

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

1) *The Anchoritic Works and Their Background*

Among the small number of manuscripts written in English that have come down to us from the thirteenth century, one group of six, copied between about 1225 and about 1250, commands particular attention. They all look somewhat alike. They are small, between five and nine inches high, and compact enough to be held easily in the hand. They are written neatly and clearly, in handwriting of no great size, on good parchment (sometimes with small holes in it) which is still exceptionally clean. Although they are quite plain, adorned with nothing more elaborate than the usual blue and red paragraph markers, capital letters and headings, the appearance of most of the manuscripts is elegant, even beautiful. For a long time now they have belonged to three different libraries in the south and east of England: the British Library in London, the Bodleian in Oxford, and the library of Corpus Christi College, Cambridge. But it is clear from the dialect of English in which they are written that they were originally copied within a few miles of one another, somewhere in the English West Midlands not far from the Welsh border. Careful inspection of their language by several generations of scholars has also revealed that the works they contain must have been written in this same place, not long before four of them (which are ten or twenty years earlier than the other two) were copied. Indeed, the manuscripts were probably held in the hands of the people for whom some of these works were written, and looked over, in one case (see p. 41) written in, by their author or authors. These six books—which now go by the catalog names Bodley 34 ("Bodley"), Corpus Christi 402 ("Corpus")

and British Library Royal 17.A.xxvii ("Royal"), Cotton Cleopatra C.vi ("Cleopatra"), Cotton Nero A.xiv ("Nero") and Cotton Titus D.xviii ("Titus")—thus provide us with a precious physical link with men and women who have been dead for three-quarters of a millennium.

The manuscripts contain an assorted group of works which are united by similarities of style and religious outlook, as well as by the fact that they were all written with the same kind of reader in mind: anchoresses, religious women who lived as "enclosed hermits" in cells which were next to, or formed part of, churches. The most important work in the group, appearing in all of the manuscripts except Bodley and Royal, is *Ancrene Wisse*, which means roughly "a guide for anchoresses": a long and elaborate discussion of the anchoritic life which was intended as an anchoress' daily companion, outlining the rules and observances she was to follow, but also giving help and advice of a more general kind. This guide, although it is now not as widely read as the writings of the so-called "fourteenth-century English mystics" (the language and assumptions of which are closer to our own), is still recognized as among the finest and most important religious works written in medieval England. Next, there are the five works which appear as a group in Bodley, and all of which are found in at least one other manuscript: *Holy Maidenhod*, a brilliantly-argued epistle in praise of virginity; *Sawles Warde* (which means "the soul's keeping" or more prosaically "how to look after your soul"), an allegorical account of why it is important to meditate on the pains of hell and the joys of heaven; and the "passions" (accounts of the martyrdom) of three heroic female saints of the early Christian centuries, Katherine, Margaret and Juliana. Finally, there are several short prayers and meditations, the longest of which is *The Wooing of Our Lord*. All these works seem to have been written between roughly 1200 and 1230, in the same place (presumably a monastic institution of some kind), in some cases no doubt by the same author and for the same anchoritic readers—some of the works borrow from and refer to one another in a way which shows that both authors and readers were acquainted with other members of the group.¹ Equally interesting, there are many signs that authors and readers themselves were intimately acquainted with one another. *Ancrene Wisse* in particular seems to have been written by the spiritual director of its first readers, and is full of affection and a very personal urgency. As a whole, the group is striking for the varied and accomplished prose in which it is written; for the range of the reading and learning it embodies; and simply for the fact that it represents a body of fine writing in English at a period in which the two main literary languages of England were Latin and Anglo-Norman French, and from which much of

the surviving English writing is fairly crude. There are no comparable bodies of English prose before the mid-fourteenth century, when the English writings of Richard Rolle, the unknown author of *The Cloud of Unknowing*, and later Walter Hilton offer opportunities for comparison. In short, the group of works preserved in these six manuscripts represents something remarkable: a sustained attempt by a small group of early thirteenth-century religious to provide, over twenty or thirty years, a coherent program of spiritual reading for a number of anchoresses in their charge, in English prose whose quality of style and of thought was not to be equalled for over a century.

Who were these religious, and who were the anchoresses for whom they wrote? For a long time these questions seemed unanswerable, to the extent that they were dismissed as pointless or sentimental. Since virtually our only sources of information are the manuscripts and works themselves, and since the works are all determinedly anonymous, it seemed futile to press the matter. It was not until fifty years ago that even the few facts just given as to where and when the works were written were finally agreed upon; the much more detailed picture that we now have has only been reached after slow and painstaking research, and still remains partial and hypothetical. By 1960 something was known of the intellectual background to *Ancrene Wisse* as a result of Geoffrey Shepherd's fine edition of parts VI and VII of the work,² which showed how extensive the author's reading was, and linked his interests with those of a generation of late twelfth-century English and French scholars at the University of Paris, including Peter the Cantor and Stephen Langton (pp. xxviii-xxix). Though he was writing in English in the provinces, he was a scholarly man who kept up-to-date with what was being said and written in the centers of learning of his day. It had also become clear which religious order he belonged to, the Augustinian canons (p. xxix, note 1), an order which combined a focus on contemplation with vigorous pastoral work and was a precursor of the Dominican friars; the author borrows from the Augustinian rule at several points in *Ancrene Wisse*, and the religious schedule he outlines for the anchoresses in parts I and VIII have many points in common with Augustinian practices. But in 1976 the publication of E. J. Dobson's *The Origins of Ancrene Wisse*, a pioneering work of brilliantly ingenious speculation, transformed our knowledge of all anchoritic works at a stroke by demonstrating (to the satisfaction of most, if not all, scholars) where, when, and by whom they must have been written, given what we know about their language, sources, and attitudes, and what can be discovered by examination of contemporary chronicles, legal documents, place-

names and a host of other historical sources.³ Dobson constructs his case with the methodical patience of a professional sleuth—indeed his book often reads like a kind of academic whodunit. If the author was a canon, what kind of canon was he? Dobson finds evidence to suggest he belonged to an independent Augustinian house, connected with the famous Victorine house in Paris (to which Hugh and Richard of St. Victor belonged). Since he acted as a confessor to the anchoresses, he must also have been a secular priest, perhaps in charge of a parish church appropriated to his house. And since he had access to a large library and seems to have been only one of a group of writers and scribes, who produced and distributed all the anchoritic works in a careful and systematic way, he must have belonged to a religious house of some size.⁴ The only Augustinian house which is both large enough and in the right place, given the West Midland dialect in which all the works were written (with its large element of vocabulary derived from Old Norse and its sprinkling of Welsh words), is Wigmore abbey, a daughter-house of St. Victor in northern Herefordshire, a few miles southwest of Ludlow in the Welsh Marches, and dedicated to St. James. Searching the records and the ground in the vicinity of Wigmore, Dobson finds evidence of two groups of women religious between 1190 and 1230, at Limebrook, a priory three miles southwest of Wigmore, and at a chapel dedicated to St. Leonard in a valley called the Deerfold, a mile to the north of Limebrook; these, he argues, are the anchoresses for whom *Ancrene Wisse* was originally written. Finally, armed with a sixteenth-century genealogy of a local family, the Lingsens—Norman gentry who took the name of a village within a mile of Limebrook where they owned land—and assisted by a short addition at the close of the Corpus manuscript of *Ancrene Wisse* which is claimed to be a cryptogram (see part VIII note 30), Dobson presents us with a name which is apparently that of the author of *Ancrene Wisse*: Brian of Lingen, specifically named in the genealogy as a younger son, and as a secular canon of the house at Wigmore. None of all this dazzling argumentation can be proved, but little of it needs to be, for all the pieces of the jigsaw fit together, and the picture it reveals is remarkably coherent. Very probably, it was indeed in this little group of communities, far from well-known centers of population or learning, that *Ancrene Wisse*, the works associated with it, and the early manuscripts that contain them, were written, copied, read, cherished, and followed.⁵

