscript as a text. Structure and genre are important to the meaning of a text, and medieval writers spent a great deal of time writing about them and applying them to the texts they wrote or copied. They help to define how a text creates meaning, and the ways in which a text is meaningful to its audience.

Structure and genre are closely related in medieval theories of literature. They make up the formal cause or *modus agendi* of a text, its manner of proceeding. Minnis calls the formal cause "the pattern imposed by the *auctor* on his materials."[1] This pattern is created both through the style of the writing and its structure.[2] The structure of a text defines the way it creates meaning by dividing its subject into meaningful units. Genre, which is better thought of as "mode" in medieval terms, is the method an author uses to present his or her arguments to a given audience. The Vernon manuscript's compiler creates structure by ordering the texts he selects into sections, which divide Sowlehele into various aspects. The bases for these divisions are the genre or modes of the texts in each section. The two are

---

[1] Minnis, *Theory of Authorship*, 29.

[2] See Judson Boyce Allen, *The Ethical Poetic of the Later Middle Ages* (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1982) 90-4 for a discussion of the link between the organization and genre of a text. As an example of this, Allen cites Averroes discussion of tragedy in which he states that in order for a tragedy to be successful, it must have its separate parts disposed in proper order with proper lengths (Allen 122).

thus closely related, and they help to define the audience of the Vernon and how the manuscript conveys its meanings to them.

4.1   The Organization of the Vernon

The organization of a medieval text is an integral part of its meaning. It became more and more important as the middle ages progressed. As Malcolm Parkes argues, "It is a truism of palaeography that most works copied in and before the twelfth century were better organized in copies produced in the thirteenth century, and even better organized in those produced in the fourteenth."[3] Parkes attributes this better organization to the nature of the readers and their expectations of literature. Reading was primarily a monastic activity before the twelfth century and the readers used the texts as a source of contemplation. Over time, the readership changed, becoming at the same time more academic and more populist (with the increase in vernacular readers), so writers made texts easier to use through improved structure.[4] Thus, chapter headings, rubrication and other such devices were added to texts by scribes so that readers could find their way through them more easily. Increasingly, such structures became a larger part of new manuscripts and texts.[5] These superficial aspects of the structure of a text—that is, the way it is presented in a

---

[3] Malcolm Parkes, "The Influence of the Concepts of Ordinatio and Compilatio on the Development of the Book," *Medieval Learning and Literature: Essays presented to Richard William Hunt*, eds, J.J.G. Alexander and M.T. Gibson (Oxford: Clarendon, 1976) 115.

[4] Parkes, "Influence" 115.

[5] Allen uses many examples from medieval English literature throughout *Ethical Poetic*. Minnis shows how these theories apply to vernacular writers in Chapter 5 and the Prologue of his *Medieval Theory of Authorship*.

manuscript–reveal the underlying structure of the text more clearly. Medieval writers always concentrated on the structure of the ideas and the concepts within their texts. As time went on they made this structure more and more obvious through the physical division of a text on the pages of a manuscript.

These concepts of organization are based on the classical concepts of textuality that I discussed in Chapter 2. The organization of a text was the *forma tractatus*. The *forma tractatus* was generally considered to have three parts: *dispositio*, *divisio*, and *distinctio*–disposition, division and distinction. *Dispositio* is the proper ordering of the parts of a text into a whole. Allen shows that medieval commentators like Geoffrey of Vinsauf were primarily interested in *dispositio* in so far as it applies to the place at which a text begins. If a text begins at the appropriate place, and the parts of the text follow appropriately from that, then it can convey meaning, even if it begins in the middle or the end of a story. The *dispositio* of the text is the way it carries forward logically from this point.[6] *Divisio* is the way a text is divided into separate, intelligible parts. *Divisio* divides a text into parts that, as Allen says, "relate additively, not dynamically",[7] that is, each part has its own meaning, and the cumulation of parts forms a cumulation of these meanings.[8] *Distinctio* is as much a genre as a structure. It defines the way a given subject is broken down into separate elements, which help to create an overall meaning. In some ways the *summae theologicae* are *distinctiones* of theology: they are encyclopaedias of the various elements of theology. The lists of joys, virtues, sins and the anatomies of Mary that can be found in

---

[6] See Allen 131-33.
[7] Allen 138.
[8] See Allen 138-9.

the Vernon, especially in Part 2, are also *distinctiones*. Allen says that *distinctiones* "array the parts of wholes, and in so doing have normative power to express definitions".[9] The *distinctio* is not about the parts of a whole, but rather about how the whole is created through the collection and arrangement of parts. *Distinctio*, *divisio* and *dispositio* work together to create meaning: "The connection between the distinctio which constitutes a text's forma tractandi [genre], and the divisio which names a text's literal parts, is ideally, if often only implicitly, achieved by dispositio, which arranges for a text's beginning that it shall name the governing distinctio."[10] *Distinctio* and *divisio* are parallel entities which both create meaning— *divisio* by dividing a subject into parts, and *distinctio* by creating a meaning from those parts. *Dispositio*, at least ideally, enables the other two through overall structure of a text.

The *forma tractatus* helps to define how the Vernon creates meaning through the organization of its texts. Modern people tend to think of structure as linear. A text moves from one point to another in a succession that leads to a clearly defined end or conclusion. This linearity can be logical or rhetorical, as in academic writing, where a text moves from thesis to evidence to proof, or it can be chronological, as in narrative writing. Of course such structures are often ignored, but many texts tend to define themselves by their attitude to linearity; in medieval writing, linearity is only one among many possible structures. Linear structures were used, as we see in romances, saints' legends and such, but they are used only in a context. They often appear inside other structures, such as manuscripts. One

---

[9]Allen 149.
[10]Allen 149-50.

common structure, which may have some bearing on the Vernon, is the spoked or rose window structure. Gregory M. Sadlek uses the example of a rose window depicting the day of judgement in Chartres Cathedral to describe this structure. The window is made up of a ring of medallions, each depicting a scene of the last judgement. This ring points inwards to a central medallion showing Christ enthroned, thus drawing attention to his place on the day of judgement.[11] Sadlek argues that this is the structure of the *South English Legendary*: each legend contains a linear narrative of a saint's life. But the central meaning of each story is how the saints embody Christian values, and so each one points towards Christ.[12] The Vernon refrain lyrics have a similar pattern, with each stanza pointing towards the central refrain.[13]

A text could also have several structures at once. Hugh of St. Victor, in his *Didascalicon,* argues that the Bible has two structures:

> History follows the order of time; to allegory belongs more the order of knowledge, because...learning ought to take its beginnings not from obscure but from clear things, and from things which are better known. The consequence of this is that the New Testament, in which the evident truth is preached, is, in this study, placed before the Old, in which the same truth is announced in a hidden manner, shrouded in figures.[14]

Hugh argues that novices to religion should begin their study with the New Testament, where they will find Christian teachings plainly revealed, and at a later stage move on to the Old Testament, where the teachings are obscured by figures and images. The Bible thus has

---

[11] Gregory M. Sadlek, "The *South English Legendary* as Rose Window" *Ball State University Forum* 25(1984). See 10-11 for a description of this structure and 12-13 for pictures of the rose window.
[12] Sadlek 14.
[13] See John Burrow, "The Shape of the Vernon Refrain Lyrics" 188-9.
[14] Quoted from Minnis and Scott 82.

two structures, historical and allegorical. The historical structure should be read only by those with experience, because the meaning is more obscure. The allegorical structure (which for Hugh places the exposition of meaning before the historical facts) is better for novices. While the Bible is of course a special case in medieval thought, the concept of a book having parallel structures or *dispositiones* is suggestive of medieval manuscripts. A manuscript is not necessarily meant to be read from beginning to end, but rather, it was usually meant to be sampled from any number of starting points in the middle. As we shall see, the Vernon appears to use such structuring.

The Vernon manuscript has a clear and discernible structure formed by the division of its texts into four or five parts. This structure does not merely reflect the order in which the scribes received their exemplars. While this order may have been a factor, the grouping of texts into sections, as Doyle argues, "also accords with stylistic and functional differences between the contents".[15] If the compiler had his scribes copy groups of texts as is from the exemplars, he may have done so because the groupings were meaningful. In other words, the compiler's role is more creative (in the modern sense of that word) than it might seem. He copies texts and groups of texts to create a meaningful book of Sowlehele.

The role of the compiler is most obvious in the structure of the sections. Each section is a *divisio* of Sowlehele. Sowlehele can mean spiritual good in general, salvation, and spiritual healing in particular. As I have shown in Chapter 3, Part 1 satisfies the spiritual good through edifying and entertaining tales; Part 2 provides spiritual healing through

---

[15] Doyle, "The Shaping of the Vernon and Simeon Manuscripts" 3.

emotional poetry; Part 3 guides people to salvation by teaching them the fundamentals

tenets of the Christian faith; Part 4 shows people how to use this teaching in their daily

lives. Sowlehele can also mean pastoral care, and this sense of the word may be what forms

the *distinctio* of the manuscript. *Distinctio* is the way a text creates a whole from its parts.

All the *divisiones* of Sowlehele form a programme of spiritual guidance and edification that

could be called pastoral care. The manuscript is thus a catalogue of the different elements

of pastoral care, from homilies to legends, from private prayer to discussions of how to use

religion in life. The *dispositio* of the text is found in the way a reader can find an

appropriate starting point in the manuscript and move on from there to the other sections.

In medieval criticism, it usually involves the starting points of texts. As such it may not

apply well to the Vernon. A manuscript, especially one of this size, is not really meant to

be read from beginning to end. However, the manuscript does begin with a table of

contents, which allows a reader to find a particular item and turn to it. I will argue

throughout this chapter that the manuscript is meant to be read by a range of readers with

different spiritual experiences. For example, a reader needing more basic forms of spiritual

edification, could find an appropriate item in the table, read it and around it, and then move

on to other items. Somebody else wanting to read a legend for a particular saint's day could

find it in the table. The *dispositio* of the manuscript is that it is meant to be read in this way,

and the table is thus the most appropriate beginning.

