

Simple Readers (Mis)Reading Profound Matter in English:  
The Lollard Heresy of Reading and its Effects on English Vernacular Theological  
Writing in the Late Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries

by

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## Table of Contents

Abstract	v
List of Abbreviations Used	vi
Acknowledgements	vii
Chapter 1: Introduction	1
Chapter 2: “Contrued þoru Mannes Wit”: False Rhymes, Sinful Tales, Plain Speech, Misreading, and the Emerging Emphasis on Didactic Secular Writing in the Vernacular	25
Chapter 3: “For Holy Church hoteth alle manere peple/Vnder obedience to be, and buxum to þe lawe”: Langland’s Self-censoring in the C-text and Misreadings of <i>Piers Plowman</i>	66
Chapter 4: “Bi Ensaumple of Him”: <i>The Testimony of William Thorpe</i> as a Lollard Reader’s Guide to Remaining Firm During an Ecclesiastical Examination	112
Chapter 5: “þe Mylke of Lyzte Doctryne”: Nicholas Love’s <i>The Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ</i> as an Orthodox Reader’s Guide to Church Teaching	150
Chapter 6: A Sympyl Creatur and Hir Boke: <i>The Book of Margery Kempe</i> as a Record of an Orthodox (Mis)Reading of Nicholas Love’s <i>The Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ</i>	182
Chapter 7: Conclusion	213
Appendix: Notes	234
Bibliography	253

## Abstract

This thesis argues that both Lollard efforts to disseminate heterodox opinions in simple terms for simple readers and the Church's reactionary and ineffective endeavours to combat this heresy with legislation and writing of its own constrained fifteenth-century vernacular theological writing. First, I summarise the current debate about the restrictive aims and effects of legislative efforts to eliminate the Lollard heresy, and I outline the historical context leading up to and following Archbishop Arundel's *Constitutions* of 1409. The subsequent chapters trace the effects of ecclesiastical restrictions over time on vernacular theological writing. In Chapter 2, I explore the use of literary devices in two Lollard dialogues, and I argue that in the years preceding the *Constitutions* Lollard writers exhibited a readiness to employ literary tools as a means to persuade effectively. In Chapter 3, I argue that many of Langland's major C revisions to *Piers Plowman*, undertaken in the aftermath of ecclesiastical restrictions, represent a response to Lollard-inspired rebel misreadings of the poem and sacrifice instances of bold poetic imagery as they endeavour to clarify doctrinal positions. In Chapter 4, I argue that Thorpe's foregrounding of the generic conventions of hagiography in his *Testimony* reflects the pre-*Constitutions* readiness of Lollard writers to use literary tools to persuade simple readers. In Chapter 5, I argue that Love's Church-sanctioned *Mirror* represented an orthodox tool in the war on heresy, but it failed to curb lay misinterpretation of theological issues. In Chapter 6, I argue that *The Book of Margery Kempe* serves as a reader's response to Love's *Mirror* and, therefore, demonstrates the ways in which Love's orthodox text could be misread by orthodox readers. I conclude the thesis by considering the Lollard *Lanterne of Ligt* and Pecoock's orthodox vernacular theology. I argue that these works show that after the *Constitutions* both heterodox and orthodox writers demonstrated an increased urgency to tailor their writing for simple readers and that this tailoring meant, for both sides, an eschewing of literary features. I assert that the Church's aggressive response to these works further constrained vernacular theological writing by suppressing its writers, readers, and circulation.

List of Abbreviations Used

<i>De haeretico</i>	<i>De haeretico comburendo</i>
<i>The Folewer</i>	<i>The Folewer to the Donet</i>
<i>Meditationes</i>	<i>Meditationes vitae Christi</i>
<i>Le Mirouer des simples ames</i>	<i>Le Mirouer des simples ames aneanties qui seulement demourant en vouloir et en desir d'amour</i>
<i>The Mirror</i>	<i>The Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ</i>
<i>The Mirror of Simple Souls</i>	<i>The Mirror of Simple Souls Who Are Annihilated and Remain Only in the Will and Desire of Love</i>
<i>The Repressor</i>	<i>The Repressor of Over Much Blaming of the Clergy</i>
<i>Reule</i>	<i>The Reule of Crysten Religioun</i>
<i>The Testimony</i>	<i>The Testimony of William Thorpe</i>

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

Untrained Lay Readers, the Censorship of Vernacular Theological Writing in Late Medieval England, and Archbishop Thomas Arundel's 1409 *Constitutions*

“And Y, britheren, myyte not speke to you as to spiritual men, but as to fleischli men;/as to litle children in Crist, Y yaf to you mylk drynke, not mete; for ye myyten not yit, nether ye moun now, for yit ye ben fleischli” (*The Wycliffite Bible*, 1 Corinthians 3: 1-2)

Eamon Duffy has observed that “the crucial factor in the growth of a well-instructed laity in fifteenth-century England was the spread of literacy down the social scale” (68). Along with increasing literacy among laypeople, the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries in England witnessed the proliferation of written materials in the vernacular about religious subjects that were previously available only in Latin and, therefore, to educated readers. The emergence of this new class of untrained readers created anxiety among orthodox and heterodox writers about the untrained reader's ability to correctly interpret writing that concerned itself with important doctrinal questions. Whereas proponents of Lollardy<sup>1</sup> advocated lay access to Scriptural translations, the Church opposed the translation of the Bible into English because Scriptural translations offered untrained laypeople the opportunity to directly interpret Scripture.

The early and influential Church theologian Origen (c185-c254) draws attention to St. Paul's nourishment simile<sup>2</sup> and reiterates that beginner level students of Christianity, like small children, must receive the milk of the Church instead of solid food. Origen indicates that *milk* represents elementary Christian instruction and *solid food* represents more advanced learning for trained pupils (de Lubac 29, Trigg 46). St. Paul's nourishment simile was frequently employed by Medieval writers. The Benedictine historian Guibert de Nogent (c1055-1124) indicates that milk ought to be



given to the young instead of meat (de Lubac 31), and the French theologian Alain de Lille (c1116-c1202) similarly suggests that the young require the milk of history (de Lubac 30). The Carthusian prior Nicholas Love (d. c1424) maintains that, as simple creatures, untrained Christians “nede to be fedde with mylke of lyzte doctryne & not with sadde mete of grete clargye” (Love 10). The modern scholar Kantik Ghosh characterises the view expressed by Love as “one of the most widely known scriptural topoi” (2005, 261). Ghosh explains that this rhetorical commonplace signifies that “Scripture, in terms of th[e] imagery of nutrition, is heavy meat, difficult to digest, particularly by those, such as the simple and *illiterati*, who are unequipped with the requisite spiritual teeth” (Ghosh 2005, 261). Therefore, since laypeople could not be trusted to understand the meaning of Scripture, the Church increasingly endeavoured to remove it from their view. In contrast to Church authorities, Lollards were very much in favour of popular access to the Bible, and Wyclif’s followers translated Scripture into English and wrote a variety of texts on religious subjects. In order to ensure that their texts could be read by a large audience, the Lollards wrote in the most widely understood dialect of Middle English (Watson 1999, 342).