At first sight, even these revelations may seem to help the general reader of the anchoritic works little. After all, we know nothing at all about Brian of Lingen, and hardly anything about Wigmore abbey or Limebrook

in the early thirteenth century, while the information that survives about the more important secular families in the district (scrupulously charted by Dobson) amounts to little more than records of their quarrels over land and of the last wills and testaments of some of their members. Yet when we combine these, Dobson's major findings, with the rest of what can be deduced about the works, their authors and their first readers from the internal evidence provided by the works and manuscripts, the value of his discoveries comes into focus, for they enable us to perceive a coherent narrative in what was previously a mass of undigested facts and hypotheses. This narrative, although it too is hypothetical and in places quite speculative, is nonetheless extremely useful as a guide to the works and the contexts in which they were written. Much of the detailed evidence for this narrative is presented in the introductions to our translations of the individual works, but the narrative itself goes something like this:⁶

Sometime before or around 1200, one or two men—perhaps Wigmore canons—began to translate Latin saints' passions into a vigorous and dramatic English prose which, with its heavy alliteration and thumping rhythms, often reads like the alliterative verse Middle English poets inherited and adapted from their Anglo-Saxon predecessors. These passions—*Margaret* and *Juliana*—were partly written for public performance in a church or hall on the feast day of the saint they commemorate, but were directed especially at "maidens," perhaps anchoresses; *Margaret* invokes its audience like this: "Listen, all you who have ears and hearing, widows along with the wedded! And maidens especially listen very carefully to how they must love the living Lord and live in maidenhood, which is the power most beloved to him" (p. 228).⁷ Later, these writers or their followers moved on to other works, which were not necessarily intended for public performance and were more obviously written for anchoresses: a third passion (*Katherine*) and *Sawles Warde*, both translations of Latin sources but more theologically and stylistically sophisticated than their predecessors; and one or more short meditations, including the *Song of Praise to Our Lord*, which do not seem to be based on any single source. It was perhaps only after all these were complete that one writer turned to a more ambitious project, the composition of *Holy Maidenhood*. This work, a self-conscious exercise in a kind of writing noted for its rhetorical brilliance (pp. 223–224), weaves its argument out of a large number of sources, assimilating their style and content to a remarkably accomplished English prose style, which is in many respects very Latinate, but which nonetheless clearly builds on the achievements of some of the work's predecessors.

This work, which for the first time is exclusively relevant to anchoresses and other women vowed to virginity, seems to indicate a considerable advance in the self-assurance of the Augustinian canons responsible for the anchoritic works. If, as seems likely, *Holy Maidenhood* immediately preceded *Ancrene Wisse*—which is in every sense the finest work in the group, and apart from *The Wooing of Our Lord*, probably the last to be written—it was an appropriate herald for that work, and may well have been written by the same man.⁸

So far, although we have to a considerable extent been following Dobson (*Origins*, pp. 163–169), his most spectacular findings have not been of much relevance. However, the context they provide for *Ancrene Wisse* throws a good deal of light on the whole group. *Ancrene Wisse* survives in the earliest manuscripts in two main versions, one of which (now found in Nero and Tiros) preceded the other (found in Corpus) by a decade or so, although both appear to be by the same author (see p. 42). Near the beginning of part IV, after describing the external temptations of illness, deprivation, and the scorn and persecution of others, Nero interpolates a passage which is not found in full in any other manuscript:

You, my dear sisters, are of all the anchoresses I know the ones who have least need of comfort against these temptations, except that of sickness. For I know no other anchoress who can get all she needs with greater ease or with greater honor than you three have, our Lord be thanked. For you do not think at all about food or clothing, either for you or for your maidens. Each of you has everything you need from a single friend; nor need your maiden look further for bread or food than at his hall. God knows it, many others know little of this ease but are very often tormented by deprivation, humiliation and difficulty; if this should come into their hands, it may comfort them. You have more to fear from the soft side of these temptations called "outer" than from the hard; for the deceiver would like to please you if he could, and make you slack, if you were not too ready for him. There is much talk of you, what well-bred women you are, sought after by many [in marriage] for your goodness and generosity, and sisters of one father and of one mother, who in the flower of your youth renounced all the world's joys and became anchoresses.⁹

This tantalizing glimpse of the lives of the women for whom *Ancrene Wisse* was originally written takes on a new specificity with Dobson's

discovery of a grant of land made by the lord of Wigmore, Roger de Mortimore, to some "sisters living in the Deerfold," only a mile from Wigmore castle, between 1194 and 1214 (*Origins*, pp. 214–229, 238–250). Roger, who knew the Lingen family well, since he was their overlord and close neighbor, was surely the anchoresses' "single friend" and probably (given his generosity) their relation—like Brian of Lingen himself, he must have been related to most of the small number of local aristocratic families from which the three women can have come. But this passage also mentions that the author knows other anchoresses less favored than the sisters; and elsewhere in the work, especially in its later parts, there are references to anchoresses which are not readily compatible with the situation of three sisters living together; for example, there is a discussion of how anchoresses should communicate with one another by sending messages through their "maidens" (see pp. 141–142). Moreover, a passage in the revision of their "maidens" preserved in Corpus specifically addresses its readers as *Ancrene Wisse* preserved in Corpus specifically addresses its readers as "anchoresses of England, very many together—twenty, now, or more," and adds "you are like the mother-house from which the others have sprung" (see p. 141). Just how this passage is to be interpreted is in doubt: does "together" imply that all twenty are living as nuns "as though in a cloister over which Jesus Christ is prior"? Or is the implication that the harmony in which they live makes them worthy equivalents of nuns, but that they still live as anchoresses?¹⁰ Either way, Dobson argues (*Origins*, pp. 255–286) that the sisters in the Deerfold are not the main audience for this passage, and that in his revision of *Ancrene Wisse* (and to some extent even in his first version) the author was writing for another group of anchoresses, at Limebrook. Limebrook was originally endowed by Brian of Lingen's father before his death in 1190, and before the sisters can have moved into the Deerfold; and it was somewhat enriched in the 1250s, when the grandson of Roger de Mortimore (another Roger) gave it the land which had formerly been granted the sisters—who were presumably all by then dead. By this time, Limebrook had grown considerably and had been formally constituted as a community of Augustinian nuns. It seems that it is this gradual expansion, which involved the establishment of other cells of anchoresses (perhaps including the one in the Deerfold) as well as an increase in the size of the "mother-house," that is celebrated in the Corpus revision of *Ancrene Wisse*.¹¹