Dispositio may also be found in the relationships among the sections of the

manuscript. There is a logic to the ordering of sections here. The logic can be seen by the

fact that the manuscript is divisible into two sections, formed from Parts 1 and 2, and 3 and

4, with the first quire serving as an introduction. The two sections could be roughly called the exemplary and the discursive. Each section follows a similar pattern. They begin with the *South English Legendary* and the *Northern Homily Cycle*. These two texts share a number of similarities. They are both long series of texts with similar structures, the historical narrative in the first case, and the homiletic-exemplary structure in the second. They also both use legendary tales (most of the exempla in the *Northern Homily Cycle* are legends and miracles). And finally, they both follow the church calendar (though this is not so obvious in the *Northern Homily Cycle* because of the missing rubrication). After these texts, each section moves from general to specific discussions of Sowlehele. Part 1 discusses the saints, who exemplify Sowlehele, and Part 2 discusses Christ and Mary, who are the models of Sowlehele; Part 3 is a general discussion of faith and right living, Part 4 emphasizes the best model for right living, the middle life. The first half is about exemplary figures. The stories are more emotional and appeal to a broader audience. The second half is more didactic and instructive, and the texts become more and more about society, rather than the individual. This half again appears to address a broad audience in Part 3, while Part 4 may address a more experienced audience, which was likely part of the entire audience of the manuscript.

While we can thus find structure in the way the Vernon is divided into parts, such structures do not appear to exist within the parts themselves. There are various reasons for this sort of structure. The large, mostly unstructured, sections allow the scribes to copy exemplars as they find them without needing to worry about accumulating a large number of exemplars before beginning to copy. The sections also make the manuscript easier to use.

A reader can easily browse the book to find similar texts. If the reader were reading one text, he or she could turn the page to find similar texts, and once this reader became familiar with the book, he or she would be able to quickly find any text. The different distinctions of Sowlehele also appear to make the sections suit the different needs of an audience, or perhaps different audiences. In other words, each section has its own occasion. This occasionality is closely tied to the modes of each section, and will be the subject of the next part of the chapter.

4.2   The Modes of the Vernon

The Vernon manuscript shows us how closely genre is related to structure in medieval writing. The structure of the manuscript is based on the genres of the texts in each section. Each part of the Vernon can be defined by its genres. The Vernon thus appears to follow familiar rules of the genre, but not entirely. For one thing, not all the texts fit into the pattern of genres. Many texts could go in any section, and some do. The emotive lyrics appear in Part 2 and in Part 3. *The Mirror of St. Edmund* fits equally well into Part 3 as it does in Part 4. There are also texts that do not appear to fit at all with the genre of their section, such as *Piers Plowman* and the other verse texts in Part 4. Thus, modern views of genre clearly apply only weakly to the Vernon. Each section is better defined by its subject matter, its approach to Sowlehele, and takes texts from a variety of genres to fully describe this subject. This in fact is a medieval view of genre. This view does not replace traditional views of genre: instead it places them in a medieval context.

As I have said before, genre is the part of the formal cause of a text, called the *forma*

tractandi. It is paired with the *forma tractatus*, the structure of a text. The *forma tractandi* defines the appropriate form for a text, or the way a subject ought to be treated in a given context. The genre defines the structure of a text: to structure something differently changes its meaning, and therefore changes its genre.

Modern readers tend to define genre by its subject matter, especially in popular fiction: if two people are in love, it is a romance; if one kills the other, it is a mystery; if they do either thing in the future, it is science fiction. In classical terms, a conflict ending in declining fortunes is a tragedy and a conflict ending in rising fortunes is a comedy. While these are admittedly gross over-simplifications of the subject, they do reveal our perceived notion of genre in which the subject matter of a story plays a pivotal role. Even when the manner of telling a story may clash with the subject, the genre changes, and the text is separated from others. So a murder told comically is a black comedy.

The term "genre" does not exist as such in any modern sense in medieval writing. Instead "mode" or "modus" or words with similar meanings were used to define how the *forma tractandi* operated. As Allen describes, "In scholastic terms, a modus is a manner or procedure of thought–a way of thinking. More broadly, 'modus' may refer to the manner, context, or kind of activity within which or in terms of which an entity may exist".[16] *Modus* defines the form in which an expression takes place. This includes both the structure and the concepts we would think of as genre. But it also defines the context in which these things exist, that is in the relationship between the author, the text and the reader. A better understanding of this can be found by examining a common list of modes. In a *Summa*

---

[16] Allen 68.

theologica attributed to Alexander of Hales, the modes of the Bible are listed. The Old Testament uses the historical mode, exhortation, prayer, revelation; the New Testament also uses the historical mode, as well as command, instruction and revelation.[17] Each mode defines the relationship between the texts and the audience. Command, exhortation and instruction are each modes that obviously involve the audience. The mode of prayer expects the audience to engage in prayer, and the historical and revelatory modes divulge past and future events for the benefit of the audience. Mode thus defines the occasion of a text.

Medieval critics wrote about two primary modes, under which the others could be grouped. These were the divine mode and the human mode, or divine science and human science. Divine science applies to the Bible and other religious writing, whereas human science refers to all other types of writing. Each of these modes contains the other modes, usually unique to each branch of science (the modes change depending on which branch they are used in, the historical mode in human science is different from the historical mode in divine science). The difference between these primary modes is psychological: the human mode appeals to the reason, the divine mode appeals to the affections, in the sense of "'affection', 'inclination' or 'disposition' of the mind"[18] Or, as Robert Kilwardby described it, human science is *"scientia ut scientia"* (science considered as science) and divine science is *"scientia ut sapientia"* (science considered as wisdom)[19] Human science produces knowledge or information; divine science changes people, to move them towards the good.

Modern readers can find familiar genres in medieval literature, and they may not

[17]This is from Article 4 of the *Summa*. It can be found in Minnis and Scott 216.
[18]Minnis, *Theory of Authorship* 119.
[19]Quoted in Minnis *Theory of Authorship* 120.

notice any difference in their use. Medieval writers did inherit and use the genres of the classical predecessors, but they interpreted these texts differently. Tragedy, for example, is in some medieval commentaries, the art of praising.[20] So, while genres do exist, they are not static, empirically demonstrable entities to which texts either belong or do not belong. Instead, they really a subset of this scheme of modes and exist only in this context.

This is essentially the concept of genre outlined by Hans Robert Jauss. In his work, *Towards an Aesthetic of Reception*, Jauss spends some time considering the development of genres, especially in the middle ages. His basic contention is that a genre is not a fixed form that remains unchanged through time, but rather it is fluid. It can appear at one time, recede, and reappear again at some later time. A genre can become increasingly or decreasingly inclusive, it can absorb texts from other genres, or it can alter itself to reflect the basic historical and social facts of a given period of time.[21] Writing of the Middle Ages, Jauss argues that "all literature is still functionally determined through its 'locus in life.' What is generic in it arises from such immediately realized, self-evident, and therefore (for the most part) unreflected functions; and thus, not from a reflected relationship with form as an aesthetic means".[22] Genre is, to Jauss, defined by form and context, not aesthetics. This is the essence of Jauss' concept of the genre as an historical family:

> literary genres are to be understood not as genera (classes) in the logical sense, but rather as *groups* or *historical families*. As such they cannot be deduced or defined, but only historically determined, deliminated and

---

[20]Allen 19-21. Allen's primary example is Averroes, whose commentary on Aristotle's *Poetics* was translated and adapted by European scholars.

[21]Jauss, "Theory of Genres and Medieval Literature," Chp. 3 of *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception*, Trans: Timothy Bahti (Minneapolis: Minnesota UP, 1982), 91.

[22]Jauss, "Theory of Genres" 102-03.

described.[23]

Jauss favours this definition of genre because it frees the critic from the historical limitations of the canonical definition:

> It frees the development of theory from the hierarchical cosmos of a limited number of genres, sanctioned by the pattern of antiquity, that do not allow themselves to be mixed or increased. Understood as groups of historical families, not only the canonized major and minor genres can constitute a group and be described in terms of the history of genres, but also other series of works that are bound by a structure forming a continuity and that appear historically.[24]

Genres form historical families; any group or continuity of texts forms a family. Jauss gives examples of such families. These include, with examples from Middle English verse: the traditional definition, all the texts that belong to one genre (romance); or all the texts of one genre from a given period or literary movement (the Alliterative Revival of the fourteenth century); all the works of one author (Chaucer); or works influenced by that author (the fifteenth-century Chaucerians); or it can include all the works of a particular form (alliterative verse, or the Chaucerian stanza); or it can be formed from a particular literary tone (anti-sacerdotal satire) or theme (the various "matters" of English romances, or the various attitudes towards the story of Troy before, during and after the Middle Ages.).[25] Some genres have no particular limit to their existence; others can exist only in a given time. Jauss also argues that a work can house various genres at once, but always with a dominant genre holding it together. Jauss' example of this is the *Romance of the Rose*

---

[23] Jauss, "Theory of Genres" 79-80. Jauss borrows heavily from Benedetto Croce for this concept.

[24] Jauss, "Theory of Genres" 80.

[25] Jauss, "Theory of Genres" 81.

which contains many genres, allegory, satire, mysticism, or philosophy. But Jauss adds: "such a division does not relieve the critic from posing the question of the generic *dominant* within the relational system of the text (in our example it is the lay-encyclopaedia, which forms a representation of Jean de Meun bodily and ingeniously meant to broaden)."[26] A generic formation can thus contain other genres, working around a central or dominant core. A manuscript is a good example of a generic formation, as the Vernon reveals.

In this conception of genre, a particular text does not necessarily belong to any genre. Jauss quotes from Juri Tynjanov to explain this: "A work which is ripped out of the context of the given literary system and transposed into another receives another colouring, clothes itself with other characteristic, enters into another genre, loses its genre; in other words, its function is shifted."[27] For example, a story can change genres over time in various retellings. The stories in the *Canterbury Tales* are a good example. Each tale has a long source history, but the use of highly individualized narrative voices in the tales gives each of the stories a new function or generic setting. The story of the Prioress' Tale, for example, which in the Vernon appears as a simple devotional legend, takes on overtones of epic and romance and is used to invoke pity in the *Canterbury Tales*. A text is not defined by its relationship with its own history, but by its specific contexts and occasions.

Jauss is writing about genres from a modern point of view, but there are similarities between his theories and medieval modes. Jauss' historical families, like modes, define the

---

[26] Jauss, "Thory of Genres" 81. The *Canterbury Tales* may have a similar generic formation.

[27] Quoted in Jauss, "Theory of Genres"106-07. From Tynjanov's "Die Ode als oratorisches Genre".

way genre is formed by its context and its audience. Together they both provide an excellent model for understanding the use of texts in a manuscript. Modes blur the traditional definitions of genre, such as form, style or subject, to create groupings of texts that suit particular occasions.