Because the emergence of a new class of untrained readers is such a critical factor in the development and repression of late fourteenth- and early fifteenth-century vernacular theological writing, it is necessary to define what it meant to be untrained and trained in late medieval England. Before I proceed with a discussion of the types of theological training people were likely to have had in late medieval England, I will begin by outlining the types of schools typical of the period. Nicholas Orme categorises public secular schools<sup>3</sup> into four groups: song schools, grammar schools, business schools, and

schools teaching more advanced studies such as theology and canon law. Orme indicates that children who attended song schools were likely between the ages of seven and ten, and that these schools instructed students in reading,<sup>4</sup> the singing of the psalms, and basic grammar. After c1300, song schools in England were mostly limited to the cathedral cities of Lincoln and York (Orme 2006, 64). The second level of education in medieval England, the grammar school, offered its students “a good general grounding in the Latin tongue, with special concentration upon the structure of language and upon literature, especially poetry” (Orme 1973, 70). Orme asserts that “[m]any people who studied grammar, however, were less interested in its linguistic and literary aspects than in its practical uses in the administrative and commercial spheres of life, for which their studies were intended to qualify them” (1973, 70). Business schools, the third level of medieval education, emerged from the grammar schools of fourteenth-century England, and specialised in teaching such matters as the composing of deeds and charters (Orme 1973, 70). The final group of schools in the medieval educational system “provided higher education: the university arts course, academic medicine, canon and civil law, and theology” (Orme 2006, 79).

As Orme suggests, medieval “[s]chools catered more fully for sons of the gentry, merchants, substantial townsmen, and rural yeomen [than for sons of the nobility]” (2006, 131). Education in philosophy, logic, and theology was provided in some friaries (Orme 2006, 262), but advanced theological training in England was limited mainly to those in the universities, Oxford and Cambridge. A thorough education in theology required a strong foundation of logic and philosophy (Orme 2006, 263). In theory, parish priests in late medieval England ought to have been able to read the Scriptures in Latin

and to study independently, but “[t]he reality was often quite different” (Orme 1973, 13). Orme affirms that “[t]hroughout the later middle ages their critics hastened to point out how far short the clergy fell of the standards of literacy expected of them” (1973, 13). In other words, it was not uncommon for parish clergy to fall well below the standards necessary to qualify them as trained readers.

In a similar vein, the education of girls within the nunneries did little to provide them with advanced theological training. Wealth and class were requirements for entrance into a nunnery, and girls there would have been instructed in morality and good manners (Orme 1973, 54). Formal education in the nunneries consisted of “learning the abc, the basic prayers, and the psalter, but did not venture far into the grammar of Latin” (Orme 2006, 275). In addition, women in the nunneries would have learned to read in English and would likely have engaged in the study of French after 1349 when French was no longer a vernacular in England (Orme 1973, 55). The characterisation of Chaucer’s Prioress in *The General Prologue to The Canterbury Tales* offers a contemporary indication of what a nun’s education might have looked like:

And Frenssh she spak ful faire and fetisly,  
After the scole of Stratford atte Bowe,<sup>5</sup>  
For Frenssh of Parys was to hire unknowe.  
At mete wel ytaught was she with alle;  
She leet no morsel from hir lippes falle,  
Ne wette hir fyngres in hir sauce depe;  
Wel koude she carie a morsel and wel kepe  
That no drope ne fille upon hire brest.

In curteisie was set ful muchel hir lest. (*GP* 124-132)

The Prioress speaks French elegantly and well, and she has good table manners. In fact, her chief pleasure is good manners, and she endeavours to imitate the manners of the court. Chaucer's characterisation of the Prioress, then, is in line with what Orme indicates would have been the educational background of a nun in late medieval England: her education in the nunnery consisted of the study of French and good manners, and Chaucer's characterisation of her gives no evidence of advanced theological training. The fact that parish priests and nuns in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries in England were deficient in advanced theological training indicates that the average layperson of the period would also have been lacking such training even if he were literate.

As we have seen, literacy in English was not an indicator of theological training in the later Middle English period. The legitimacy of the Church authorities' anxieties about the possibility that laypeople might misinterpret unmediated Scripture or other theological writings is corroborated by a Wycliffite sermon written in English by a writer with a familiarity with Latin. The misreading occurs in the section of the sermon that addresses Christ's appearance to two disciples as they journey to Emmaus following the resurrection of Christ three days after his death. In the sermon, the author rails against the disciples for sinning by telling fables. Thomas Arnold shows that the sermon's author has misunderstood the term *fabularentur* from the Vulgate: "Et factum est, dum fabularentur, et secum quærerent: et ipse Jesus appropinquans ibat cum illis" (*Vulgate Bible*, Luke 24:15). Rather than rendering the term as *talkiden*,<sup>6</sup> the sermon's author imprecisely translates the term as *fabliden*, thus "rais[ing] a difficulty which has no real

existence” (Arnold ii, 133 n. a). The sermon’s author renders Luke 24: 13-15 in the following manner:

Two of Cristis disciplis wenten on þis Sunday to a castil þat was clepid  
Emaus, aboute six myle fro Jerusalem. And þes two spaken togidere of  
alle þes þinges þat weren fallen. And it was don, while þei fabliden, and  
souzten betwixe hem two, þe same Jesus cam ny3 and wente wiþ hem.

(“Sermon CLXXXII” 133)

As a result of his misinterpretation of the term *fabularentur*, the Wycliffite sermon’s author develops an argument in which he maintains that the disciples are guilty of sinning by telling fables and that they ought not to be imitated by Christians: “And here foolis arguen comunly, þat it is leweful to telle fablis, for þus diden þes two disciplis, after þat Crist was risun to liif; but God forbede þat herfore Cristene men have leve to synne” (“Sermon CLXXXII” 133). Later in the sermon, the author’s misreading of *fabularentur* leads him to conclude erroneously that “þus þes two disciplis of Crist fabliden as þei shulden not” (“Sermon CLXXXII” 133).