So the development by the canons of Wigmore, between 1200 and 1230, of a body of English prose which was increasingly ambitious, stylish and specific in its address to the particular needs of anchoresses, did not take place in a vacuum, but ran parallel to the simultaneous development of

an anchoritic "movement" in the same area—doubtless at once fueling and being fueled by that movement. As the anchoresses grew in numbers, both in Limebrook itself and in the cells of which the *Corpus Ancrene Wisse* says it was the "mother-house," so the works written for them articulated the ideals by which they were to live more and more clearly, until one of them produced, with the revised version of *Ancrene Wisse*, a document which was intended to serve as a common basis and support for all the anchoresses in the area, and which perhaps came to constitute, more or less formally, the "rule" of Limebrook Priory. Here too the group of six surviving early manuscripts comes into the story, for it was at about the same time that the revision of *Ancrene Wisse* was being prepared (probably the late 1220s) that the earliest of these manuscripts was copied. Two of them, Bodley and Royal (probably 1225–1230), were collections, made from a variety of sources, of a number of the earlier anchoritic works: *Katherine, Margaret, Juliana, Sawles Warde* and, in the case of Bodley, *Holy Maidenbood*. After writing and distributing a series of works piecemeal over some years, it seems that the canons decided to draw together at least those which could be read publicly into arranged collections; one of these may well have been in part for the use of the growing community at Limebrook.¹² Of the others, *Corpus* itself was not written for Limebrook (although another copy of the revised *Ancrene Wisse* must have been) but addresses itself, in its closing words, to a single anchoress who presumably lived alone (*Origins*, p. 291). The passage in *Corpus* about the growing number of anchoritic cells indeed fits the rest of the evidence well, for there are signs that there was a surge in demand for copies of *Ancrene Wisse* with which it was hard, at some stages, to keep pace. Cleopatra seems not to have been written at Wigmore but farmed out to a scribe in another religious house, who did such a poor job that his work had to be extensively corrected; moreover the manuscript from which Cleopatra was copied was divided into sections beforehand, so that two copies of it could be made at once.¹³ The texts of *Ancrene Wisse* in Titus and Nero, which are only ten to twenty years later than *Corpus* and Cleopatra, each represents widely divergent textual traditions, and imply the existence of several more manuscripts of the work, now lost, made as early as 1230. There was even an early translation into French (brilliantly accounted for in *Origins*, pp. 299–311).¹⁴ In all, more than a dozen copies of the work must have been in existence within two decades of its original composition, almost all of them in the hands of one or more anchoresses in the vicinity of Wigmore. The early history of the anchoritic works, and of the growing number of anchoresses for whom they were written, is one of the increasing and mutually supported success

of an ambitious spiritual and literary movement, all within a tiny area of the west of England, and involving, at the outside, a hundred people.

It is not possible here to chart the continuing popularity of *Ancrene Wisse*, and its appearance in various incarnations across England until the end of the fifteenth century (see *Ancrene Wisse* note 11 below). But it is relevant to add a codicil concerning the history of the works as late as 1250 or so, the date of Titus. For some time, a number of copies of *Ancrene Wisse* seem to have been kept together somewhere other than Wigmore (so Dobson argues, pp. 293–299),¹⁵ and it is here that Titus and Nero must have been copied—from their dialect they are not Wigmore manuscripts. The most likely place is the Franciscan house in Hereford, founded in 1228, from which the nuns of Limebrook were later to choose their confessors, and whose earliest members may be alluded to in an added passage in the *Corpus Ancrene Wisse* (pp. 25–26). If this is where these manuscripts originated, it is to the Franciscans that we owe the arrangement of the anchoritic works in Titus, followed in this book—an arrangement we later argue is far from casual. It also may have been the Franciscans who, recognizing the importance of *Ancrene Wisse*, first distributed it beyond its first home in the Welsh Marches, and thus enabled it to acquire its later widespread popularity.

From our small group of manuscripts and the works they contain it has proved possible, after more than a century of scholarly endeavor (and largely as a result of the persistence of one man, E. J. Dobson), to deduce a good deal about the circumstances in which they were written. But if these works were indeed the literary manifestations of a sustained and successful "spiritual movement," as we have suggested, what do the works preserve for us of the purpose and significance of that movement? To ask this question is to raise others: first, what was the anchoritic life, how was it lived, and what was it considered to mean in these early thirteenth-century works? Second, how were the works themselves shaped to the needs of the anchoresses for whom they were written? The next section tries to provide some answers to these overlapping questions.

2) *The Anchoritic Life: What It Was, What It Meant*

In the late Middle Ages, a distinction was drawn between "hermits," solitaries who lived in cells which were often (though not always) in isolated places and many of whom begged for or grew their own food, and "anchorites," solitaries who were permanently enclosed in cells which

were attached to churches and who, as a result, usually lived in the middle of villages or towns.¹⁶ Because of the informality and the lack of definition possible within the eremitic life, the term "hermit" was a catchall, encompassing a wide range of kinds of life and of people, from the rigorous Carthusians, who lived as communal solitaries, sharing their worship and their daily routine but staying much of the time in their individual cells, to the simplest peasant who earned his way by keeping a bridge or a stretch of road in repair. The only essentials were the intention to live a holy life, and the wearing of a hermit's habit. The life of the anchorite, on the other hand, just because it was a life of strict enclosure, and because it was harder to become an anchorite than a hermit,¹⁷ tended to be defined much more narrowly and often also more harshly, in terms admitting of no compromise. Thus, although the solitary life was thought of as embodying meanings which varied from time to time and place to place, almost every anchorite shared at least one primary definition of their vocation: that their way of life was a living death. This dramatic idea was regarded as being so fundamental to the anchoritic life that it forms the basis for all the surviving late-medieval ceremonies for the enclosure of anchorites, at the climax of which the officiating priest administers extreme unction to the postulant, and recites the prayers for the dying as she or he enters the anchorhouse—never, in theory, to leave it alive—through a door which is then blocked from the outside.¹⁸ The symbolic potency of this definition can only have been reinforced by the long years that followed of living in a cramped, lightless, bare and uncomfortable cell, vulnerable to cold, damp and heat, often literally surrounded by the graves of the dead; such a life was also commonly referred to as being in "prison," or in "the desert." St. Paul writes to some of his charges who have undergone the process of conversion, "You have died and your life is hid with Christ in God" (Colossians 3:3), and says of himself, "It is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me" (Galatians 2:20); one of the most important things to be said about the anchoritic life is that it was meant to embody these spiritual transformations in a highly physical and public way.¹⁹

A basic impulse behind the anchoritic life, then, determining both the images used to describe it and its actual form, was penitential and ascetic. Very often the reasons given for becoming an anchorite were, from a modern point of view, profoundly negative, emphasizing the dire anger of God, the spiritual danger of living in the world, and the advisability of escaping from that danger; as *Ancrene Wisse* says, alluding to the devil as he is described in 1 Peter 5:8, "If a mad lion was running through the street would not a sensible woman shut herself in?" (p. 109). Some people

were thought especially to need solitude if they were to have a chance of saving their souls; Aelred's *De Institutione Inclusarum* (*Rule of Life for a Recluse*), which the author of *Ancrene Wisse* studied closely, states bluntly, "Living in a crowd means ruin for some people."²⁰ *Ancrene Wisse* tells a story from *The Lives of the Fathers* in which a voice from heaven tells Arsenius, "Arsenius, flee from mankind and you will be saved" (p. 109). From this point of view, those who did so flee had good cause to consider themselves abjectly as the weakest of all Christians, an attitude which, according to the preface to a ceremony of enclosure in the early sixteenth-century Sarum Manual, is to be encouraged:

Let the one who is enclosed learn not to think highly of himself, as though he deserves to be set apart from the mass of mankind; but let him rather believe that it is provided and appointed for his own weakness that he should be set far from the companionship of his neighbours, lest by more frequent sins he should both himself perish and do harm to those who dwell with him, and should thus fall into greater damnation. Let him therefore think he is convicted of his sins and committed to solitary confinement as to a prison, and that on account of his own weakness he is unworthy of the fellowship of mankind.²¹

Ancrene Wisse makes few such comparisons between its anchoritic readers and other people, but it assumes the spiritual usefulness of much the same kind of self-disgust when it says that anchoresses who admire the whiteness of their hands "should be scraping the earth up every day out of the pit they shall rot in" (pp. 91–92), recommending meditation on the vileness of the human body as a salve against the deadliest and in God's sight most hateful of the sins, pride (p. 149); and it concurs with what the Sarum Manual implies, that anchorites should engage in pious self-deception to prevent themselves from succumbing to pride: "Do well, and judge yourself always weak" (p. 51), it urges. *Sawles Warde* puts the same point yet more explicitly: "God the just wants us to judge ourselves weak and low, even when we are not so . . . Unless we are meek and mild [in addition to having all the other virtues], and reckon ourselves weak, God can justly condemn us for it all because of our pride" (pp. 216–217). A strain of deep caution and anxiety runs through the anchoritic ideal, prompting a negative and defensive view of the enclosed life as providing a much-needed shelter from (on the one hand) one's own frailty, the world and the wiles of the devil, and (on the other) the just anger of God.

Even more than most medieval spiritual writing, anchoritic literature thus tends to emphasize the need to take continuing care to avoid sin—for not even the shelter of enclosure guarantees spiritual security, and “God will not protect anyone who is so foolhardy that she does not warily protect herself” (*Ancrene Wisse*, p. 72). Aelred writes, “Beware of your weakness and like the timid dove go often to streams of water [i.e., the scriptures] where as in a mirror you may see the reflection of the hawk as he hovers overhead and be on your guard” (*Rule of Life for a Recluse* II.20, p. 68). *Ancrene Wisse* also describes the anchoress as a bird who, on the occasions when she must descend to earth to take her food, “must look carefully about her as a bird does, keep watch on every side, so that she does no kind of wrong—lest she be caught by some of the devil’s snares, or hurt in some way, during the time she stays so low” (p. 98). This attitude of caution operates in every sphere of the anchoritic life, and finds its way into every part of *Ancrene Wisse*. An anchoress’ day is a round of prayers which begins the moment she wakes up and closes with prayers to ward off evil just before she goes to sleep (part I). While there is, of course, a positive purpose to this devotional routine, it clearly has the important negative function of keeping her attention away from other things—all the dangerous sights, thoughts and actions the author calls “idleness.” She lives much of the year on one meal a day, strictly observing all the church’s fasts, keeps silent during most of the day, and on occasion practices more severe mortifications, such as self-scourging (part VIII), and thus she keeps her body from greed and lechery, and tames that most dangerous instrument, her tongue. Fear also governs her attitude to the outside world. So far as is possible she must avoid looking at it, or listening to it, or letting her heart dwell on it. *Ancrene Wisse* gives vehement advice on whom she may see, who may see her, how she must keep her hand inside her window if she is receiving food or returning some object to someone (part II). As well as fearing the world, she must be fearful of giving offense to people in the world. Dependent on the charity of others for food, she must put up uncomplainingly with what she gets, even “die a martyr in her discomfort” (p. 87) rather than cause scandal by asking for better. Any hardship she has to suffer is justified by the inherently penitential nature of her profession, for: “It is quite unreasonable to come into an anchorhouse, into God’s prison, readily and willingly into a place of discomfort, in order to look for ease. For what is an anchorhouse but her grave?” (p. 68).

But the penitential and ascetic images of the anchorhouse as grave, prison, desert, can also imply a quite different reading of the anchoritic life: that it is a way of life of the most extreme heroism and holiness. Like

hermits, anchorites are often invited to recall that they are the spiritual descendants of the desert fathers, those early virtuosos of the holy life who, according to Cassian’s *Conferences* (one of the major accounts of the spirituality of the fathers, well-known to the author of *Ancrene Wisse*), do without the support of any religious community because “they long to join in open combat and in clear battle against the demons; they are not afraid to push into the great hiding places of the desert.”²² In this view, the solitary life, whether anchoritic or eremitic, is no longer a fearful and defensive retreat from an overpowering world; instead, the decision to live alone is seen as a daring act of self-exposure, often described in Cassian’s terms as a spiritual battle or, in relation to another group of early Christian heroes, as a process of self-martyrdom. It is a measure of the power of these images that before the Reformation there seems to have been little serious opposition in western Christendom to the idea that the solitary life was the most exalted of all forms of the religious life, more sublime than even the strictest monastic vocation, and superior in kind to the lives of secular priests and bishops, however necessary to the good of the church these were. *The Rule of St. Benedict* is dubious about the solitary life, cautioning that only those who have had long experience of fighting devils in the battle-line with their brothers (i.e., as monks) should attempt to go out against them on their own, and clearly regarding the monastic life as safer and as preferable in the vast majority of cases (chapter 1); but this monastic classic itself concurs with the general view that hermits and anchorites live as holy a life as is possible on earth.²³

Even while they are warning their readers to think of themselves in the most abject and cautious terms, *Ancrene Wisse* and the other anchoritic works are also encouraging this heroic view of the solitary life. Although the author of *Ancrene Wisse* speaks to his readers in many different voices, some of them harsh and authoritarian, there is an underlying respect and admiration throughout the work for the difficulty of their chosen path: “All you ever endure is penance, and hard penance, my dear sisters,” he writes at the beginning of part VI; “all the good you ever do, all you suffer, is martyrdom for you in the most severe of orders” (p. 176). Part IV, which deals at length with the subject of temptation, makes it clear that anchoresses are certain to be more strongly troubled by temptation than anyone else, simply because they “live the life of sublimity,” high up on the hill of holiness: “Since the hill of sublime and holy life is higher, the enemy’s blasts, the winds of temptation, are greater and stronger on it” (p. 114). In many places throughout the work they are invited to compare their experience with that of the desert fathers, and have their struggle with

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sin described in heroic terms: "Holy men and women are tested most often with every kind of temptation, and for their better health; for through fighting against them, they win the joyful crown of the champion" (p. 119). Occasionally this struggle against temptation metaphorically takes on all the vivid coloring of the visionary battles fought by an Anthony or a Simon Stylites:

Seize the staff of the cross right away, by naming it with your mouth, by drawing it with your hand, by thinking of it with your heart, and order him out sternly, the foul cur. And strike him hard blows fiercely on the back with the holy cross. . . . With imploring prayers in your own language, drive your knees sharply down to the earth and lift up the staff of the cross and swing it in four directions against the hell-dog: this is nothing else than to bless yourself all around with the sign of the holy cross. Spit at him in his beard with contempt and scorn, who so trifles with you. (Part IV, p. 154)

Ancrene Wisse does not in general encourage its readers to indulge in comparisons between their own and other ways of life, but the splendid contempt of its language here clearly envisages the anchoritic reader as a spiritual aristocrat, albeit one beset by urgent difficulty. The same kind of language is used in *Katherine* and the other saints' passions to describe the spiritual victories, with their amplitude of heavenly reward, which these female martyrs wrest from the demons and tyrants who tempt them and drive them to death. Indeed, although at first sight the silent and in many ways passive anchoritic life seems to have nothing at all in common with the vigor and aggression of saintly viragos such as Katherine and Margaret, one of the reasons the passions of these women were translated for the anchoresses was apparently for their usefulness as role models. Part IV of *Ancrene Wisse* cites Margaret's harsh treatment of a demon called Ruffin as an example of the enormous power over evil available to those who pray holy prayers (p. 137), and there is a persistent implication in the work that anchoresses are the latter-day equivalents of the martyrs.