The sections of the Vernon define Sowlehele through the use of modes. The overall mode of the manuscript is one of divine science: the texts move the affections. Each section relates to this mode in a different way. I will examine the modes of each section briefly to clarify this relationship.[28]

Part 1 of the Vernon, with the saints' legends, uses what may be called the historical or exemplary mode. The legends use history in the narrative, linear style, and the exemplary mode in the lives of each saint and the way all of those lives emulate the life of Christ. The modes serve to entertain the audience and also to provide comfort and a source of worship. The two modes help to provide religious edification in an appealing way that would suit a broad audience.

Part 2 of the Vernon is a mixture of the historical-exemplary mode and what Alexander of Hales calls the orative mode. The historical-exemplary mode is used in the *La Estorie del Euangelie* and the *Miracles of Mary*. Hales categorizes the psalms under the orative mode, the mode of prayer. The short lyrical verses could be used for any number of modes. I have been calling this verse lyric because it is simply a convenient term, and it is commonly used to describe the short poems that focus on single subjects. It may be more

---

[28]There is no canonical list of modes, so the modes I describe below, based on the list in Alexander's *Summa theologica*, could be called something else in another text. This is a problem of terminology really. The concept of modes is similar, but the terms differ.

accurate to characterize these by their modes because there are many poems that fit this model that are used in different ways. The lyrics in Part 2 could thus be termed orative poetry. Each poem is addressed to God, the Holy Ghost, Christ or Mary. In many of the poems, the speaker appears in the first person, and is seeking some sort of release from sin. Among these poems are found two extrapolations from the Psalms, the archetype of orative poetry for the Vernon compiler, and these perhaps show that the compiler was searching for poems that fit the orative mode when he chose the texts.

Part 2 thus combines genres. Jauss speaks of such combinations (as I have described above), arguing that there is usually a dominant genre that absorbs the others. These poems are all about the Holy Family: some are supplications for help from Mary or God, others are examples of the help they can provide. The dominant mode of Part 2 appears to be orative. The poems either provide models for prayer, or they describe the objects of prayer (in the case of the biblical paraphrase in *La estorie del Euangelie*), or they provide examples of the benefits to be gained from prayer. The historical-exemplary mode serves the orative mode and uses its exemplary characteristics to support it.

Part 3 contains the widest variety of genres in the modern sense of that word, but these can be classed under two closely related modes, the instructing and advising modes. Alexander of Hales says that the Gospels use these two modes, along with the historical mode; the historical mode depicts the events of the Gospels, the instructive-advisory mode is used in Christ's teachings. Part 3 uses other modes, including the historical, orative, allegorical and other modes. But the dominant mode is the instructing-advisory mode. The *Northern Homily Cycle* sets the modal pattern for Part 3. This series of homilies is a

catalogue of basic sermon material, coupled together with a variety of other texts, which are used as exempla for each homily. Here we find a variety of genres combined to provide instruction. The other texts in Part 3 fit into the instructive-advisory mode in various ways. As I have said before in Chapter 3, most of the texts in Part 3 combine didacticism and exemplum to provide instruction in the fundamentals of Christianity.

Part 4 also contains texts of the instructive-advisory mode. The texts are distinguished from those of Part 3 by the subject of the instruction, as well as the fact that they are by and large prose texts. Generally speaking, the texts in Part 4 provide advice on how people should best live their lives. Most of the texts are prose letters addressed to a specific person, who is either referred to by name, or is obviously a specific individual or group of individuals. Examples of these are most of Rolle and Hilton's prose texts in the Vernon, and the *Ancrene Riwle*. Sometimes the Vernon versions of these texts generalize the audience, but they do not obscure the epistolatory nature of the texts. The basic pattern of this form is that the author, who is sometimes named, but otherwise known to have an authoritative position in relation to the subject, provides advice to people who are of lesser status in their religious progress. This is often a novice, embarking on the pursuit of a new level of spirituality, or an important lay person who is making a serious effort to lead a more religious life. The subjects of the text are often depicted as seeking the advice of the author, or of being low enough in status that they would respect the author's advice. In other words, there is no sense that this advice is unsolicited, or that the authors are producing some sort of criticism of the subject. The advice in these texts can include some of the material we find in Part 3, but the emphasis here is on the way the reader lives his or her life. These texts

are as much about the way the Christian values are used as they are about the values themselves. So while Part 4 is like Part 3, the characteristics of each section are distinguished by the audience, the specific subject of the texts and, indeed the forms of the texts.

4.3   Conclusion

Structure and mode in the Vernon function to create a programme of religious instruction and pastoral care. Through a study of mode and structure, we can see how the compiler describes different varieties of Sowlehele in each section of the manuscript and uses each section to satisfy the different needs of his audience. The sections of the manuscript provide Sowlehele through exemplary figures in Part 1, as spiritual healing through prayer in Part 2, through general religious instruction in Part 3 and through the use of religious instruction in Part 4. The sections also suit different occasions. Part 1 appears to belong to a more public occasion. The legends are not meditative or instructive: they are more of an entertainment and could very well have been read at some gathering, perhaps on each saint's day throughout the year. The legends could have been read privately, but the private reader could have approached these texts with a different attitude than the others. The prayer-like poems in Part 2 are more private. They require great emotional involvement from the reader, and their occasion would be one of devotion or penitence. These texts are ideally suited to private reading, but they could very well have been read, or even sung, in public. Both Parts 1 and 2 require emotional involvement from the reader, though the tones of each section are different. The texts could also appeal to a broad audience. Parts 3 and

4 appeal to a similar audience, but there is a sense that the readers of Part 4 would need to be familiar with the material in Part 3. Part 3 is instructive: it provides different types of knowledge to different levels of readers. Some texts provide basic catechistic material, like the versions of the *Mirror of St. Edmund*, and simple moral teachings, like the proverbs. Others provide somewhat more advanced instruction. These texts could be used to teach a group of people, or read for private instruction. The texts in Part 4 provide similar education, but they also contain texts for more discriminating readers. For example, the reader of this section is often shown the mystical forms of contemplation, but is just as often encouraged not to follow them. Such a reader would be able to understand *Piers Plowman* in this context. The texts on the middle life often recommend it for a person of some authority, while the texts on contemplation are addressed to nuns embarking on the life of a recluse, who would have received some education from the abbey before reaching this stage. Such people could have formed part of the group of readers of the Vernon, and this part of the manuscript may be addressed especially to them.

In my analysis of the modes of the Vernon above, I compared them to the modes used to describe the Bible by some medieval commentators. It is interesting to note that the Vernon appears to follow the Bible in its order of modes. It begins with the historical-exemplary mode, like the first five books of the Old Testament (in fact it begins with the old testament summary), followed by orative texts in part two, which are like the psalms (there are some psalm-extrapolations here). The Vernon then contains instructive texts in Part 3, like the New Testament (in fact Part 3 begins with the *Northern Homily Cycle*'s rubric "Þe gospeles"). Part 4 contains instructive texts written in the epistolatory mode, like

the epistles in the Bible. *Piers Plowman* could be a revelatory text, like the Book of Revelations. This model is by no means perfect: there is no equivalent of the books of prophets, there is a life of Adam and Eve near the end, a gospel paraphrase (*La estorie del Euangelie*) near the beginning, and so on. The compiler of the Vernon did not see his text as being in any way analogous to the Bible. What it does perhaps reveal is how the Vernon compiler expected his book to be read. Earlier I quote Hugh of St. Victor, who argues in the *Didascalicon* that different readers should start at different places in the Bible and read the books in different orders. Perhaps the same is true of the Vernon. The compiler has used structure and mode in the Vernon to create a text that would suit a range of readers with a range of spiritual needs.

Chapter 5: The Occasion of the Vernon

In the last chapter I showed how the mode of a medieval text is closely tied to its textual context. The medieval text needs to be considered in relation to its community. The modes of the text show how it addresses its audience and the reasons the author has in expressing his or her subject in a particular way. The text does not point towards some external reference, but rather expresses the universal to suit a particular audience at a particular time.[1] In this chapter, I want to study the occasion of the Vernon manuscript. We have some sense that the compiler of the Vernon was trying to create a program of pastoral care, to provide spiritual guidance to a group of individuals who needed such information in a variety of forms that they would be able to understand. In this chapter, I want to examine this audience to gain a clearer understanding of it in terms of its place in history, its reading practices and some possible models for how it functioned. This is the textual context of the Vernon.

In the past chapters I have referred to the various interpretations of the audience of the Vernon manuscript. Some critics argue that it would have been written for a female, novice or secular audience. There is evidence in the manuscript for any of these, but there is also evidence against them all. The debate over the exact nature of the audience is unresolvable and thus somewhat irrelevant. We cannot determine who the audience was specifically, but we can determine the general make-up of the audience and can guess at the attitudes the compiler had towards it. Through this we can gain a clear understanding of the place this audience would have had in society and the church, and an understanding of how

---

[1] This is Mary Carruthers' argument (80-81).

it would have functioned as a group.

5.1   The Manuscript Tradition of the Vernon

I will begin this study with a survey of manuscripts contemporary with the Vernon. We can better understand how the Vernon functioned within its textual context through an understanding of the production of manuscripts contemporary with it. The Vernon is not a unique text in terms of the types of texts it contains, and so a study of similar manuscripts will be revealing. For the purposes of this study, I have concentrated (though not exclusively) on manuscripts that have texts that are in the Vernon and were made around the time the Vernon was produced (between 1350 and 1450). I have looked mainly at manuscripts that contain more than one text that is also in the Vernon, but I have not limited myself to these.

A quick survey of these manuscripts shows that the Vernon and Simeon are not unusual manuscripts in terms of their selection and range of material. While no extant manuscript has the same range of texts, it is far from unusual to find manuscripts that contain several of the Vernon texts and similar material. Two later manuscripts of the *Northern Homily Cycle* are good examples. MS BL Harley 4196 and MS BL Cotton Tiberius E.vii contain the expanded version of the *Northern Homily Cycle*, like the Vernon, but in northern dialects. Various critics date these manuscripts from 1400-1450, with the Cotton MS being slightly older.[2] The manuscripts seem to be textually related. Besides the

---

[2] See Saara Nevanlinna's edition of the *NHC* for discussions of the dates (pages 5 and 12). Most catalogues date the MSS to around 1400 or at least the first half of the fifteenth century. Horstmann dates the Cotton MS to as early as the middle of the fourteenth

NHC, the Harley MS contains a verse translation of the Gospel of Nicodemus and the *Pricke of Conscience*. The Cotton MS contains the *Speculum vitae*, the dialogue between Mary and St. Bernard, a paraphrase of Rolle's *Form of Living*, the *Spirit of Guy* and a poem about the Magi. All but the last item are found in the Vernon. Little is known about the provenance of these manuscripts. Like the Vernon, they are both carefully but not elaborately decorated, revealing a formal presentation.