While misreading can involve literal misinterpretations, it can also include misreadings at the figurative level. Chaucer’s *Clerk’s Tale* offers a notable, if fictional, example of this sort of misinterpretation. At the conclusion of his tale, the Clerk makes plain one way in which his tale of the constant Griselda ought not to be read:

This storie is seyð nat for that wyves sholde  
Folwen Grisilde as in humylitee,  
For it were inportable, though they wolde,  
But for that every wight, in his degree,

Sholde be constant in adversitee

As was Grisilde; therefore Petrak writeth

This storie.... (CIT 1142-1148)

The Clerk cites his tale's author, Petrarch, and asserts that, according to Petrarch, the practical lesson to be drawn from his tale is not that wives should follow Griselda as an example of humility. Echoing Petrarch, the Clerk maintains that it would be intolerable for wives to follow Griselda in this way even if they wished to do so. Nevertheless, in the Ellesmere, Hengwrt, and other manuscripts that preserve the Host's stanza, Harry Bailly draws the very moral maxim from the *Clerk's Tale* that the Clerk has rejected:

This worthy Clerk, whan ended was his tale,

Oure Hooste seyde, and swoor, "By Goddes bones,

Me were levere than a barel ale

My wyf at hoom had herd this legende ones!" (CIT 1212a-1212d)

Despite the Clerk's insistence that his tale teaches that all people should be as steadfast in adversity as was Griselda, the Host would rather his wife had heard this tale just once than have a barrel of ale. The Host's merry words here intimate that he thinks his wife could benefit from a lesson in humility. In this way, the Host misreads the *Clerk's Tale* in precisely the way the Clerk counsels against.

Yet another type of misreading is hinted at in the efforts of translators and annotators of vernacular theological writing in the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. In her study *Books Under Suspicion*, Kathryn Kerby-Fulton calls attention to the Prologue of the second version of the late fourteenth- or early fifteenth-century English translation of Marguerite Porete's *Le Mirouer de simple ames* (*The Mirror of Simple*

*Souls*). The translation was carried out by the as yet unidentified M. N., and, as Kerby-Fulton indicates, his “own Prologue to the second version tells us that he is undertaking a revision of his translation because readers have objected to or misunderstood passages in his first version” (2006, 280). M. N. asserts that he is translating the text for a second time because he was “enfourmed þat some wordis þerof haue by mystake” (qtd. in Kerby-Fulton 2006, 280). Kerby-Fulton indicates that “[t]he crucial word here, ‘mystake,’ can mean both misunderstood and ill-received, and so there is an ambiguity” (2006, 280). However, M. N. follows his assertion that some words have been mistaken with the remark that he “schal declare þo wordis more openli” (qtd. in Kerby-Fulton 2006, 280). His insistence that he will translate the text as clearly as possible makes plain that he is concerned about lay misreadings of, and not objections to, the theological text he is translating. He indicates, therefore, that he dreads the task before him because his source concerns “hize diuine maters” and is “ful mystili ... spoken” (qtd. in Kerby-Fulton 2006, 280).

Like M. N., the red ink annotator<sup>7</sup> of Margery Kempe’s *Book* appears to be preparing the text for lay devotional use (Parsons 144). Also like M. N., the red ink annotator exhibits anxiety about potential misreadings of Kempe’s *Book*. For example, he inserts phrases that serve to make sections of the *Book* more conservative. In Book I, Chapter 86, the red ink annotator inserts the word “gostly” in the passage in which Christ thanks Margery for harboring him and Mary in her bed: “And also dowtyr I thank þe for alle þe tymys þat þu has herberwyd me & my blissyd modyr in þi bed <gostly> for þes & for all oþer good thowtys...” (qtd. in Parsons 150). Parsons affirms that the red ink annotator “apparently approv[es] of Margery’s affective behaviour elsewhere, [but] in

[this instance and others] the annotator censors her ‘bodily’ references, upgrading them to a more conservative and therefore safer ‘ghostly’ status” (150). In addition, the red ink annotator excises material from Kempe’s *Book* that he apparently determines to be inappropriate (Parsons 149). Parsons indicates, for instance, that the red ink annotator crosses out Margery’s assertion in Book I, Chapter 84, that she had been Mary’s maiden during Christ’s childhood; the annotator excises Margery’s claim that she had “holpyn to kepyn hym in hys childhod & so forth in-to þe tyme of hys deth” (*BMK* 203: 9-11). Parsons argues that the red ink annotator’s excision of this passage shows that he “seems to object to Margery’s language and to be uncomfortable with her familiarity, albeit ghostly familiarity, with the humanity and physicality of Christ” (149). It is equally possible that the red ink annotator views Margery’s claim to be untrue. In either case, the annotator’s excision of the passage indicates that he has determined it is not suitable reading material for a lay audience. Whereas the annotator’s excision of Margery’s writing indicates that he wishes to remove some portions of her text from the lay reader’s view, his efforts to clarify her writing with the insertion of explanatory words makes plain that he is anxious about the *Book*’s potential to be misread by laypeople.

Translations of Scripture circulating in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries posed a similar risk. These translations, unaccompanied by orthodox exegesis, opened up the possibility that untrained lay readers of vernacular Scripture might use eisegesis, “[t]he interpretation of a word or passage (of the Scriptures) by reading into it one’s own ideas” (OED, q.v.). In 1407, in response to the continuing circulation of Biblical translations and the promulgation of Lollard theological opinions, the then Archbishop of Canterbury, Thomas Arundel, drafted his *Constitutions* at Oxford (Watson



1995, 825). Two years later, in 1409,<sup>8</sup> they were formally issued. Despite the explicitness of Arundel's thirteen articles, there is little critical consensus about how broadly based he meant for his attack on Lollardy to be. At particular issue is the question of whether or not Arundel meant to eliminate lay access to religious material in English. Although the Archbishop's seventh constitution expressly forbids the translation of any Scriptural text into into English unless the translation is approved by the appropriate authorities,<sup>9</sup> there is critical disagreement about precisely what sort of writing Arundel meant to limit with this constitution and whether or not his chief focus in formulating his *Constitutions* was the laity at all. Nicholas Watson, Fiona Somerset, Kathryn Kerby-Fulton, and Andrew Cole have written extensively about the *Constitutions* and a review of their respective arguments regarding the aim and scope of the *Constitutions* will assist in establishing Arundel's objective in developing legislative barriers to English translations of Scripture.

Nicholas Watson has argued that the *Constitutions*

as a whole constitutes one of the most draconian pieces of censorship in English history, going far beyond its ostensible aims of destroying the Lollard heresy and effectively attempting to curtail all sorts of theological thinking and writing in the vernacular that did not belong within the pragmatic bounds set by earlier legislation. (Watson 1995, 826).

He affirms that the seventh constitution's ban on the translation of "any text of the Scripture" (Arundel 192) "was intended in the widest sense, to include even single verses translated in written form as well as the Wycliffite Bible itself, often thought of as its

main target” (Watson 1995, 829). Because of the broadly based attack on any vernacular theological writing that contained a translated verse of Scripture, Watson asserts that

[i]t was thus inevitable that, in trying to eradicate the heresy—by censoring out of existence the discussion, writing, and preaching by which it was sustained both at its home base Oxford and elsewhere—the Constitutions should have had considerable implications for texts and writers not aligned with Lollard views, and indeed for the whole intellectual life of fifteenth-century England. (Watson 1995, 826)

On that account, Watson concludes that Arundel’s *Constitutions* contributed to the shift from Ricardian to Lancastrian cultures and led to the emergence of vernacular theological writing that “explicitly characterised itself in terms of imitation, caution, and respect for fourteenth-century *auctores*” (Watson 1995, 823).