Thus, as well as being a place where the weak retreat from spiritual dangers which might draw them to damnation, the anchorhouse is a place where the holy go to fight with demons and by doing so to increase their heavenly reward, following in the footsteps of the desert fathers and the early Christian martyrs. But what does this spiritual battle involve in practice, other than a life of physical discomfort? The fathers are often de-

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scribed as struggling with demons in visionary reality, but in spite of the way some of its accounts of spiritual struggle use the language of visionary combat for metaphorical purposes, *Ancrene Wisse* dismisses the idea that its readers might have comparable dreams and visions, regarding them as deceptions (p. 130). It focuses instead on two more everyday kinds of struggle, against the spiritual sins of pride, envy and especially anger, and against the bodily sin of lechery. Its descriptions of these struggles are worth further discussion, since they employ some important new images for the penitential nature of the anchoritic life.

The first of these struggles is a form of the battle all Christians face in reaching moral maturity, what Cassian calls "purity of heart," and *Ancrene Wisse* being "soft and sweet within" (p. 98). For the anchoress, this is a process of acquiring inner humility and patience by learning to endure the "shame and pain" (p. 178) inherent in the anchoritic life. The various kinds of shame and pain are exhaustively cataloged in *Ancrene Wisse*, notably in the first few pages of part IV, but the most persistent and perhaps unexpected emphasis is on the humiliations that anchoresses must endure in their inevitable daily contact with the outside world. These vary from the contempt of "Slurry the cook's boy" (p. 187) to the difficulty of being materially dependent on others, to what is described generally as "persecution" and seems to involve suffering indifference and verbal assaults from relations, friends, enemies, casual passers-by, ill-disposed priests and monks, and sometimes the anchoress' own servants or colleagues. For the aristocratic women who were the original audience for *Ancrene Wisse*, enclosure must inherently have had its humiliating side, removing them from positions of power and respect in the world and making them vulnerable objects of curiosity to their erstwhile dependents and social inferiors. It is thus natural that one of the major struggles they are envisaged as having to fight is with their own anger at what others do and say to them. Parts III and IV of *Ancrene Wisse* provide many "comforts" to help readers deal with the problem of anger by transforming it into an opportunity for spiritual growth (pp. 94-96 and 131-135), and the discussion of speech and hearing in part II contains careful and vehement accounts of the corrupting power of evil speech, which treat it as among the most serious moral challenges likely to be faced by anchoresses. By overcoming anger, they gain a surpassing reward in heaven, and can eventually hope to grow beyond the need for such struggles even in this life (p. 129). They also learn to follow the footsteps not only of martyrs and desert hermits, but of the man who was more humiliated than anyone else, Christ—and here we arrive at another definition of the anchoritic life, as a "shameful and pain-

ful" imitation of Christ's own suffering. The anchoresses are expected to be intensely aware of the passion of Christ at all times, saluting the cross hanging over their altar on arising every morning (p. 54), and spending the noon-hour of each day, the time when Christ was crucified, in special prayer (p. 60). When they feel frustrated by the sensory deprivation of their lives, they are to learn patience by thinking how Christ suffered for them in all his five senses, far more painfully than they can possibly suffer for him (pp. 87-91); when they are humiliated or injured, they are to comfort themselves by meditating on his humiliation (pp. 117-118)—as *The Wooing of Our Lord* puts it at the opening of its passion meditation:

You asked me to see how you fought for me, so that I would not be afraid of worldly poverty,
or humiliation from wicked people's mouths when I am guiltless,
or bodily sickness and torment of the flesh,
when I see how you were poor for me,
how you were hurt and humiliated for me,
and at last, in painful death, hung on the cross. (p. 252)

Point for point, the sufferings inherent in the anchoritic life parallel those of Christ, and at the end of this meditation, the anchoress rededicates her enclosed life specifically as a crucifixion: "May my body hang with your body, nailed on the cross, fastened, transfix'd within four walls—and I will hang with you and nevermore come from my cross until I die" (p. 256). *Ancrene Wisse* uses the same image in part VI—"Night and day you are up on God's cross" (p. 176)—as well as referring to Christ in a strange and wonderful image as having been "an anchorite in Mary's womb," and later in his tomb (p. 186). By sharing in Christ's physical and moral sufferings, by enduring poverty, pain, and humiliation, and by battling with the spiritual sins, the anchoress hopes to become like him in this life, and also to share more fully in his joy in the next.

But as well as having to wrestle with "shame and pain" and the sins of pride, envy and anger, the anchoress has to face a cruder and more violent enemy, one who was very familiar to the desert fathers: lechery. *Ancrene Wisse* reserves some of its most detailed and colorful accounts of struggles against sin (such as the one quoted above where the cross is wielded like a weapon) for the urgent battles which the anchoress fights against her own flesh—and these fights are treated not only as dramatic but as likely to be common. The author apparently assumes that temptation to sexual sin or to sinful fantasy lurks around every corner, is latent in every conversation,

can be sparked by a sidelong glance or touch of the hand, is an inherent part of what an anchoress must face in the solitude of her cell. The amount of space given the subject in the anchoritic works and the vehemence with which it is treated has surprised some scholars, who see it as an "imbalance" in the spirituality of the group (see e.g., Dobson, *Origins*, pp. 155-156). This has particularly been said of *Holy Maidenhood*, which in praising virginity not only castigates lechery but also contains brilliant polemic and satire against marriage, seeming to assume that marriage and sexual sin are one and the same, and at times to identify all sexual activity as sinful—causing a recent critic to comment indignantly that the work's "strident mocking of God's arrangement for continuing humankind amounts to a lewd obsession."²⁴ Yet if there is any imbalance here, it is one common to other eremitic writings. Aelred's *Rule of Life for a Recluse*, for example, is nearly as extreme on this subject as *Holy Maidenhood*. We can surely take on trust the fact that women and men, shut away from all human company and comfort, and deprived of every kind of physical satisfaction (even if by their own choice), might at least periodically suffer from a compulsive craving for natural warmth and sexual intimacy, and would then have to take the most strenuous measures to oppose these feelings if they were not to succumb to them totally. Much of *Holy Maidenhood*, like the parts of *Ancrene Wisse* which deal with lechery, is intended to help readers undergoing such urgent temptation by exposing both its natural and what was seen as its diabolical root, and dealing with them in language which, under the circumstances, has to be forceful, dramatic and one-sided if it is to be effective. For solitaries who have taken a vow of chastity—however bizarre the taking of such a vow may now seem to some—there is no room for ambiguity or compromise in sexual matters; the maintenance of a strict attitude of physical purity, an inner withdrawal from the merest idea of sexual contact, are sheer necessities. Physical purity has, moreover, been regarded throughout Christian history as one of the essential ingredients of any self-disciplined religious life. As the anchoritic works, including *Holy Maidenhood*, are fond of pointing out, it does not of itself guarantee purity of heart and mind, the moral maturity toward which the anchoress must also strive; but it is a prerequisite for reaching such spiritual purity. Like humility, patience and an attitude of "inner sweetness," physical purity is especially a goal of any ascetic and penitential spirituality: a resting-place that is only achieved after a prolonged period of heroic struggle against flesh and devil. In terms of Christian tradition, there is nothing surprising about the earnestness and violence with which lechery is discussed in the anchoritic works.