Some Vernon texts that are commonly grouped together are those of Rolle and Hilton. There are numerous collections of their works, some of only Rolle or Hilton, some of both. The *Pricke of Conscience* is often found in these manuscripts because it was attributed to Rolle. A typical example of a Rolle manuscript is MS Longleat 29, which seems to have been written over a period of time between 1422 and 1450, with texts in Latin and English. It contains Rolle's *Form of Living*, *Ego Dormio*, and *The Commandment* (all in the Vernon), along with other treatises and poems by Rolle that do not appear in the Vernon. It also has Hilton's *Epistle on the Mixed Life* and texts similar to the Vernon's, such as a collection of sayings (in Latin) and a collection of proverbs, as well as lyrics in the same vein as those in the Vernon. In addition to these, it contains a number of prose and verse treatises and meditations, including Chaucer's *Parson's Tale*.[3] An example of manuscripts with Hilton's texts is MS Lambeth Palace 472, which contains both books of the *Scale of Perfection*, the *Qui habitat* and the *Epistle on the Mixed Life*. This MS dates

---

century. Nevanlinna accepts the 1400 dating.

[3] For a full description of this MS, see Ogilvie-Thomson, *Richard Rolle: Prose and Verse* (EETS. 293) xvii-xxxi.

from around 1400 and was owned by one John Killum, possibly a grocer in London.[4]

Another example is MS Bodl. Rawlinson A.356, with the *Mixed Life*, Book 1 of the *Scale of Perfection*, Rolle's *Commandment* and *Form of Living*, and an extract from the *Pricke of Conscience* among other things.[5] There are many other examples of such manuscripts.[6]

We can thus see two trends here: first that the texts in the Vernon often appear with other similar texts, and second, that the manuscripts are owned by both secular and religious people. The other texts confirm these trends. The Vernon contains one of the earliest extant versions of *Piers Plowman* A. Most manuscripts of the A-Text come from much later in the fifteenth-century. The surveys of manuscripts in the Athlone editions of all three *Piers Plowman* versions shows that they were owned by both secular and religious houses. A survey of the manuscripts shows *Piers Plowman* does not often appear with other texts in the Vernon. It occasionally appears with the *Pricke of Conscience* and once with the *Abbey of the Holy Ghost* and the *Charter*.[7] The various cycles of miracles of the Virgin have similar textual histories. There is no direct antecedent for the Vernon cycle of miracles, but

---

[4] See S.J. Ogilvie-Thomson, ed, *Walter Hilton's Mixed Life*, in *Elizabethan and Renaissance Studies* 92(1986) xii-xiv.

[5] Ogilvie-Thomson, *Walter Hilton's Mixed Life*, xiv-xv.

[6] Other examples are Bodl. e. Mus 232 (*Mixed Life, Mirror of St. Edmund*), ULC Dd.5.55 (*Pricke, Commandment, Scale*), ULC Ff.5.40 (*Pricke, Scale, Mixed Life*). Bodl. 11272 (*Ego Dormio, Commandment, Form of Living*), ULC Dd.5.64 (*Ego Dormio, Commandment, Form of Living*), Magdalene Cambridge Pepys 2135 (*Ego Dormio, Commandment, Form of Living, Mirror of St. Edmund*), Westminister School 3 (*Ego Dormio, Commandment, Scale*), Dublin Trinity College 155 (*Ego Dormio, Pricke, Form of Living*).

[7] The A-Text appears with the *Abbey* and *Charter* in MS Bodl. 21897 (Douce 323), and with the *Pricke of Conscience* in Library of the Society of Antiquaries of London MS 687; the B-Text appears with the *Pricke* in Huntington MS 128; the C-Text appears with the *Pricke* in BL MS Royal 18.B.xvii.

such cycles were popular and appear in all languages throughout medieval Europe—English and Latin cycles appear in a large number of British manuscripts. Thomas D. Cooke lists these collections in his chapter on "Tales" for the *Manual of Writings in Middle English* (9.3183-98). Such collections appear in a variety of contexts, with romances (such as in the Auchinlek MS) with collections of saints' legends and with sermons, among others.

The Thornton MS is another example of a manuscript with many of the texts in the Vernon and a comparison of it to the Vernon will shed some light on the Vernon. The Lincoln Thornton MS (MS Lincoln Cathedral 91), written sometime in the second quarter of the fifteenth century, is a secular text, apparently written for the personal use of Thornton or his family. Besides an extensive collection of religious texts, including a number by Rolle and some that are found in the Vernon,[8] it contains texts commonly associated with secular manuscripts, including a large collection of romances, historical texts and medicinal recipes. The Thornton thus combines what could be called entertainment and popular wisdom with a sort of religious piety similar to that found in the Vernon. The religious texts include some lyrics and legends as well as mystical writings that seem to concentrate on the mixed life. Thornton, like the compiler of the Vernon, appears to be interested in how people combine religion with their daily lives and find spiritual well-being there. However, Thornton balances these texts with others that he likes or finds useful. The Thornton MS is thus a sort of personal anthology of favourite and useful texts. The Vernon MS, on the other hand, is much more focussed on the religious texts and is written with a more defined

---

[8] Among these are *Pricke of Conscience*, a prose version of the *Mirror of St. Edmund*, Book 1 of the *Scale of Perfection*, *Epistle on the Mixed Life*, and *Abbey of the Holy Ghost*.

purpose than the Thornton. The Thornton reveals how concentrated the Vernon is on its goals. The Vernon's lack of non-religious material, and its more formal presentation and layout, reveal it to be a manuscript with a definite religious programme.

Another manuscript that has some similarities with the Vernon is the Worcestershire Miscellany, MS BL Addit. 37787. It was written by a monk named John Northwood, after 1386, probably in Bordesley Abbey, where the Vernon may have been written. The Miscellany is a short manuscript containing religious prose and verse in English, French and Latin. In its present state, Add. 37787 contains 20 pieces in English (one being a duplicate), and 14 of these are in the Vernon. Among these are a number of the short poems in Part 2, as well as a few of the poems in Part 3, including *Body and Soul* and the *Stations of Rome*. N. S. Baugh, who edited the English texts of the Miscellany, suggests that Northwood used the same exemplars as the Vernon's scribes did (that is, one did not copy from the other) and that Northwood copied the book for his own use.[9] Sometime in the fifteenth century, perhaps in the latter part, the Miscellany left the abbey and came into possession of Goditha (Goody) Throckmorton Peyto. Both the Throckmortons and the Peytos were closely associated with Bordesley and were powerful families in the area.[10]

While both manuscripts are closely focussed on religious texts, the Vernon is much broader in scope. Baugh argues that the Miscellany is more clearly a Cistercian compilation than the Vernon, both because we know the scribe to be Cistercian and from Bordesley and because of the types of texts he included in the manuscript. The Vernon is much more "encyclopaedic" in scope.[11] However, the Miscellany does reveal that there was interest for

---

[9] Nita Scudder Baugh, *A Worcestershire Miscellany* (Philadelphia: n.p., 1956), 38-9.
[10] Baugh 15.
[11] Baugh 39.

the texts that are in the Vernon, both within the Cistercian house and among the wealthy families in the Worcestershire area.

So the Vernon Manuscript is part of a broad tradition of manuscripts containing vernacular religious instruction. It does have a clearly defined place in that tradition. Its emphasis is on religious texts and its presentation is formal. However the appeal of the Vernon is much broader than many other manuscripts because of its wide range of texts. The Vernon thus appears to be a more public manuscript than the others I have mentioned. While this may be obvious from the size of the manuscript, a comparison between the Vernon and other manuscripts reveals the truth of this assessment in much greater detail.

5.2   The Historical Context of the Vernon

A clearer picture of the textual context of the Vernon can be gained by examining the history of England at the time it was written. The history of late-fourteenth century England in the context of religion of course involves the Lollards. But the Lollards are really part of a broader movement towards vernacular religion. Lay folk were becoming better educated and more literate while the clergy was decreasing in its learning and becoming less able to provide lay folk with the spiritual guidance they desired. Secular people sought for religious instruction in their own language, while knowledge of Latin among the lower orders of the clergy was declining. The Lollards arose as an answer to these problems, but orthodox answers were also sought. The Vernon manuscript may have been conceived as part of such a solution.

Such a possibility seems to raise the question of the Vernon's orthodoxy. While

there is nothing in the Vernon that clearly proclaims "This is an anti-Lollard book", it is clear that the manuscript represents an orthodox position. The selection of texts, for one, clearly reflects an orthodox position. The manuscript does contain some Biblical paraphrases and extrapolations, but no actual translations. Thomas Heffernan raises this point about the *Northern Homily Cycle*. It was written in the early 1300s, but "read in the context of the late 1380s, it is an accommodated choice which allows of a political interpretation"[12] because it becomes an orthodox response to the Lollard Bible. The *Northern Homily Cycle* is a paraphrase of the gospels, rather than a translation, and Heffernan feels it represents an orthodox response to the Lollard text. Other examples of this type of orthodoxy include the Old Testament history in the *South English Legendary*, *La Estorie del Evangelie*, the psalm extrapolations in Part 2, which all describe Biblical events or use them as the basis for a prayer, but do not attempt to supplant the Bible. The Vernon is also careful in the way it treats the liturgy. "How to Hear Mass", for example, describes what happens during Mass and what the congregation should do throughout, but it does not translate the mass. Heffernan argues that "The texts selected for inclusion in the Vernon are representative of an unspoken dialogue amongst kindred and opposing texts"[13] The selection of texts gives people the religious instruction they need without crossing the line into supplanting the role of the clergy.