Watson’s first premise that Arundel’s *Constitutions* were chiefly concerned with eradicating vernacular theological writing is challenged by both Somerset and Cole. In “Professionalizing Translation at the Turn of the Fifteenth Century: Ullerston’s *Determinacio*, Arundel’s *Constitutions*,” Somerset examines Richard Ullerston’s contribution to the 1401 Oxford Translation Debate, *Tractatus de translatione Sacrae Scripturae in uulgare*. Somerset argues that

scholars have had some trouble explaining why Richard Ullerston defended vernacular translation in the debates over biblical translation at Oxford around 1401, at just about the same time that *De Heretico Comburendo*<sup>10</sup> was enacted and that William Sawtry (prematurely, just before the enactment of the legislation) became the first heretic to be

burned in England, on charges of Lollardy.<sup>11</sup> Admittedly Ullerston's *Tractatus de translatione Sacrae Scripturae in uulgare* was written six years before 1407, when the *Constitutions* were drafted in Oxford; but scholars' efforts to convince one another that these six years made a crucial difference, when the reaction against Wycliffites' use of English goes back to the 1370s, have met with only limited success.

(Somerset 2003, 148)

However, as Watson observes, in Ullerston's participation in the Oxford Translation Debate, the writer "adopted a stance as distanced from Lollardy as it is from the conservative views that he opposed" (Watson 1995, 841). Moreover, as Somerset indicates, "Ullerston includes the conventional submission to the approval of Holy Church" (Somerset 2003, 148). What is more, his defence of vernacular Scriptural translation is undertaken in a scholastic setting eight years before the promulgation of Arundel's *Constitutions*, and it is carried out in Latin and so unlikely to pose a danger to lay readers. As Anne Hudson asserts, "it may also be important to differentiate between the audiences in view: to advocate the legitimacy of biblical translation to an academic audience in Latin, even in 1401, was a different matter from proclaiming its necessity to the laity in English" (Hudson 1988, 417).

Ullerston may have been writing at the same time as the enactment of *De haeretico comburendo*, but he was also writing before the anti-Lollard statute of 1406,<sup>12</sup> the drafting of the *Constitutions* at Oxford in 1407, and the promulgation of the *Constitutions* in 1409. In addition, Maureen Jurkowski shows that the repressive environment in England between 1407 and 1409 was increasing at a steady pace: "Even

after the [1406] statute's lapse in October 1407, Arundel continued to issue commissions from the chancery in 1408 and 1409 ordering that proclamations be made warning that all Lollard preachers would be arrested" (293). In January of 1409, it was decided that an Oxford university committee of twelve members would examine the writings of John Wyclif and create a list of errors found in these works. As a result of the committee's endeavours, a quantity of suspect works was burned at Carfax in 1410 (Jurkowski 285). The increasing number of Lollard executions further indicates that the Church's campaign against the Lollards continued to escalate after 1409. Between 1401 and 1410, the Lollards William Sawtry and John Badby were burned (Royle 65). The year 1415 witnessed the executions by burning of Richard Turming and John Claydon. Sir John Oldcastle was hanged and burned in 1417. William Taylor was burned in 1423. Between 1423 and 1522, as Trevor Royle notes, "34 Lollards suffered the extreme penalty, while over 400 abjured their beliefs rather than face the flames" (65).

Despite the evidence that the Church's anti-Lollard activities were increasing in severity during the years after Ullerston defended vernacular Scriptural translation in 1401, Somerset indicates that his defence sheds light on Arundel's objectives in drafting the *Constitutions* in 1407. She maintains, for example, that "Arundel is far less interested in controlling lay access to clerical knowledge than in seeking better control *within* his authoritative group" (2003, 146-147). In addition, she argues that even where Arundel's *Constitutions* may

seem to be concerned with lay access, Arundel's focus is on attempting to produce the conditions—well patrolled internal hierarchies, narrowed

bounds of orthodox opinion, sanctions on employment—that would make possible [a] sort of perfect censorship of the clergy....

(Somerset 2003, 147)

However, the advantage of this sort of perfect censorship of the clergy is that it hinders lay access to heterodox ideas. As Orme notes, Arundel “issued constitutions for his province, the two-thirds of England that lay south of the River Trent” (Orme 2006, 222). Both the University of Oxford and Cambridge University are within the bounds of this province. Arundel’s eleventh constitution indicates that the masters at the universities were required to inquire on a monthly basis if any student or students at the university proffered any conclusion or proposition contrary to the Catholic faith (Arundel 194). In addition, the sixth constitution prohibits the reading of any treatise or book written by Wyclif or others<sup>13</sup> (Arundel 192). The fact that the Lollard heresy among the laity first took root at Oxford strongly suggests that Arundel’s efforts to restrict theological discussion at the universities were designed both to exert control within his authoritative group and to prevent the dissemination of heterodox opinions from the universities to the laity. His constitutions that deal with preachers (constitutions one through four), for example, display a similar interest in controlling lay access to heterodox ideas by limiting the content of preachers’ teachings. These four constitutions make plain that Arundel wishes to control the content of preachers’ teachings, and the first constitution specifically addresses the content of preachers’ teachings in English.

To support her position that Arundel was not principally concerned with limiting lay access to heterodox ideas in the vernacular, Somerset points to the fact that “higher-status laity continued with impunity to own books of the prohibited kinds” (Somerset

2003, 153). However, as Duffy affirms, “among the aristocracy and higher gentry [there was a] growing number all over the country who secured for themselves the convenience and the status symbol ... of a private chaplain” (131). Having a chaplain in one’s household means having a mediator and, therefore, the likelihood of Scriptural misreadings or misinterpretations of vernacular theological writing is greatly reduced. Indeed, Arundel’s tenth constitution addresses the issue of chaplains born outside of the province of Canterbury and declares that such persons must present letters from their ordinaries and character references from other bishops in their dioceses before they may be admitted to celebrate within any diocese in the province of Canterbury (193).

Like Somerset, Cole expresses misgivings about the degree to which Arundel’s *Constitutions* are concerned with lay access to heterodox opinions in the vernacular. He asserts, for example, that “[f]rom the Blackfriars Council to Arundel’s *Constitutions*, the problem was the heretical message, not the medium” (83). Moreover, Cole notes, “bishops did not question suspects on their views of vernacularity” (Cole 83). First, it is worth remembering that the Blackfriars Council did reveal an ecclesiastical concern about the medium as well as about the heretical message. Specifically, Archbishop Courteney asked John Aston to reply to his questions in Latin because of the laypeople present (Kelly 17). To the displeasure of the Archbishop, Aston replied in English (Kelly 17).<sup>14</sup> Second, Archbishop Arundel’s *Constitutions* do concern themselves with the medium of the heretical message. The seventh constitution, for example, specifically forbids the translation of “any text of the Scripture into English or any other tongue, by way of book, libel or treatise” (Arundel 192), and it commands that “no man read any such book, libel or treatise ... in part or in whole, privily or apertly” (Arundel 192).