embrace my beloved anywhere but in a secret place." In this way our Lord speaks to his spouse. Let it never seem strange to her that he shuns her if she is not much alone—and so much alone that she puts all the thronging world and every earthly noise out of her heart. For she is God's chamber. (*Ancrene Wisse*, p. 82)

The author of *Ancrene Wisse* takes this sort of language both directly from the Canticles and from the body of twelfth-century Cistercian mystical writings which are the fountainhead for virtually all late medieval writing in this vein of "bridal mysticism"—particularly Bernard of Clairvaux's *Sermons on the Song of Songs*. But the anchoritic works treat even these traditional images of Christ as lover and the soul as spouse in their own way. For one thing, they are not presented as images at all but as factual descriptions. As virgin solitaires, the anchoresses are encouraged to see themselves as straightforwardly wedded to Christ, shut away from the world in a harem-like seclusion, destined to be "the Lord's beloved whom all things obey, lady of all the world as he is Lord of all" (*Holy Maidenhood*, p. 226), and to join the company of maidens in heaven who "follow the lamb wherever he goes" (see p. 231 and Revelation 14:3–4, key verses in this group of works). Christ is immediately accessible to them, in the sense that he is physically present in the eucharistic elements kept near the high altar of the church on which their cell abuts, and that whenever a priest consecrates the elements on this altar, the incarnation repeats itself: "After the kiss of peace when the priest consecrates the host, forget all the world, be wholly out of the body, embrace in shining love your lover who has alighted into the bower of your heart from heaven, and hold him as tight as you can until he has granted all you ever ask" (*Ancrene Wisse*, p. 59). Most strikingly, Christ is not presented simply as a lover but as a full-blown aristocratic medieval husband, anxious to compete with would-be earthly husbands for the attentions of the anchoritic reader. In part VII of *Ancrene Wisse* he woos the anchoress by reminding her of his own superior attractions: "Am I not the fairest one? Am I not the richest king? Am I not the highest born? Am I not the wisest among the wise? Am I not the most courteous of men? Am I not the most generous one? Am I not of all things the gentlest and sweetest?" (p. 194). He then offers her a spectacular series of gifts as inducements to accept him: riches, castles, kingdoms, rulership of the world, the whole roster of the joys of heaven. *The Wooing of Our Lord* develops a long meditation out of this passage, in which the anchoress reaffirms the choice she has made by recounting Christ's attractions one by one and comparing them with those of other men (pp. 248–251). If the

The idea of purity as a "resting-place," a stasis, may seem to be merely another sign of the defensive negativity we noted in the anchoritic works' attitude to virtue in general. It certainly has a strong defensive streak; in *Holy Maidenhood*, virginity is described as a "high tower," a building which at once exalts and protects the one who remains inside it (pp. 225–226). The image of the protecting building signifies in more than one dimension in the anchoritic works: it can refer to the "unbroken" virginal body (*Holy Maidenhood*); to the pure heart which protects the soul enclosed within (*Stables Warde*, pp. 211–212); to the anchorhouse itself, which protects both heart and body (*Ancrene Wisse*, e.g., p. 170); and to Sion, the New Jerusalem, the goal of the anchoritic life (*Holy Maidenhood*—see also the "city built in the heart" in *Katherine*, pp. 276–277). The way all these images interlock is suggestive of the extent to which "inner" and "outer" purity, physical enclosure and physical virginity, virginity and the purity of heaven, are themselves seen as interrelated concepts, all of which tend to be treated in an equally static and defensive fashion: "Maintain the purity of your heart, body, and cell unbroken until death, and you will rise to the purity of heaven," is the penitential message of this cluster of images. But the theme of virginity and the image of the protecting building used to describe it are also closely tied to another set of ideas of, and images for, the anchoritic life, which in some sense represents a break with the dominant penitential element in the spirituality of this group of anchoritic works. For as well as being a grave, a prison, a desert, a cross, a protecting tower or castle, the anchorhouse—with its counterpart, the virginal body—functions as a physical representation of a mystical image, that of the "bower" or "chamber" in the Canticles in which Christ is united with his earthly spouse, the pure soul. If the anchoress repudiates the world, physical comfort and the pleasure of sexual intimacy, and engages in a heroic and anxious struggle against her own sinful nature and the promptings of the devil, she does so not only for the hope of a high heavenly reward—although that is a strong motive—but for a union with Christ her beloved which begins here, in this life. If she must avoid even looking out at the world beyond the cell, and speak to those who live there only when she has to, it is because such abstinence frees her senses for the enjoyment of a spiritual intimacy within the cell:

Ostende michi fatiem tuam (Canticles 2:14)—"Show your face to me," he says, "and to no one else; look at me if you would have clear sight with your heart's eyes. Look within where I am and do not seek me outside your heart. I am a bashful lover, I will not

sisters who lived in the Deerfold knew this work, they would have used it to remind themselves why, when they were "sought after by many," they turned instead to Christ, the best of all the matches they could have made. In this final, mystical reading of the meaning of enclosure, the cell becomes a place in which all the things that the anchoress has had to give up—comfort, pleasure, power, in the fleeting form in which the world knows these things—come back to her transfigured, as permanent spiritual gifts:

And you will find such sweetness in his love and in his service, and have so much joy of it and pleasure in your heart, that you would not wish to change the state in which you live to be crowned a queen. So gracious is our Lord that he does not wish that his chosen ones be without reward here; for so much comfort is in his grace that everything they see suits them, and though it seems to other people that they suffer severely, it does not trouble them at all but seems easy to them, and they have more delight in it than anyone else has in the pleasures of the world. This our Lord gives them here as an earnest of the endless reward that will come afterwards. So God's friend has in a marvellous way all the fruit of this world that she has forsaken, and heaven at the end. (*Holy Maidenhood*, pp. 226–227)