The Vernon is thus an orthodox text, but we need to determine the nature of this orthodoxy, specifically, its relationship to the Lollard movement. Is the Vernon an actively

---

[12] Heffernan, "Orthodoxies' *Redux*" 78.
[13] Heffernan, "Orthodoxies' *Redux*" 78.

anti-Lollard manuscript, with the compiler carefully choosing texts to counter the Lollards? Or is he simply trying to strengthen orthodoxy? If the first argument were true, we might expect to see texts that explicitly speak against the Lollard movement. Except perhaps for the occasional reference to Lollards in *Piers Plowman*, there is no mention of them or their ideas. Instead, the manuscript provides an orthodox alternative to the Lollards. As Heffernan argues: "The collection in the Vernon is an attempt to give pride of place to the hallowed traditions of orthodoxy in the vernacular."[14] The Vernon compiler appears to recognize the religious atmosphere of his time and knows that people are searching for some kind of religious instruction in their own language. So he accommodates them through a collection of texts that provide the audience with the learning that they want, while not threatening the authority of his church. Thorlac Turville-Petrie elaborates this point. He documents many books of religious writings in English coming out of the diocese of Worcester around 1400. Many of these manuscripts were owned by the wealthy families of the areas, such as the Throckmortons, and many were produced by the religious houses, including the Cistercians, who seemed to be the producers of the Vernon and Simeon manuscripts.[15] Turville-Petre argues that there was a great effort, as John Mirk writes, "to remedy the 'defaute of bokes' in the fight against heresy."[16] So the Vernon is not a reaction against the Lollards, but rather an orthodox manifestation of the same movement that gave rise to Lollardy.

As orthodox as the Vernon is, it may still have been controversial. The movement

---

[14] Heffernan, "Orthodoxies' *Redux*" 79.
[15] Turville-Petrie 42-3.
[16] Turville-Petrie 44.

to lay piety ran into many problems. Nicholas Watson examines this movement and the controversy surrounding it in his essay on the Arundel Constitutions of 1409. The Constitutions attempted to halt the spread of Lollardry in general, and effectively tried to halt the dissemination of vernacular texts. The Constitutions were the culmination of a long debate over the translation of the Bible and vernacular literature. The debates found one of their best expressions in 1401-07, in what is called the "Oxford Translation Debates". Watson succinctly sums up the main issues of the debate:

> the nature and capacity of English; the nature and capacity of the (mostly but not exclusively lay) readership of vernacular theology; the definitions of truth that are 'necessary' to know; and the role of the clergy as communicators or, alternatively, guardians of knowledge.[17]

Arundel's response is essentially that English cannot properly convey the meaning of Scripture; that no one can properly understand Scripture without proper training (that is, unless they are members of the clergy); that lay folk need only know at most the requirements of the Lateran Council; and that the clergy is solely responsible for any knowledge beyond this and must guard it from untrained people.

The Constitutions reveal Arundel's response through a series of conservative restrictions on teaching in universities and schools, and on preaching.[18] There is one article, the seventh, in the document that concerns writing. This reads, in a sixteenth-century translation:

> Item, It is a dangerous thing, as witnesseth blessed St. Jerome, to translate

---

[17] Nicholas Watson, "Censorship and Cultural Change in Late Medieval England: Vernacular Theology, the Oxford Translation Debate, and Arundel's Constitutions of 1409", *Speculum* 70(1995): 846. He discusses the Oxford Translation Debate on 840-46.

[18] Watson discusses the extent of the constitutions in "Censorship and Cultural Change" 826-27.

the text of the holy Scriputre out of the tongue into another; for in the translation, the same sense is not always easily kept, as the same St. Jerome confesseth, that although he were inspired, yet often times in this he erred: we therefore decree and ordain that no man, hereafter, by his own authority translate the text of the Scripture into English or any other tongue, by way of a book, libel or treatise, now lately set forth in the time of John Wickliff, or since, or hereafter, to be set forth, in part or in whole, privily or apertly, upon pain of greater excommunication, until the said translation be allowed by the ordinary of the place, if the case so require, by the council of the provincial. He that shall do contrary to this, shall likewise be punished as a favour of error and heresy.[19]

Arundel's primary concern seems to be how best to control the translation of the Bible, in whole or in part, including individual phrases.[20] This would and did restrict the ownership of texts such as *Piers Plowman*, the *Northern Homily Cycle*, the *Pricke of Conscience*, and works by Rolle and Hilton.

For my purposes, the most interesting point about Article 7 is that it does not ban biblical translation but rather restricts it. No one can make translations *auctoritate sua*, "by his own authority", and nobody can own or publish such texts without permission from ecclesiastical authorities. This is the tenor of the constitutions as a whole. They forbid preaching without a license, public discussion of the sins of the clergy, arguments over matters of faith and the sacraments.[21] Certain books received licenses, even from Arundel

---

[19]The translation is by John Foxe and appears in *Acts and Monuments* 3:245. It is quoted in Watson, 828-9, note 15. The Latin version can be found in *Conciliae Magnae Briotanniae et Hiberniae*, ed. David Wilkins (London, 1737).

[20] The phrase in question here is "*textum sacrae scripturae*", "the text of the Scripture". Anne Hudson uses this as a basis for her argument that Lollardry was closely linked to the vernacular movement. Translation usually implied in the medieval sense as much an act of interpretation as a mere conversion from one language to another. See Watson, 828-9 and note 16.

[21]Watson 827. These bans are discussed in Articles 1, 3, 5 and 8 of the constitutions, which Watson quotes in note 14.

himself.[22] Thus, the Constitutions did not seek to ban, but rather to restrict them to certain people. Translating the scriptures and so forth was not sinful, but "dangerous", and Arundel ensured that they were only created and owned by the right people.

The constitutions date from one or two decades after the Vernon. However, they are really the culmination of a long debate that Watson traces. For various reasons, Watson argues, the scope of vernacular literature changed in the middle of the fourteenth-century. Before 1350 vernacular theology was written for "vernacular religious, often nuns and anchoresses, many of whom were personally known to the writers, and to write in English was thus to write for a smaller imagined audience than was addressed in the language of universal (clerical) access, Latin."[23] After 1350 writers wrote for "an indeterminate and socially mixed group who had in common only the fact that they were not *literati*."[24] This caused great concern, which we can see reflected in the literature of the period. Langland often worries about uneducated people reading his text, and criticizes those who speak of scriptural matters they do not really understand. The author of *La estorie del evangelie* also expresses similar concerns. The concern here is with access: Langland and the *Evangelie* author worry about consequences of untrained people using scriptural learning, and their own texts. Such knowledge is dangerous because the reader may misinterpret the passages and fall into sin as a consequence.

This is the context in which the Vernon was created. And it is a context which the compiler was aware of. Not only do the texts in the Vernon address the controversy over vernacular religion, as we have seen, but the Vernon comes from an area where there was

---

[22] Nicholas Love's *The Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ* is an example. See Watson 831.
[23] Watson 837. Watson's appendix to this article chronicles this period; see 859-64.
[24] Watson 838.

some concern for this controversy. Thorlac Turville-Petre discusses this historical context in his essay on the relationships between the Vernon and Clopton MSS, and similar books from the Worcestershire area. The Clopton MS (which contains *La estorie del Evangelie*, *Piers Plowman C*, Manning's *Handlyng Synne*, the *Meditations on the Supper of Our Lord*, and Mandeville's *Travels*[25]) belonged to one Sir William Clopton (c. 1382-1419) and is clearly marked with his crest.[26] Clopton was the Under-Sheriff for Worcestershire and was closely allied through marriage and family to many of the wealthy families in the Worcestershire area, the same area as the Vernon likely came from. These families were active both in the trend to lay piety and in the persecution of the Lollards. One of the families the Cloptons were allied to, the Throckmortons, owned, at a later date, the Worcestershire Miscellany. They also appear to have owned a manuscript that encouraged the head of the household to read to his family at the dinner table and to give spiritual instruction to his wife in the vernacular. Later, one of the family, John Throckmorton, sought Lollards for persecution, as might have Clopton in his role as Under Sheriff.[27] The Vernon manuscript may have had a role to play both in these family's desire for more religious knowledge and in the counter-movement to control vernacular religion.

The Vernon manuscript appears to belong to a similar tradition as the Clopton and other manuscripts from the area. It reinforces orthodox religious values and is apparently aimed at a similar upper class (as the blank coat of arms at the beginning of Part 2 suggests) or religious audience as the other manuscripts, the same audience Arundel did not seek to

---

[25] See Turville-Petrie 35 for the list of contents.

[26] See Turville-Petrie 37 for a picture of the crest and 36 for a description.

[27] See Turville-Petrie 43. John Throckmorton hunted for Lollards after the 1414 Wycliffite Uprising. The manuscript with the instructions for lay devotion is discussed by W.A. Pantin, "Instructions for a Devout and Literate Lay-man", in *Medieval Learning and Literature*, ed. J.J.G Alexander and M.T. Gibson (Oxford 1976) 398-422.

exclude from such texts in his Constitutions. The Vernon compiler seems to be well versed in the debate over vernacular theology and anticipates the Arundel Constitutions through both his selection and arrangement of texts. The Constitutions take the requirements of the Lateran Council, outlined in Pecham's Syllabus, as the most that lay folk should know, restricting disputes over faith and biblical truth to the universities.[28] The Vernon contains a number of post-Lateran texts (the versions of the *Mirror of St. Edmund* are examples) and little that could be said to go much beyond these. *Piers Plowman* does describe less-orthodox arguments, but only in the context of condemning them. The Constitutions also limit Biblical translation to religious houses and people with sanction to own them. Despite Heffernan's argument that the biblical paraphrases in the Vernon set this manuscript apart from the Lollard translations, the presence of them in the Vernon could have been problematic after Arundel. There are numerous direct translations, in *Piers Plowman*, the *Pricke of Conscience* and the proverb collections, to name a few texts, and even more paraphrases. One can imagine that a manuscript like the Vernon might not have survived the fifteenth century if it were owned by the wrong people. But this would never have been a problem. As Watson argues, these texts were allowed in religious or upper-class houses. The Vernon could easily have been owned by either such house. In fact the cost of the book almost certainly means that it was.