Arundel's objection to lay access to vernacular theological writing is also made known in Thorpe's *Testimony*.<sup>15</sup> When Thorpe points out that a particular sermon written in both English and Latin is owned and prized by many (85: 1984), Arundel expresses his displeasure forthrightly: "3oure cursid sect is bysie, and it ioieþ gretli, to contrarie and to distrie þe priuilege and þe fredam of holy chirche" (Thorpe 85: 1994-1996). Since a claim of clerical privilege—that is, a claim of clerical exemption from the jurisdiction of the secular courts in Medieval England—was proved by reading (Firth 183), Arundel's suggestion that circulating copies of Lollard sermons threaten the benefit of clergy underscores his concerns about laypeople reading such material in the vernacular precisely because the average layperson would be unable to read Latin well enough for the copies of heterodox sermons in Latin to pose a significant threat. Therefore, as Vincent Gillespie observes, theological writing in English, like the sermon Thorpe mentions, was a "potential threat to the authority and power of the clerical institution with [its] espousal of 'lewed clergie' (lay learning)" (403). Furthermore, it makes sense that lay access to Lollard opinions in the vernacular would be a concern for Church authorities because Lollards both advocated lay access to such writings and disseminated them. Accordingly, the English version of Wyclif's *De officio pastorali* (c1400) defends vernacular Scriptural translation. The English tract writer defends the translation of Scriptural texts into English on the grounds that "freris han tauzt in englonð þe paternoster in englisch tunge, as men seyen in þe pley of zork, & in many opere cuntreys" (429). He then goes on to ask: "siþen þe paternoster is part of matheus gospel, as clerkis knowen, why may not al be turnyd to englisch trewely, as is þis part?" (*De officio* 429-430).

On the subject of Biblical translations, Kerby-Fulton suggests that Arundel's *Constitutions* were not so draconian after all because "[i]t is, indeed *biblical translations* (not interpretations) that contemporaries cite as needing licenses" (2006, 399). Nevertheless, because Arundel places restrictions on the translation of any Scriptural text, it follows that he is also placing restrictions on writings that contain Biblical exegesis, as these would include brief quotations from Scripture followed by Biblical exposition. Accordingly, Love's 1410 *The Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ*, a series of heavily glossed Gospel meditations, was submitted to Arundel for examination prior to its dissemination. Kerby-Fulton also indicates that "[t]here is no evidence that authors of interpretive works of orthodox intent felt ... constrain[ed by the *Constitutions*]" (2006, 399). Although she observes that Bishop Reginald Pecock's dates fall later than the scope of her study (Kerby-Fulton 2006, 189), his reference to the *Constitutions* early in *The Reule of Crysten Religioun* (c1443) contradicts her position that there is no evidence that orthodox vernacular theological writers felt constrained by the legislation. As we will see in Chapter 7, Pecock very clearly indicates that he is willing to censor any material with which Church authorities find fault. Kerby-Fulton also comments on the ostensible lack of enforcement of Arundel's fifth constitution. This constitution placed restrictions on the religious instruction schoolmasters could provide to grammar school students. Citing Orme's 1973 study *English Schools in the Middle Ages* (Orme 1973, 254), Kerby-Fulton argues that "there is no evidence of enforcement in the schools" (Kerby-Fulton 2006, 398). However, in his 2006 study *Medieval Schools: From Roman Britain to Renaissance England*, Orme complicates Kerby-Fulton's assessment of his evidence about the enforcement of the fifth constitution when he asserts that "although



the extent of enforcement is unclear, the fact of its production is significant” (Orme 2006, 222). He explains that the aims of the fifth constitution are significant because they show that “[j]ust as the Lollards anticipated the Reformation in some respects, so they stimulated the Church authorities to address the teaching of children in a way that presaged what would happen in the sixteenth century” (Orme 2006, 222).

What Kerby-Fulton’s study is trying to show is that, because complete censorship was impossible in a manuscript age (2006, 17), our modern understanding of what Arundel’s *Constitutions* actually accomplished runs the risk of becoming so extreme that we neglect highly original and exciting fifteenth-century vernacular theological works in our efforts to locate evidence of censorship in works produced after the promulgation of Arundel’s *Constitutions*. She asserts, for example, that “[t]he creativity of Kempe, Julian (who was writing her Long Text after the Constitutions), the translators of ... Catherine, ... and many more therefore must ‘count’ in any calculation of English vernacular theology and its adventurousness” (Kerby-Fulton 2006, 401). This is an important point, but it requires qualification: the vernacular theological works by Margery and Julian, and the English translation of Catherine of Siena’s *Dialogo della divina provvidenza* (*Dialogue Concerning Divine Providence*), show evidence of self-censorship on the part of annotator, author, and translator. As we have seen, Margery’s red ink annotator glosses material that has the potential to be read in subversive ways.

Like the red ink annotator of Margery’s *Book*, Julian demonstrates a tendency towards conservatism in the production of the Long Text. The date of Julian of Norwich’s Long Text is uncertain and is tentatively dated after 1393 to c1415 (Wogan-Browne 233). Even if the text is written after the promulgation of the *Constitutions* in

1409, Julian censors portions of the Short Text's Prologue (c1382-1388) that she includes in the Long Text. For example, where she indicates in the Short Text that "[t]here es a visiou schewed be the goodenes of God to a devoute womann and hir name es Julyan that is recluse atte Norwyche" (79), she indicates in the Long Text that "[t]hese Revelations were shewed to a simple creature that cowde no letter" (41). As Kerby-Fulton notes, Julian suppresses the fact that she is a female in the Long Text (2006, 301). What is more, Julian identifies herself by the term *simple creature*, a term that Nicholas Love and others use in the fifteenth century to identify readers deficient in advanced theological training and requiring religious instruction from Church authorities. Julian's use of the term in her Long Text indicates that she is exhibiting precisely the kind of caution Watson suggests is a product of Church's repressive activities against heterodox theological opinions. Finally, the English translation of the Latin version of Catherine of Siena's *Dialogo della divina providenzza*, *The Orchard of Syon* (c1420-1440), is rendered safer and more conservative by its translator. As Watson notes,

The *Orchard of Syon*, for example, frames a translation of Catherine of Siena's sophisticated visionary theology, the *Dialogo*, with a prologue that presents the entire work as a mere pious meditation, "a fruytful orchard" divided by the translator into pleasant alleys and walkways which the reader can savor as she will; we could read this as an instruction to readers to feel, not think, their way through the text, but also as an attempt to shield a theologically adventurous translation from suspicious eyes.