How are we to characterize a way of life which is presented as having all these overlapping meanings—which is cautious yet so deeply ambitious, ascetic yet so frankly sensual in its mysticism? Perhaps above all else it seems *pragmatic* in its approach to spiritual reality. The anchoress subjects herself to the harshest possible way of life; it is especially important that she remember at all times why she does this and what she hopes to gain from it. Thus, the anchoritic works continually remind her of the spiritual dangers that beset her, in and out of the world, of the great eternities of hell and heaven between which she is positioned, of the surpassing reward available to those who choose to follow Christ along the arduous road of virginity and self-martyrdom. Much of the time their appeal is to her prudence and self-interest. The author of *Ancrene Wisse* knew and used Bernard of Clairvaux's *De Diligendo Deo* (*The Book on Loving God*), which describes a spiritual progression through four kinds of love, from a love of God which is based on the benefits he confers, to a love—to be experienced only momentarily in this life—which has become wholly disinterested, when "satisfaction of our wants, chance happiness, delight us less

than to see his will done in us and for us."²⁵ Yet even the existence of such a love—around which the aspirations of so many of the mystics of late medieval Europe are focused—is not acknowledged by the anchoritic works. This does not, of course, mean that the anchoresses might not have felt any such love, or that the author of *Ancrene Wisse* thought them incapable of it; it is rather that the idea of disinterested love does not belong to the everyday spiritual world in which spiritual aspirations coexist with egotisms, temptations and distractions, and that it is in this world that the anchoritic life is assumed on the whole to operate. Like all good pastoral writings, the anchoritic works deal in their several ways with the real world of their readers, not with abstract theological issues and occasional spiritual possibilities. They also encourage those readers, who as solitaries must to a large extent be their own spiritual advisors, to practice this realism in their own lives. If they provide the anchoress with a series of pictures of her chosen way of life which are so strongly contrasted with one another as to be inconsistent, it is because she needs all these models of what she is doing to maintain what is thought of as a proper attitude to it—an attitude containing all the inconsistencies which combine to make up that peculiar Christian conundrum, the ideal of holiness. She must by turns be abject, ambitious, fearful, and joyful; feel protected, imprisoned, exalted, and disgraced by her confinement; run from the devil, and trample him scornfully down; cower before the anger of God, and turn toward him with the naive assurance of the child, or the erotic confidence of the beloved.²⁶ When she attains "purity of heart," a stability based on a mature self-understanding and knowledge of God, she may no longer need to alternate between all these attitudes, and at this time she may no longer need the anchoritic works either. But until then, they continue to provide her with the material she needs, with the images and strategies to prevent her from falling into the pitfalls surrounding a life so harsh and ambitious, and to encourage her to persevere with the energetic moral striving that is necessary for her to attain her goal:

You . . . must row confidently against the current, force your way ahead with much hard work, and pull stalwartly with your spiritual arms. And so must you all. For we are all in this stream, in the world's wild water, which carries many under. As soon as ever we tire and rest ourselves in sloth, our boat goes backwards. . . . But as Job says, when someone digs for a hoard of gold, the closer they get to it, the more ardent gladness of heart makes them, and the keener to dig and delve deeper and deeper

until they find it (Job 3:21). Your heart is not on earth, so you need not delve downwards. But lift the heart upwards. For that is this rowing against the world's current: to set yourself against it, so as to delve the gold-hoard that is up in heaven. And what is that delving? Eager, seeking thought: Where it is; what it is; how it can be found. This is the delving: to be busily and eagerly always about it, with a constant yearning, with the heat of the hungry heart; to wade up out of sin; to creep out of the flesh; to break up above her; to rise above her on your own with high thought towards heaven . . . (*Ancrene Wisse*, pp. 88–89)

Like the mixed metaphors in this passage, the inconsistent mixtures of images for the anchoritic life, the diverse attitudes struck and demands made by the anchoritic works, aim to prevent the "sloth" that will cause the anchoress to go backward. Her job, then, is to activate them, to "delve the gold-hoard" of practical wisdom and help provided by the works, to read, and put into practice what she reads, and "with the heat of the hungry heart" to apply the vehemence, the solicitude, the warmth of their words to her own condition. The spirituality of these anchoritic works may be cautious and defensive in comparison with the bold ardor of some thirteenth- and fourteenth-century mysticism, but it embodies, in its own particular way, just as exalted and hungry a striving after perfection.²⁷

3) *The Titus Manuscript*²⁸

Our characterization of the spirituality of the anchoritic works as "pragmatic" brings us conveniently back to our starting-point: the group of surviving early manuscripts, all of them small enough to hold without weariness, clear enough to be read in the dim light of a cell, eminently practical objects in their own right. Designed for use as they were, what does their presentation of the various anchoritic works tell us of the use to which these latter were intended to be put? The arrangement of works in the manuscripts which seem to have been either written or commissioned at Wigmore—Bodley, Royal, Corpus, Cleopatra—suggests that in the period of expansion during the 1220s, when they were being copied, there was a feeling that the works conveniently fell into distinct groups, consisting on the one hand of *Ancrene Wisse* alone, on the other of the homilies and narratives which form what scholars call the *Katherine* group: the saints' passions, *Sawles Warde*, and *Holy Maidenhood*. Unless Royal origi-

nally contained more works in the style of *An Orison to St. Mary* (see note 12), it would seem that the meditations and prayers scholars call the *Wooing* group were at this stage circulating separately, each, perhaps, written and distributed individually on single leaves of parchment. There seems to be a hierarchy of value discernible here. *Ancrene Wisse* states that it is written for daily use (p. 207), and refers to *Margaret* and *Sawles Warde*—in rather the same way that *Holy Maidenhood* refers to the examples of Margaret, Juliana and Katherine (p. 242)—suggesting these works were expected to be available to anchoresses, at least for occasional reading.²⁹ But there is nothing in our admittedly scanty evidence which implies that they were as widely available as we know *Ancrene Wisse* was; perhaps manuscripts of the *Katherine* group are among the books the author of *Ancrene Wisse* refers to when he writes of the need for anchoresses to be generous in lending one another reading material (p. 118). Apart from the fragment in Royal, the *Wooing*-group works, for their part, do not begin to appear in the surviving manuscripts until around 1240, when Nero adds three of them in a few spare folios to its copy of *Ancrene Wisse*; they therefore seem to have been regarded, relatively speaking, as ephemera.³⁰

These observations, based largely on conjecture, do not go very far toward helping us see the anchoritic works in their practical context. But one manuscript, Titus, is of considerable help, since it is the only one which attempts to be a one-volume library of the anchoritic works, gathering into a single, well-organized collection *Ancrene Wisse*, the three most important *Katherine*-group works, and one work from the *Wooing* group, *The Wooing of Our Lord* itself. As we saw, Titus is not a Wigmore manuscript and may well have originated with the Franciscans in Hereford, and have been copied as late as 1250 (p. 15). Moreover, its texts of the works it contains are often not the most accurate, and do not have the dialectal purity of the Wigmore manuscripts (which is perhaps why it has not been closely studied by Middle-English scholars). Nonetheless, it represents a highly intelligent selection and ordering of the principal anchoritic works, by means of which it is possible for us to be much more confident about the purpose each one was intended (at least according to one thirteenth-century anthologist) to fulfill within the larger program of the anchoritic works as a whole. For this reason—and because our own choice of anchoritic works translated in this volume follows the one made by whoever put Titus together—the manuscript is worth a closer look.³¹