5.3   Reading Practices

The reading practices of the Vernon manuscript will reveal contexts in which the manuscript was read. By reading practices, I refer to the ways in which the Vernon may

---

[28] Watson 827-28. Watson argues the Syllabus was itself partially responsible for the rise in vernacular literature.

have been received by its audience. I use the term to encompass both literate and oral reception of the manuscript. Reading practices are specific to the various types of audiences. Thus, a study of reading practices can help to determine much about the audiences of the texts and the context in which they were read. There is no real internal evidence in the Vernon as to how the manuscript was received, but the structure of the manuscript does provide some good clues. There is also quite a bit of information about the reading practices of other medieval books at this time, books containing the texts that we find in the Vernon. Before examining these, I will examine medieval reading practices in more detail. Discussions of reading practices usually centre on the debate over whether or not the audience was literate or illiterate, whether they read the manuscript or needed to have it read to them. In many ways, however, this is an anachronistic debate. Mary Carruthers discusses this idea in her book, *The Book of Memory*. In defining the use of memory, Carruthers notes that modern scholars might find memory incompatible with a literate society: memory and the cultivation of it are supposed to be one of the foundations, indeed a necessity, of an oral society, and literacy is supposed to cause a decline in its use. Carruthers argues that this is not so because the literate and oral communities in the middle ages share a concern for rhetoric: "as a concept, literacy privileges a physical artefact, the writing-support, over the social and rhetorical process that a text both records and generates, namely the composition by an author and its reception by an audience."[29] A text is not a static artefact, but rather part of a dynamic social process. Carruthers' argument seems almost Jungian on first blush. She argues that a text forms a link with a communal memory, the shared ideas, beliefs and values of a community. Some texts can enter the communal memory and have their ideas, beliefs and values added to it, to be expressed later in other texts. As much as this sounds

---

[29] Carruthers 11.

like the collective unconscious, Carruthers' argument is based on much more than modern psychological concepts. The best demonstration of this argument is the Bible. The Bible, a text written in a language most could not read, and presented in a context most could not understand (the Latin liturgy), codifies the prime ideas, beliefs and values of medieval society and creates this communal memory. The goal of the Lateran council was that every Christian should have at least a rudimentary understanding of the basic teachings of the Bible. The Council institutionalised this process by creating a relatively simple set of lists of basic aspects of this belief through a series of written and oral texts that gave everyone access to this belief.

Communal memory is of course ideology. It is controlled and preserved primarily by the church (as I have described), and by the powerful political people (as the spread of courtly love and Arthurian romance), with the occasional intrusion from the lower orders of society (the famous invocation of Piers Plowman during the Peasants' Revolt may be an example). Carruthers' primary interest in communal memory is its rhetorical and textual aspects, rather than its political ones. In this, communal memory is closely linked to the medieval concept of modes as the principal system for classifying texts. Modes express the way texts exist in a context, the way they express communal memory for a particular audience and occasion. In terms of reading practices, Carruthers main contention is that a text can have or provide equal access to communal memory whether it is read or heard.[30] What is important are the circumstances of that presentation. I will examine the various types of presentation in the next paragraphs.

Private reading could be used as a vehicle for meditation and study. It could take

---

[30] Carruthers makes this point on 12. See Carruthers 170-71 for her discussion of reading practices and memory.

place in many contexts: in churches, monasteries or libraries of course, or in private chapels in homes. W.A. Pantin describes such rooms: during the later middle ages, people often sought some private place in the home where they, with perhaps one or two others, could practise their devotions in small groups, and reading or reciting may have been a part of these gatherings.[31] Paul Saenger provides an excellent picture of how this reading would have been done in any of these contexts. His central argument is that reading, which was usually done out loud in the classical era, became necessarily silent during the middle ages. He also discusses how these practices changed many aspects of the book culture. For example, in the earlier middle ages, when reading was done out loud, cloister libraries were designed to accommodate these practices. They had separate carrels divided by thick walls that allowed readers to read out loud without disturbing each other. During the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries this began to change. Chained libraries began to appear, with large reference books chained to lecterns. In such a place, reading out loud, or even *sotto voce*, would be distracting to others, so silent reading became the norm.[32]

The Vernon could have been read in either circumstance. There are many reasons to suspect oral reading. For one, the manuscript is too large to have been held in the hands: it would need to be kept on a desk or lectern. There were many books being written for private reading at this time, and they tend to be small, suitable for holding in the hand.[33] The Vernon resembles a coucher or ledger book. P.R. Robinson argues that books of the size of

---

[31]Pantin 406-7. I will describe Pantin's article in more detail below.

[32]Saenger "Silent Reading: Its Impact on Late Medieval Script and Society" *Viator* 13(1982): 396-97. Some examples of the reference books in chained libraries are Thomas Aquinas' summas and Hugh of St. Cher's and Nicholas of Lyre's biblical commentaries. Some examples of chained libraries are the ones at Merton College, Oxford (est. 1289) and the Sorbone (est. 1290).

[33]Blake, "Vernon Manuscript, Contents and Organization" 58-9. Blake sees the size alone as evidence that the Vernon was read aloud.

the Vernon tended to be antiphonals, chartularies or registers.[34] Coucher books were typically "extremely comprehensive" collections, with a wide range of texts, and the Vernon belongs very much in this category.[35] Robinson further argues that the Vernon is ill suited to private reading since there is less rubrication and other such apparatus, all of which were becoming more common in texts to be read privately.[36] Beyond this, many of the texts in the Vernon are well suited for public reading. The saint's legends appear to have been written for oral performance. Their length and the narrative voice in the poems suggest oral performance, not unlike similar features in medieval romances. The homilies of Part 3 also have an oral form. And any of the other texts in the manuscript, including the ostensibly non-oral prose in Part 3, could have been read to an audience.

As much evidence as there is for oral reading, there is also evidence that the Vernon could have been read silently or privately. Many of the texts suggest private reading. The contemplative works seem to be intended for private reading. The presentation of the manuscript also suggests private reading. The illustrations in Parts 2 and 3 would be of value only to a reader, not a listener. As with the identity of the audience, it is hard to determine how exactly the manuscript would have been performed. The difficulty here perhaps comes from a modern belief in a progression from orality to literacy. The way I have framed the discussion makes the Vernon seem like a transitional work, standing at the end of orality and at the emergence of literacy. However, some critics, like Janet Coleman, argue that the two modalities existed mixed together.[37] The Vernon is an excellent example

---

[34] Robinson 20 and 24. Coucher is generally a northern term for such books. Ledger is the southern equivalent (22-3).

[35] Robinson 27.

[36] Robinson 16-17.

[37] See Janet Coleman, *Public Reading and the Reading Public in Late Medieval England and France* (Cambrdige: Cambridge UP, 1996) 69-75.

of this mix.

W.A. Pantin describes a possible context as it is outlined in a Latin note written to a wealthy lay person, possibly a member of the Throckmorton family who lived in the area from which the Vernon came and are loosely affiliated with it.[38] This note describes how a manuscript like the Vernon could have been used in a private home. This note provides a guide for how the reader (the master of a wealthy household) should conduct himself and perform his religious devotions throughout the day and throughout his life. Among these guides are the following for dinner:

> Let a book be brought to the table [at dinner] as readily as the bread.
> And lest the tongue speak vain or hurtful things, let there be reading, now by one, now by another, and by your children as soon as they can read; and think of the wicked Dives, tormented in hell in his tongue more than in any other members.
>
> ......
> Expound something in the vernacular which may edify your wife and others.
>
> ......
> After grace, said standing, go to that secret place, and send for William Bonet or Sir William Trimenel or others as you please, and confer with them there until vespers.[39]

These points suggest several contexts for private and oral readings. For one, texts could be read at the dinner table, as they were in monastic houses.[40] Secondly, the householder is expected to provide some sort of religious instruction for his wife and other family members by expounding to them in the vernacular. This could involve reading from a vernacular text. Third, the householder is to spend his night conferring with close friends in a private

---

[38]As mentioned above, the Throckmorton's were related by marriage and friendship with the Clopton family. The Clopton MS contains a copy of *La estorie del evangelie* in a version that was possibly copied from the same exemplar as the version of this text in the Vernon. They also later owned the Worcestershire Miscellany.

[39]Quoted and translated by Pantin 399-400.

[40]Pantin discuss this comparison on 407.

room.[41] This could have involved the friends studying, or reading to one another. Here we see various possible contexts for the Vernon. It could used for education, both in the sense of imparting new information to people like the householder's children, and of reinforcing known information for people like the householder's wife. It could also be used for private or group study or for the edification of the householder.

The type of audience described by Pantin could possibly be the audience of the Vernon. It is ideally suited to the needs of a wealthy householder, who would want texts that would provide his own spiritual edification and allow him to educate his family. There are many reasons to argue against such an ownership. The cost of the book indicate that it could only be owned by a wealthy family. The size indicates that the book would may not have been moved around too much. In truth, the situation described in the note is probably better understood as a model for the context of the Vernon. Whatever the audience, it would have been analogous to this family. The group of readers would have been mixed, with some just learning spiritual guidance and others who had some familiarity with it. There would have been an authority figure in this group, a person with some status in the community, who perhaps was responsible for the spiritual lives of the others and controlled the manuscript.

The Vernon's audience may have had an authority figure similar to the addressee of the Throckmorton note. The only major difference is the language of the texts. The note is in Latin, the Vernon uses Latin only in quotations, which are always translated or paraphrased. The householder in the Throckmorton note could be better educated than the audience of the Vernon, and perhaps of a higher class. However, this may not mean there is as big a difference between the two audiences as there might seem to be. There were

---

[41]Pantin is not certain who William Bonet is, but there are various candidates for the William Trimenel mentioned in the note. Two possible candidates are wealthy Londoners. The recipient of the note seems to have spent some time in London each year (409).

many lay folk of the same social status as the subject of the Throckmorton note seems to be who could not read Latin, or at least had an easier time with English. The very existence of the most of the texts in the Vernon (especially those in part 4) attests to this.

The authority figure in the Vernon audience seems to be well educated and of a high social standing. Part 4 seems especially suited to such a person. Some of the texts, like Hilton's *Epistle on the Mixed Life*, are aimed at readers who are wealthy and powerful and thus of some status in their communities. As I have said in the previous chapters, such a reader may also have been expected to take the discussion of the mystical tradition and other such texts in context and use them as guides for the more practical forms of contemplation. At the same time, the Vernon provides such a reader with material he or she could use to teach others. The Throckmorton note encourages the householder to expound to his family in the vernacular, and texts like the *Northern Homily Cycle* could be used in this way. Hilton expects the subject of his epistle to follow the mixed life so that he can have charity both in his spiritual life and his public life, so he can love his God and his fellow Christians. The Vernon manuscript contains a selection of texts that allow such a person to do this.

The Throckmorton note makes some references to householder's wife needing spiritual guidance from the householder: "Expound something in the vernacular which may edify your wife and others" (quoted above). There are similar references elsewhere in the note, giving the general impression that the householder is as much responsible for giving his wife spiritual guidance as his children. The householder, on the other hand, seems to be responsible for his own spirituality. He of course needs to go to church, and is encouraged to discuss religious matters with his friends, some of whom are clerics, but in general he is felt to be responsible enough to educate his family and pursue his own edification. The

Vernon has a different attitude to women; the texts expect female readers to be as independent in their religious lives as the householder in the Throckmorton note. The most obvious examples of this are the texts written for female recluses, which teach their readers how best to find Sowlehele through their contemplation. But women have a strong role throughout many Vernon texts and are themselves the source of spiritual value. The women in some of the *Miracles of Our Lady* are seen to be guiding the others in the story, as does the mother in the "Child Slain By Jews" miracle, which I have discussed in Chapters 2 and 3. These women do stand in for Mary. However, their relationship to Mary is not allegorical. They do not represent Mary; they are independent figures whose values are like those of Mary. The refrain lyric, "Of Women Cometh This World's Weal", as I have discussed before, refutes the claims that women brought suffering to men like Adam because the men chose to commit sins themselves. The poet then argues that it was only through women that God took on the form of Christ and saved the world. The representation of women in the stronger and more independent than the women represented in the Throckmorton note. This may indicate that the manuscript was intended for a primarily female audience, such as a nunnery, or an audience with prominent women.