(Watson 1995, 836)

These examples of self-censorship by an annotator, an author, and a translator unconnected to Lollardy support the view that Arundel's *Constitutions* had effects that extended beyond their ostensible aim of controlling writers and works associated with Wycliffism.<sup>16</sup>

As Watson has shown, the *Constitutions* did not put an end to vernacular theological writing. He notes that while fifteenth-century lay readers of rank continued to read vernacular theological works of note from the fourteenth century (1995, 835), vernacular theological writers of the fifteenth century were generally writing translations or compilations that tended to simplify their sources and tended to be produced anonymously (1995, 833), or, like Lydgate, were writing hagiographical works. The question, then, is precisely what effect did the *Constitutions* have on vernacular theological writing? This thesis argues that the *Constitutions* influenced writers of vernacular theological works that treated important doctrinal matters to intensify their efforts to achieve clarity of meaning for simple readers and that these efforts are accompanied by a paring down of bold imagery, poetic form, and the use of fiction. Because the promulgation of Arundel's *Constitutions* represents one in a series of anti-Lollard activities on the part of the Church, this thesis examines the effects of earlier ecclesiastical repressions and legislative efforts on Lollard and non-Lollard works from the last quarter of the fourteenth to the middle of the fifteenth century. I argue that these earlier works reflect their authors' efforts to clarify meaning and, in some cases, demonstrate a paring down of bold imagery designed to limit interpretation, but these works do not demonstrate the pedagogical impulse to anatomise the topic under

discussion, accompanied by a striking absence of bold imagery, poetic form, and the use of fiction, that is discernible in works written after the promulgation of the *Constitutions*.

In Chapter 2, I argue that the Lollard advocacy of simple, direct, and plain language, and the Lollard objection to writing with non-Scriptural content develops out of the two principal camps of the medieval, pan-European truth-fiction controversy. I show that in the years preceding the *Constitutions* Lollard dialogue writers exhibit a readiness to employ literary devices as a means to persuade the simple reader effectively. The Lollard authors of these dialogues favour the didactic over the dialectic by producing exemplary texts that contain embedded interpretations and, consequently, limit the potential for misinterpretation. The Church's response to this phenomenon was a two-pronged approach that includes legislation restricting this kind of writing and vernacular theological writing by its own representatives that was carefully tailored to simple readers. Despite the orthodox side's efforts, it did not curb lay misreadings, and orthodox and Lollard writers exhibited an even fiercer tendency to tailor their writing for the simple reader and this tailoring meant, for both sides, an eschewing of literary features. As a result of the growing efforts of vernacular theological writers to insist on clarity of meaning, the Church clamps down even further and displays an extreme lack of tolerance for vernacular theological writing that concerns itself with profound doctrinal questions and that is adapted to untrained readers. Out of this historical context emerges the fifteenth-century cultural privileging of didactic secular works, such as romances, in the vernacular. Consequently, authors and editors, such as Lydgate and Caxton, openly advocate the reading of romances on the grounds that they are good sources of moral instruction.

In Chapter 3, I argue that the C version of *Piers Plowman* (c1385-87) is a response to Lollard-inspired rebel misreadings of the B version of the poem. To my twenty-first century mind, Langland's efforts to clarify doctrinal positions in the C-text have a constraining effect on the poem, as he pares down bold poetic imagery in favour of clarity of meaning. I show that Langland's text works as a good case study of what happens to English vernacular theological writing as a result of the Lollard movement and the Church's efforts to suppress it because Langland is revising his C-text at a time when Church authorities are endeavouring to enforce conformity of belief. In Chapter 4, I argue that *The Testimony of William Thorpe* (1407) serves as a Lollard reader's guide to remaining steadfast under ecclesiastical examination. Thorpe is writing before the promulgation of the *Constitutions* and, like the late fourteenth-century dialogue writers under discussion in Chapter 2, he employs literary features as means to clarify meaning. In his *Testimony*, he consciously develops those elements of his narrative that are consistent with saint's life narratives, particularly those of the *passiones*. He tailors his narrative to the lay readership he has in mind, and the points of commonality between his *Testimony* and the highly recognisable and culturally pervasive conventions of saints' lives function as signals to the reader that Thorpe's perseverance is worthy of belief and imitation.

In Chapter 5, I show that Nicholas Love's 1410 *The Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ* (henceforth *The Mirror*), a tool in the Church's campaign against Lollardy, serves as an orthodox reader's guide to Church teaching and that it is tailored towards simple readers. With his *Mirror*, Love produces heavily glossed Gospel meditations that make Scriptural translations less enticing to his readers. In order to control the course of

his readers' interpretation, Love inserts in-text signals that alert his untrained readers to pay special attention to the sections of his writing to which he gives prominence. In addition, to limit lay speculation about weighty doctrinal questions, Love excises material from his source, the pseudo-Bonaventuran *Meditationes vitae Christi*. In Chapter 6, I argue that despite the Church's efforts to prevent lay misreadings of vernacular theological writing by producing works of its own, lay readers are continuing to misinterpret orthodox theological works in the vernacular even when, like Love's *Mirror*, they are carefully tailored to untrained laypeople. Margery Kempe's *Book*, I assert, serves as a reader's response to Love's work. Margery's claims to orthodoxy frequently parallel Love's exposition of orthodox positions, and her meditative practice is based on Love's programme. Nevertheless, her emphasis on her own singularity represents a misreading of Love's narrative. In the final chapter, I show that, in response to the *Constitutions*, both heterodox and orthodox writers continued to produce vernacular theological works that dealt with weighty doctrinal questions, but they did so with increasing efforts to ensure clarity of meaning for simple readers who lacked clerical training. By this time, the fictional framework used early on even by Lollard writers is replaced by the tendency to anatomise one's subject matter. In this chapter, I examine the Lollard *Lanterne of Ligt* (c1409-1415) and Bishop Reginald Pecock's orthodox vernacular theology from about the middle of the fifteenth century. Both the heterodox *Lanterne of Ligt* and Pecock's orthodox theology in the vernacular display an urgency about spelling things out for lay readers. I argue that the Church's aggressive response to *The Lanterne of Ligt* and Pecock's orthodox vernacular theology—this despite of the

latter's open challenge to Lollard doctrine—further constrained vernacular theological writing by suppressing its writers, readers, and circulation.

## Chapter 2:

### “Controued Þoru Mannes Wit”: False Rhymes, Sinful Tales, Plain Speech, Misreading, and the Emerging Emphasis on Didactic Secular Writing in the Vernacular

My aim in this chapter is to provide an account of the historical context of the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries that ushered in a fifteenth-century cultural privileging of didactic secular writing in the vernacular. Noted literary critics, such as Watson, have pointed to a perceived aesthetic impoverishment in fifteenth-century theological writing in English without providing a comprehensive evaluation of what happened in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries and to what end. The fifteenth-century writers Thomas Hoccleve and John Lydgate hint at their creative inferiority when compared to the great fourteenth-century writer Geoffrey Chaucer,<sup>17</sup> but medieval writers and readers cannot be shown to indicate a similar dissatisfaction with fifteenth-century vernacular theological writing in English. Nevertheless, to my twenty-first-century mind, something is lost in the theological writing in English of the fifteenth century. Theological works, like the B-text of William Langland’s *Piers Plowman*, that employ bold imagery, exploit poetic form, use fiction, are open to interpretation, are dialectic instead of didactic could not be produced in the years following Archbishop Thomas Arundel’s 1409 *Constitutions*. Once the lines between heterodoxy and orthodoxy begin to harden, an insistence on clarity of meaning has a constraining effect on literature.