A useful though imperfect analogy for the organization of Titus is that of Aelred's *Rule of Life for a Recluse*, which is in three parts: the first concerning the "outer man," the second the "inner man," and the third

being a meditation which is also divided into three sections, respectively dealing with the past (the life of Christ), the present (one's own life) and the future (the life to come, heaven and hell). *Ancrene Wisse* derives its own distinction between outer and inner rules from Aelred (for which see the author's Introduction, pp. 47-48 and note 1); three of the shorter works that follow it in Titus can also be thought of as corresponding with the sections of Aelred's "threefold meditation." The end, part VII of *Ancrene Wisse* reminds readers that they can find accounts of the joys of heaven written "elsewhere" (see note 38), probably referring to *Sawles Warde* (the second half of which is an account of those joys, balancing an account of the torments of hell given in the first half); and it is *Sawles Warde* which is the next work in Titus, starting a few leaves from that on which these lines occur. As its closing explanation of how it is supposed to be read makes clear, the purpose and subject of this homiletic allegory is similar to that of the last section of Aelred's meditation, on humanity's eternal destiny: "So those people who forget the salvation of their souls in the sleep of carelessness ought to meditate very often, and keep their hearts awake with the thoughts inspired by these two messengers [Fear and Love of Life]. They should look from the vision of hell to the joy of heaven, and be frightened of the one, loving towards the other" (p. 221). For all its allegorical apparatus, *Sawles Warde* is no more than a generalized meditation aimed at stirring the reader toward virtue and away from vice. Perhaps because of the simplicity of these aims, the compiler of Titus considered it an appropriate work to appear at the beginning of the series of short works with which he intended to supplement *Ancrene Wisse*.

Aelred's meditation on the present is an oddly personal comparison between his own early life of confusion and vice and what he sees as the purity of life of his sister, for whom he wrote the *Rule*. The next work in Titus, *Holy Maidenhood*, can be seen as equivalent to this: a consciously one-sided investigation of the sexual possibilities in human life, written for women who have already committed themselves to virginity but who may need reminding from time to time how right they were. *Holy Maidenhood* is not a meditation, and does not maintain an exclusive focus on the present—in particular, there is a good deal of discussion of the heavenly reward of virgins, supplementing the account of that reward already given in *Sawles Warde*. But the themes of the work—the importance of maintaining purity, the loss involved in sullying it, the equation of purity with virginity—are the same as Aelred's, and the intended effect of the work is also the same: to stiffen the resolve with which anchoresses face their daily lives of abstinence and self-denial.

The next work in Titus, *The Wooing of Our Lord*, is a meditation divided into two distinct sections. In the first, the anchoress finds reasons to prefer Christ to all earthly lovers, and outlines these reasons inexorably and systematically; this section goes over the same ground as *Holy Maidenhood*, but in a far more positive, indeed romantic, way. After this meditation on the present, the second section is a fine meditation on the life and death of Christ, organized less on narrative and more on thematic lines than Aelred's meditation on the past, but serving the same purpose, even sharing similar material. This meditation ends by returning the anchoress to the present world of her own cell, and rededicating her life to it. If *Sawles Warde* presents the religious life cautiously and simply as maintaining a balance between fear and love, and *Holy Maidenhood* asserts a more precise and elevated emphasis on virginity, *The Wooing of Our Lord* assumes (within the structure of the work's bridal mysticism) what is in its way a still more radical view of the anchoritic life as the imitation of Christ. Titus orders the three works as a progression.

The last work in Titus, *Katherine*, could be seen as what medieval preachers called an *exemplum*, a story which encapsulates a particular theme or group of themes, in this case the common preoccupations of the other works in the manuscript, including *Ancrene Wisse*. The heroine's life and death, her discretion, her courage, her wisdom, the intimacy of her union with Christ, her imitation of Christ's suffering and death—all of these things make her story a kind of summation of the entire manuscript. But there is a further dimension to *Katherine* (as there is not to its two companion-pieces, *Margaret* and *Juliana*). Katherine's religious knowledge, and the way she has to use it in her debates with Maxentius and his philosophers, give the whole work a distinctly theological air; there are discussions of the creation and fall, of the paradox of the incarnation and the doctrine of redemption, of the Trinity, and so on. After a great deal of pastoral theology, the doctrinal content of which tends to modify according to occasion, and which generally keeps to the simpler theological ideas, the last few pages of Titus provide a copy of a work which was evidently written with the assumption that its readers needed to have an abstract grasp of at least the basic doctrines of the Christian faith.

The Titus manuscript does, then, seem to present a purposeful and practical arrangement of the major anchoritic works, from the essential daily guide to all aspects of the anchoritic life, *Ancrene Wisse* itself, to the occasional pieces which have each their distinctive place and contribution to make in chastising, comforting, cajoling, stirring and instructing the reader. It is clear from the way the work is structured that the author of

Ancrene Wisse has some expectation that his anchoritic readers will read it through in order, but also assumes they will refer to sections out of context whenever they recognize a particular need in themselves. Titus as a whole is probably intended to be read in the same two ways: as a collection with an overall shape and purpose; and as a compendium which it is up to the reader to quarry and to use as she thinks best. The considerable areas of overlap between one work and another—for example, the similarities between part VII of *Ancrene Wisse* and *The Wooing of Our Lord*, or between both of these and some passages of *Holy Maidenhood*—also encourage a third kind of reading, one which is layered, referential, and appreciative of the many different perspectives from which the anchoritic works view their small circle of subjects. All three kinds of reading would have been slow, ruminative, conducted aloud, and aimed at acquiring a deep familiarity with the thought, the forms of expression, the sounds of the different works. It is important, in closing, to stress this point: that the works preserved in the anchoritic manuscripts were written to be known and appreciated more intimately than modern-day readers (or translators) can hope to know anything. We do not know who were the early owners of Titus, but we should imagine it as one of a very few books available to its first readers, who would perforce have turned to it, perhaps over years or decades, until its contents were known almost off by heart, its meanings accepted at a deeper than verbal level. By comparison, and however earnestly we study and compare and annotate, we come to these works as tourists.³²

NOTES ON TRANSLATION AND STYLE

One of the more slippery problems for the translator of Early Middle English is the *near*-match of some words with their modern cognates; leaving such words unchanged would result in a text of unfocused meaning. For example, though there is a large area of overlap, the most commonly-understood senses of modern “wit” are too narrow to encompass its meanings in our texts: “reason,” “mind”; Early Middle English *witti*, although it shares the modern meaning of “clever,” has as well the sense of “wise, learned”; “common sense” is not far off the meaning of Middle English *wit* in some contexts. In *Holy Maidenhood*, we have left the original *meiden*, “maiden” throughout, in spite of its being slightly archaic, since to replace it with “virgin” would have limited alliterative possibilities similar to those in the original (see below on alliteration), and because the Modern English meaning is the same. In *Katherine*, though, we have sometimes translated it as “girl”: the Latin source has *puella* (alternating with *virgo*); when the chief scholar expresses his indignation that they have all been called to the court from the ends of Alexandria “to argue with one girl,” it is her femininity, youth and dismissibility which are meant to be evoked, not her virginity as such (see p. 268).

We have tried to avoid archaic language. Many of the early (and some of the more modern) translations of Middle English texts opt for a pseudo-medieval English used by the William Morris school of fantasy-romance, sometimes somewhat oddly mediated by the King James Bible—a language which distances its content from the reader by attempting to *reproduce*