The subject of the Throckmorton note is also expected to educate his children. The Vernon contains many texts suited for just such a purpose. The Vernon does not contain basic catechistic texts designed to teach children the prayers, creeds, and lists of sins and virtues they were supposed to know. However, it was the function of the Church to provide such training, so it is typical of the Vernon that it does not intrude in this area. But the Vernon does contain many texts that support such training. All three versions of the *Mirror of St. Edmund*, for example, contain summaries of the creed and lists of the virtues, sins and commandments. The *Speculum vitae* helps the reader to understand the Lord's Prayer in

great detail. *How to Hear Mass* guides the reader through the mass. All these texts help the reader to understand, remember and benefit from the liturgy and church doctrine, but the Vernon does not attempt to subvert the authority of the church by attempting to teach these things itself. Though these texts could be useful to any reader of the manuscript, they would be especially useful to any child trying to pass their confirmation.

The Throckmorton note also makes reference to the family reading to each other from a book at dinner time. Each member of the family would participate in this, including the children, when they learn to read. The practice of reading at dinner was not uncommon throughout the middle ages. It was especially common in monasteries and abbeys.[42] The Trockmorton note says that dinner time reading was to be done "lest the tongue speak vain or hurtful things", not unlike the vow of silence. The Vernon could have been used in this way. Each saint legend and homily in The *South English Legendary* and the *Northern Homily Cycle* could have been read on the appropriate day throughout the year the shorter lyrics could have been read as a form of prayer and the texts in Part 3 could have been read to educate all members of the group.

We have here a model of the Vernon's audience. Such audiences could be found not only in wealthy households, but also in abbeys and in other gatherings of people who were seeking spiritual guidance. The compiler of the Vernon has created a text that suits the audience's needs while maintaining church authority. The homiletic-exemplary style of the manuscript provides the audience with the didactic material that instructs them in their faith and exemplary material that entertains and moves them so that they better understand this instruction. The compiler gives the audience texts that help them to better understand

---

[42] See, for example, Eileen Power, *Medieval Women* (1975, Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1997) 84-85.

scripture and the liturgy but do not supplant the church's control of these, as well as texts that teach practical contemplation based on prayer and scripture, texts which steer the audience away from the more mystical forms of contemplation and encourage them to engage in the world through the middle life. The compiler makes use of medieval modes and other concepts of textuality to create this text. His grouping of texts parallels the different members and needs of his audience. He uses modes to clearly define the teaching of each section of the manuscript to make it suit a given audience and occasion.

Chapter 6:   Conclusion

I first became interested in the Vernon manuscript when I came across it during research on *Piers Plowman*. The manuscript is an important text for Langland scholars: not only does it contain a copy of A-Text (and one of the earlier instances of it), but it also has a number of texts that could have been sources for *Piers Plowman*, especially the B- and C-Texts. Most obvious among these is the *Castle of Love*, which contains the allegory of the four sisters debating the fate of the soul prior to the harrowing of hell. The proverbial texts and the books of Cato all contain quotations that Langland uses. The discussions of contemplation and the mixed life are also echoed in *Piers Plowman*. Beyond these similarities in content, there are also a number of stylistic similarities between the Vernon and *Piers Plowman*. One of the primary similarities becomes evident when we look at the use of Latin in the Vernon.

Though the Vernon compiler does in some ways anticipate the Arundel Constitutions and their restrictions on the transmission of scripture, he does make extensive use of biblical quotations, which are generally translated or paraphrased. Depending on who the audience of the Vernon was, these quotations could have become a problem for the manuscript in the early fifteenth century. The fact that the Vernon survives with most of these texts intact indicates that this was not a serious problem: the manuscript was probably kept in a place allowed by Arundel, such as a religious institution or a wealthy home.

Though the Vernon is primarily in English, the presence of Latin throughout is important. As I have said before, the Vernon acts as a support to pastoral care—showing readers how to listen to the mass and such, helping them to remember the creed, the sins,

and other matters—but it does not try to supplant the role of the clergy. It has a similar interaction with its Latin quotations as *Piers Plowman*.

John Alford has discussed the presence of Latin in *Piers Plowman*, and the way Langland uses it as a structural element. Alford finds that the quotations in each section of the poem are linked to each other and to the English text around them. He compares *Piers Plowman* to a concordance. In sermon writing, concordances were used to help preachers find similar passages in the Bible. A passage in the gospels, for example, would be written down along with passages from the Old Testament that prefigure it.[1] Alford argues that Langland creates such a concordance in his poem. The concordance is closely related to another type of medieval book, the *florilegium*. These are notebooks of favourite extracts from a variety of texts. Some *florilegium* could contain concordances, and sometimes the concordance could be used as a structural principle of *florilegia*.[2]

Florilegia were used, typically, as teaching or study aids. Teachers could compose *florilegia* to give their students a series of quotations they should learn, or students could compose them while reading other texts to help them remember the comments. Typically, *florilegia* contains quotations of not more than a few lines, or short passages, but the form was often adapted to a variety of needs, so this standard does not always hold. For example, *florilegia* of exempla were used by preachers. In the fourteenth century these grew to include a wide variety of forms.[3] In the Vernon manuscript, we thus find various types of

---

[1] See Alford, "The Role of the Quotations in *Piers Plowman*" *Speculum* 52(1977): 82-5.

[2] See Alford 84 and Carruthers 176.

[3] Carruthers describes these on 176-77. She has an extensive discussion of the genre here.

florilegia among its selection of texts. The proverb collections and the *Distichs* of Cato are

standard examples, and the *Northern Homily Cycle* is an example of the preachers' books

of exempla mentioned above. *De institutione inclusarm* is similar to *Piers Plowman* in that

Aelred includes a number of quotations from the gospels strung together with paraphrase

and interpretation that are designed to help the reader meditate on the events of the Bible.

The *South English Legendary*, the *Miracles of Our Lady* and the *Speculum vitae* are a few

of the many other examples of individual *florilegia* in the manuscript.

The purpose of the *florilegia* is, according to Carruthers, "not to substitute for the

study of original texts, but to provide cues for recollecting material read earlier."[4] They are

aids to memory and support for other forms of knowledge. Carruthers compares the way

people read a *florilegium* to the way they would listen to a lecture. In a lecture, listeners

listen a great deal of information imparted in (ideally) a rhetorically sound manner, and they

take down important points, or at least commit them to memory. The listeners could later

copy these points down into books organizing them into suitable divisions that allowed

them to be remembered more easily.[5] Not all *florilegia* were well organized, but *divisio* is

a fundamental feature of this type of book. Carruthers argues that the unstructured *florilegia*

likely depended on some form of structure external to the book, an "already formed

memoria".[6] The *florilegia* support other forms of knowledge by organizing important

extracts from it into structures that could be easily used and remembered. It is important to

---

[4] Carruthers 175-6. Her example here is Rhabanus Maurus' *De universo*, which was compiled for a bishop. It is a collection of material drawn from ancient sources, including natural history, history and etymology.
[5] See Carruthers 176 for this example.
[6] Carruthers 177.

remember that such definitions are of typical, standard examples of *florilegia*. Such books did exist, but there were others that went beyond these definitions.

The Vernon manuscript contains many *florilegia*, but it could also be considered a *florilegium* itself. There were *florilegia* similar to the Vernon. I have already mentioned the books of *exempla* for priests that expanded to include other material in the fourteenth century. While it is possible that the Vernon is an example of a priests' *florilegium*, it does not seem likely because one might expect more Latin in such a book. But the manuscript is very much like these books. It contains a wide variety of exemplary material, linked to homiletic texts whose audiences are secular people or nuns instead of priests. The manuscript is then structured into divisions of Sowlehele that organize these texts by their mode and occasion, which help the reader to more easily find like texts and memorize them.

The function of the Vernon as a *florilegium* is to provide support for the clergy by helping the reader to remember what they have been taught by the priests. As I have said repeatedly, the Vernon manuscript does not attempt to teach the readers what the priests should teach them, but rather provides them with the tools through which they may better understand what they are being taught and incorporate it into their lives. Part 1 recounts much of this knowledge in a manner that is both edifying and entertaining through the saints' legends. Part 2, with its emotive texts, helps the readers to better understand and internalize scripture. Part 3 provides discursive and homiletic descriptions of the scripture and the liturgy that help the readers to better understand these and participate in them. And finally, Part 4 shows the readers how to use this knowledge in their daily lives. In this sense, the Vernon provides its readers with what Rita Copeland calls the hermeneutics of access

to their faith. It makes their faith more accessible, but at the same time controls this access so that the readers remain orthodox.

One of my goals in this thesis has been to study the viability of using medieval theories to understand medieval literature. Part of this project is the type of book the Vernon manuscript is, because it is a book and not merely a collection of texts, with a definite programme and function. The modern tendency is to study the relationship between an author and a text, and thus privileges individual texts outside of their context. The medieval theories of structure and mode, as well as the broader definitions of the writer, all define how the text functions in its community. The compiler of the Vernon binds his texts together through careful use of modes and structure to create a manuscript for a devout audience who want to find Sowlehele on their own, but still under the aegis of the Church. An understanding of these theories and medieval attitudes to textuality helps to reveal this textual context of the Vernon and other manuscripts.

Bibliography

Aelred of Rievaulx. *De institutione inclusarum*. Ed. J. Ayto and A. Barratt. EETS os.287. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1984.

Aers, David, ed. *Culture and History 1350-1600: Essays in English Communities, Identities and Writing*. Detroit: Wayne State UP, 1992.

--- and Lynn Staley. *The Powers of the Holy: Religion, Politics and Gender in Late Medieval English Culture*. University Park: Pennsylvania State UP, 1996.

Allen, Judson Boyce. *The Ethical Poetic of the Later Middle Ages*. Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1982.

Alford, John. "The Role of the Quotations in *Piers Plowman*." *Speculum* 52(1977): 80-99.