As I will argue at length throughout this thesis, the preoccupation with misreading created by the Lollard heresy led to the proliferation of written texts, both heterodox and orthodox, that were directed—often expressly—to the simple reader. This emerging class of readers—or listeners—were regularly characterised in the literature of the period



as simple readers or men and women of simple understanding because of their lack of formal theological training. Proponents of Lollardy initiated the production of writing directed to simple readers in plain language, and, in an effort to confute Lollard doctrine and uphold the teachings of the Church, the Catholic Church responded in kind. The Church's production of a simple doctrine directed to simple readers in the form of Nicholas Love's *The Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ* did not eliminate the misreading of theological material by laypeople. On the contrary, the Church's efforts to stamp out lay misreadings proved so ineffectual that the overtly anti-Lollard Catholic Bishop Reginald Pecock died condemned and in confinement *c*1459 (Scase *ODNB*) because he wrote a vernacular theology that made profound material, as his contemporary critic Thomas Gascoigne put it, accessible to laypeople in English. Pecock's approach in his programme of lay theological education paralleled the Lollard one, as numerous Lollard writings attest, because of his insistence on outlining and explaining doctrinal positions to the simple reader in plain language that he or she could easily understand. Because the Lollard emphasis on plain language in lay religious education emerges from the sect's engagement with the medieval, pan-European concern about the relationship between truth and fiction, what follows is an account of the various strands of the medieval truth-fiction controversy.

In the twenty-first century, writers and readers are very clear about what is meant by the terms *truth* and *fiction*. We use the term *fiction* to refer to works of the imagination, such as fables, legends, and myths; sometimes we use the term when we mean falsehood. The term *fiction* is much less frequently used in Middle English. Hoccleve and Lydgate use it in the first part of the fifteenth century to refer to lies.

Hoccleve explicitly contrasts truth and fiction in *The Regement of Princes*: “it soth is; it is no ficcioun” (RP l. 5136). Lydgate similarly uses the term *fiction* in *The Pilgrimage of the Life of Man*: “[t]her yt ys put sothfastly.. With-oute al symulacioun, Deceyt, or any Ficcioun” (PLM l. 6051, 6057-8). John Trevisa uses the term *fiction* in relation to poets in his 1398 translation of *De proprietatibus rerum*. Wynkyn de Worde’s 1495 printing of Trevisa’s text illuminates the particular context in which Trevisa uses the term:

Reciteth this also the blessyd apostle Poul in his epistles, sayeng that by thise thynges visybles, whyche ben made and ben visyble, man maye se and knowe by his Inward sighte Intellectuall the divyne celestyall and godly thynges whiche ben Inuisibles to this our naturall sighte. Deuowte doctours of Theologie or dyuinyte for this consyderacyon prudently and wysely rede and vse natural philosophye and morall, and poetes in ther ficcions and feyned Informacyons, vnto this fyne or ende, so that by this lyklyhode or simylitude of thynges visible our wit or our vnderstondyng spirytuely bi clere and crafty vtteraunce of wordes may be so well ordred and vttred that thyse thynges corporelles maye be cowplid with thynges spyrytuelles and thyse thynges visybles may be conioyned with thynges Inuisybles.<sup>18</sup> (*De proprietatibus rerum* 2)

In his assesment of how one comes to a deeper understanding of complex spiritual truths, Trevisa is allowing for the figural properties of language, but he is also connecting the concept of fiction with the notion of invented facts.

The late and infrequent use of the term *fiction* in Middle English intimates that Middle English people generally had a somewhat different understanding of the concept

of fiction. Michael Clanchy importantly observes, for example, that “the distinction between fact and fiction in writing . . . would not have been as sharp to medieval people, although they were very conscious of the moral difference between truth and falsehood” (251). If one considers the case of Chaucer’s depiction of St. Cecilia, for example, it is clear that the improbability of events presented as truth in the saints’ lives is inconsequential. Readers are meant to attend to the doctrinal truths promulgated in the lives of the saints. Chaucer maintains, for instance, that Cecilia’s executioner strikes her with “[t]hre strokes in the nekke” (*The Second Nun’s Tale* 526). Nevertheless, while Christian people work around her to absorb copious amounts of her blood with sheets, she lives for another three days “[a]nd nevere cesse[th] hem the feith to teche” (*SN* 538). The inconceivability of this episode is at once overshadowed by, and illustrative of, the truth of the Gospels that Cecilia neither ceases to bear in mind nor fails to teach until the moment of her death.<sup>19</sup>

To clarify, as Richard Firth Green argues, the term *truth* in the medieval context to which I refer “had inherited all the semantic complications that a prominent genealogy can bestow on such a word” (8). Green classifies the dozen or so chief fourteenth-century definitions of the word into four groups,<sup>20</sup> but it is the last two groups in his formulation that are most relevant to a discussion of the truth versus fiction debate in the later fourteenth century. Whereas Chaucer’s rendering of the life of St. Cecilia may be said to be deficient in what Green terms the “*intellectual senses*” of the word *truth* because it lacks a “correspondence to reality, accuracy, [or] exactitude” (9), Chaucer’s narrative is brimming with the “*theological senses*” of *truth* in that it affirms the established truths of the Christian religion (9). In this way, Chaucer’s life of St. Cecilia

serves as what Judson Boyce Allen calls “evidence of the medieval willingness to blur the distinction between fact and false, and to receive stories as true more on the basis of their significance ... than their verifiability” (260).

Because of this tendency to value the intellectual sense of truth less, one might expect to see a corresponding readiness among medieval people to esteem the creative exercise of the imagination, but this does not occur. The disinclination to value the creative activity of the imagination has been most discernible in Lollard writing of the late fourteenth century. In his treatment of the poetics of dissent from 1380 to 1590, Ritchie D. Kendall examines the methodology of proto-Protestant, or Lollard, writing that is contemporaneous with Chaucer. He argues that the chief impulse of what he terms “nonconformist art” is characterised by “a fear of fictionality in general” and a “latent and lamentable antipathy to the imagination” (89). In addition, he gives prominence to the antagonism between Lollard preachers and orthodox writers: “The medieval dramatist and the itinerant Lollard preacher vied for the loyalties of much the same audience, one created by the rise of the pious layman and his hunger for new and more engaging modes of devotion” (Kendall 50). Eamon Duffy comments on the larger doctrinal function of this medieval drama: “The Corpus Christi gild and the Pater Noster gild at York regularly mounted plays designed to teach the citizens the elements of the faith” (66). Moreover, as Bevington notes, “the Church cooperated fully in the production of the Corpus Christi plays and evidently regarded them as instructive religious drama” (228). It is Kendall’s findings, however, that concisely outline our current understanding of the writing of vernacular theological writing in the later Middle English period. This understanding envisions the emergence of a straightforward dichotomy between the Catholic Church’s