Baugh, N.S. *A Worcestershire Miscellany*. Philadelphia: n.p.,1956.

Benskin, Michael and M.L. Samuels, eds. *So Many People Longages and Tonges: Philological Essays Presented in Scots and Medieval English to Angus McIntosh*. Edinburgh: Middle English Dialect Project, 1981.

Bennett, J.A.W. "*Nosce te ipsum:* Some Medieval and Modern Interpretations." *The Humane Medievalist and Other Essays in English Literature and Learning, from Chaucer to Eliot*. Ed. Piero Boitani. Rome: Edizioni di storia e letteratura, 1982.

---. *Poetry of the Passion: Studies in Twelve Centuries of English Verse*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1982.

Blake, Norman, ed. *Middle English Religious Prose*. London: E. Arnold, 1972.

—. "Vernon Manuscript: Contents and Organization." *Studies in the Vernon* 45-60.

Burrow, John. *Medieval Writers and Their Work*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1982.

—. "The Shape of the Vernon Refrain Lyrics." *Studies in the Vernon* 187-200.

Bynum, Caroline Walker. "'...And Women His Humanity': Female Imagery in the Religious Writing of the Later Middle Ages." *Gender and Religion: On the Complexity of Symbols*. Ed. Caroline Walker Bynum, Steven Harrell and Paula Richman. Boston: Beacon P, 1986.

—. *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1987.

175

---. *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages*. Los Angeles: U of California P, 1982.

Campbell, Gertrude H. "The Middle English *Evangilie*." *PMLA* 30(1915): 529-613, 851-3.

Carruthers, Mary. *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1990.

Chaytor, H.J. *From Script to Print: An Introduction to Medieval Literature*. Cambridge: W. Heffer & Sons, 1945.

Clanchy, M.T. *From Memory to Written Record*. London: Edward Arnold, 1979.

Coleman, Janet. *Public Reading and the Reading Public in Late Medieval England and France*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996.

Copeland, Rita. *Rhetoric, Hermeneutics and Translation in the Middle Ages*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1991.

Doyle, A.I. "The Shaping of the Vernon and Simeon Manuscripts". *Studies in the Vernon* 1-13.

The English Text of the Ancrene Riwle: Edited from Brittish Museum Cotton MS Nero A.xiv. Ed. Mabel Day. EETS os.225. London: Oxford UP, 1952.

Gellrich, Jesse M. *The Idea of the Book in the Middle Ages: Language, Theory, Mythology, and Fiction*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1985.

Görlach, Manfred. *The Textual Tradition of the South English Legendary*. Leeds: U of Leeds P, 1974.

Heffernan, Thomas J. "Orthodoxies' *Redux: The Northern Homily Cycle* in the Vernon Manuscript and its Textual Backgrounds". *Studies in the Vernon* 75-88.

---, ed. *The Popular Literature of Medieval England*. Knoxville: U of Tennessee P, 1985.

---. *Sacred Biography: Saints and Their Biographer in the Middle Ages*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1988.

Henry, Avril. "'The Pater Noster in a table ypeynted' and Some Other Presentations of Doctrine in the Vernon Manuscript." *Studies in the Vernon* 89-114.

Hilton, Walter. *Walter Hilton's Mixed Life*. Ed. S.J. Ogilvie-Thompson. *Elizabethan and Renaissance Studies* 92(1986).

Horstmann, Carl. *Yorkshire Writers: Richard Rolle of Hampole, an English Father of the Church, and his Followers*. 2 vols. London: Swan Sonnenschein, 1895.

Hussey, S.S. "Implications of Choice and Arrangement of Texts in Part 4." *Studies in the Vernon* 61-74.

Jankofsky, Klaus P. "Entertainment, Edification and Popular Education in the *South English Legendary*." *Journal of Popular Culture* 11(1977): 706-17.

Jauss, Hans Robert. "The Alterity and Modernity of Medieval Literature." Trans. T.Bahti. *New Literary History* 10(1979): 181-230.

—. "Theory of Genres and Medieval Literature." *Towards and Aesthetic of Reception*. Trans. T. Bahti. Minneapolis: Minnesota UP, 1982.

Joseph of Arimathea. Ed. David A. Lawton. New York: Garland, 1983.

The King of Tars. In Vol. 2 of *Ancient English Metrical Romances*. Ed. Joseph Ritson. 3 vols. London: G. and W. Nicol, 1802. (Notes in vol. 3)

Knowles, David. *The Religious Orders in England*. 2 vols.. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1954.

Langland, William. *Piers Plowman*. Ed. W.W. Skeat. 2 Volumes. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1886.

Marx, C.W. "The Middle English Verse 'Lamentation of Mary to Saint Bernard' and the 'Quis Dabit'." *Studies in the Vernon* 137-158.

Matsuda, Takami. "Death and Transience in the Vernon Refrain Series." *English Studies: A Journal of English Language and Literature* 70(1989): 193-205.

Meale, Carol M. "The Miracles of Our Lady: Context and Interpretation." *Studies in the Vernon* 115-136.

Minnis, A.J. and A.B.Scott, eds. and trans. *Medieval Literary Theory and Criticism, c.1100-c.1375: The Commentary Tradition*. Revised ed. Oxford: Clarendon, 1991.

Minnis, A. J. *Medieval Theory of Authorship*. 2nd Edition. London: Scolar Press, 1984.

Minor Poems of the Vernon Manuscript. Part 1 ed. Carl Horstmann. Part. 2 ed. Frederick J. Furnivall. EETS os.98, 117. London: Kegan Paul, 1892 & 1901.

The Northern Homily Cycle. Ed. Saara Nevanlinna. Mémoires de la Société Néophilologique de Helsinki 38. 3 vols. Helsinki: Société Neophilologique, 1972, 1973, 1984.

Ong, Walter J. *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the World*. London & New York: Methuen, 1982.

---. "Orality, Literacy and Medieval Textualization." *New Literary History* 16(1984): 1-12.

Pantin, W.A. "Instructions for a Devout and Literate Lay-man." *Medieval Learning and Literature*. Ed. J.J.G Alexander and M.T. Gibson. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1976. 398-422.

Parkes, M.B. and Andrew G. Watson, eds. *Medieval Scribes, Manuscripts and Libraries*. London: Scolar P, 1978.

Parkes, Malcolm. "The Influence of the Concepts of Ordinatio and Compilatio on the Development of the Book." *Medieval Learning and Literature: Essays Presented to Richard William Hunt*. Eds. J.J.G. Alexander and M.T. Gibson. Oxford: Clarendon, 1976.

Pearsall, Derek. *Old English and Middle English Poetry*. Vol. 1 of *The Routledge History of English Poetry*. 1. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1977.

---, ed. *Studies in the Vernon Manuscript*. Cambridge: Brewer, 1990.

Platt, Colin. *The Abbeys and Priories of Medieval England*. London: Secker and Warburg, 1989.

Power, Eileen. *Medieval Women*. 1975. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1997.

The Pricke of Conscience. Ed. Richard Morris. Berlin: A. Asher, 1863.

Reichl, Karl. "The Shape of the Vernon Refrain Lyrics." *Studies in the Vernon* 187-200.

Rickert, Margaret. *Painting in Britain: The Middle Ages. The Pelican History of Art*. 2nd Ed., London: Penguin, 1965.

Riverside Chaucer. 3rd ed. Ed. Larry D. Benson. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987.

Robert of Sicily. *Middle English Metrical Romances*. Ed. Walter Hoyt French & Charles Brockway Hale. 1930. New York: Russell and Russell: 1964.

Robinson, P.R. "The Vernon manuscript as a 'Coucher Book'." *Studies in the Vernon* 15-28.

Rolle, Richard. *English Prose Treatises of Richard Rolle de Hampole*. Ed. George G. Perry. EETS os. 20. Revised ed. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1921.

---. *Richard Rolle: Prose and Verse*. Ed. S.J. Ogilvie-Thomson. EETS os.291. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1988.

Rouse, R. H. and M. A. Rouse. "*Ordinatio* and *Compilatio* Revisited." *Ad Litteram: Medieval Texts and Their Medieval Readers*. Ed. Mark D. Jordan & Kent Emery, Jr. Notre Dame: U of Notre Dame P, 1992.

Rubin, Miri. *Corpus Christi: The Eucharist in Late Medieval Culture*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1991.

Sadlek, Gregory M. "*The South English Legendary* as Rose Window." *Ball State University Forum* 25(1984): 3-19.

Saenger, Paul. "Silent Reading: Its Impact on Late Medieval Script and Society." *Viator* 13(1982): 367-414.

Sajavaara, Kari. "The Relation of the Vernon and Simeon Manuscripts." *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 68(1967): 428-39.

Scott, Kathleen. *Later Gothic Manuscripts*. 2 vols. *Survey of Manuscripts Illuminated in the British Isles* 6. London: H. Miller, 1996.

Serjeanston, Mary S. "The Index of the Vernon Manuscript." *Modern Language Review* 32(1937): 222-261.

The South English Legendary. Ed. Charlotte D'Evelyn and Anna J. Mill. 3 vols. EETS os.235, 236 & 244. Oxford UP, 1956-59.

Speculum vitae. Ed. John W. Smeltz. Diss. Duquesne U. 1977.

Stock, Brian. "Medieval Literacy, Linguistic Theory and Social Organization." *New Literary History* 16(1984): 13-30.

The Stacions of Rome and the Pilgrims Sea-Voyage, with Clene Maydenhod. Ed. Frederick J. Furnivall. EETS os. 25. London: N. Trübner, 1867.

A Talking of the Love of God. Ed. M. Mary Dominica. Paterson, NJ: St. Anthony Guild Press, 1941.

Thompson, John J. "The Textual Background and Reputation of the Vernon Refrain Lyrics." *Studies in the Vernon* 201-224.

Turville-Petre, Thorlac. "The Relationship of the Vernon and Clopton Manuscripts." *Studies in the Vernon* 15-28.

The Vernon Manuscript: A Facsimile of Bodleian Library, Oxford MS. Eng. poet.a.1. Intrd. A.I. Doyle. Cambridge: Brewer, 1987.

Waldron, Ronald. "Vernon Refrain Poems: Didacticism into Art." *Unisa English Studies* 31(1993): 1-10.

Watson, Nicholas. "Censorship and Cultural Change in Late Medieval England: Vernacular Theology, the Oxford Translation Debate, and Arundel's Constitutions of 1409." *Speculum* 70(1995): 822-64.

Woolf, Rosemary. *The English Religious Lyric in the Middle Ages.* Oxford: Clarendon, 1968.