position on the appropriate nature of exemplary fiction and that of the Lollard opposition. It has become commonplace in studies of Middle English literature to call attention to the Lollard aversion to hagiography and Corpus Christi plays.<sup>21</sup> Kendall appears to laud the dramatic value of Lollard writings when he optimistically asserts that “these works are best understood not by marking (and implicitly condemning) their deviation from a canonical norm but by recognizing their autonomous integrity and unity as forms of a spiritual, internalized theater that on rare occasions may converge with mainstream literature” (Kendall 89). Nevertheless, he observes that, while Lollards are “[c]ommitted to a discovery of scriptural truth” (55), their “misgivings about the cycles manifest a distrust of all forms of religious devotion dependent upon man’s fiction-making capacity” (55).

This prominent conception of a neat demarcation between the pro-fiction Medieval Church and the anti-fiction religious reformers notwithstanding, many European, medieval literary works unconnected to Lollardy express doubt about the veracity of certain kinds of vernacular writing. Peter Damian-Grint describes the French prose-verse controversy in his analysis of the emergence of the preference for prose rather than verse in vernacular historical writing at the end of the twelfth and the beginning of the thirteenth century. In his treatment of Old French vernacular historical writing, Damian-Grint remarks that “verse was no longer considered serious enough to be used in historical writing” (172). Diana B. Tyson adds that audiences began to favour prose because “they mistrusted the veracity of verse” (Tyson 186). Thus, Gabrielle M. Spiegel observes that, in Nicolas de Senlis’s c1202 translation of the *Pseudo-Turpin Chronicle*, the writer maintains that where other writers “employed the deforming

medium of verse, producing only ‘lies’ and fictions, he will eschew verse and speak the truth” (Spiegel 56). In the preamble to his translation, for example, Nicolas is highly critical of vernacular histories in verse and associates them with lies:

Voil commencer l'estoire si cum li bons enpereires Karlemaine en ala en  
Espaigne par la terre conquere sore les Sarrazins. Maintes genz si en ont  
oi conter et chanter mes n'est si menconge non co qu'il en dient e chantent  
cil chanteor ne cil iogleur. Nus contes rimes n'est verais. Tot est  
mencongie co qu'il en dient....<sup>22</sup> (qtd. in Spiegel 55)

Spiegel notes that the mistrust of verse is rooted in the fact that it is not as straightforward as prose: “By contrast, verse (from the Latin *verto*, to turn), to the extent that it deviates from the straightforward path of prose, is a deviant linguistic practice, necessarily implicated in the convoluted ways of lying” (Spiegel 57). The poet of *La mort Aimeri de Narbonne* (c1180) makes exactly this claim when he criticises the *chanson de geste*:

Nus hom ne puet chanson de geste dire  
Que il ne mente là où livers define  
As mos drecier et à tailler la rime.<sup>23</sup> (qtd. in Spiegel 61)

In 1200, Buoncompagno da Signa, master of rhetoric at the University of Bologna, makes similarly critical remarks about the lack of veracity in versified written works: “Nam rithmi et metra sunt mendicata suffragia...” (qtd. in Dembowski 258).

In the preamble to his French language *Chronique* (c1350), Jean le Bel identifies the sorts of lies one might encounter in versified vernacular histories:

Qui veult lire et ouir la vraye hystoire du prœu et gentil roy Edowart, qui  
au temps present regne en Engleterre, si lise ce petit livre que j'ay

commencé à faire, et laisse ung grand livre rimé que j’ay veu et leu, lequel aucun controuueur a mis en rime par grandes faintes et bourdes controuvées, duquel le commencement est tout faulx et plain de menchongnes jusques au commencement de la guerre que ledit roy emprit contre le roy Philippe de la France. Et de là en avant peut avoir assez de substance de verité et assez de bourdes, et sy y a grand plenté de parolles controuvées et de redictes pour embelir la rime, et grand foison de si grands proesses racontées sur aucuns chevaliers et aucunes personnes qu’elles debveroient sembler mal creables et ainsy comme impossibles; par quoy telle hystoire ainsy rimée par telz controuueurs pourroit sembler mal plaisant et mal agreable à gens de raison et d’entendement. Car on pourroit bien attribuer, par telles parolles si desmesurées, sur aucuns chevaliers our escuiers proesses si outrageuses que leur vaillance en pourroit estre abessée, car leurs vrais fais en seroient mains creus, de quoy ce seroit dommage pour eulx, pourquoy on doibt parler le plus à point que on pœut et au plus prez de la verité.<sup>24</sup> (le Bel 1-2)

I quote this passage in its entirety because it represents le Bel’s most comprehensive statement about the association of poetry and lies. According to le Bel’s view, versified vernacular histories contain fabricated language and fictional noble deeds that are inserted in these works to embellish the rhyme and, presumably, to delight readers or listeners of the text. In contrast to the contrivers who write false histories, le Bel proposes to write “par prose ce que je ay veu et ouy recorder par ceulx qui ont esté là où je n’ay pas esté, au plus prez de la verité que je pourray, selonc la memoire que Dieu m’a

presté, et au plus brief que je pourray, sans nulluy placquier” (le Bel 4).<sup>25</sup> Le Bel does not identify the false, rhymed history of King Edward with which he finds fault, but he promises that his account of the King will remain as faithful to the truth as possible, and he proposes to accomplish this by way of straightforward prose and by resisting the versifier’s tendency to dress up or embellish his subjects. Thus, le Bel asserts that he will not lavish excessive praise or compliments upon anyone: “sans nulluy placquier” (le Bel 4).

Turning to English, in his *Prologue* (c1396-1400), Chaucer’s Parson makes plain his aversion to poetry when he asserts that he does not intend to tell his tale in verse. Specifically, he maintains that he is incapable of alliteration and that he respects rhyme only slightly more:

But trusteth wel, I am a Southren man;  
I kan nat geeste ‘rum, ram, ruf,’ by lettre,  
Ne, God woot, rym holde I but litel better;  
And therefore, if yow list—I wol nat glose—  
I wol yow telle a myrie tale in prose.... (*ParsPro* 42-46)

Here, the Parson suggests that telling a tale in verse would amount to obscuring the truth or falsifying his matter; therefore, he “wol nat glose” but will instead tell his tale in prose. The Parson’s association of poetry and falsification can be traced back to Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) who expressed the view that poets lie (Manning 505). The Parson does not dismiss the possibility that he can rhyme. After all, his *Prologue* is expressed in rhyme. He does, however, indicate that poetry deceives and, therefore, is not suited to the purpose of communicating virtuous matter. As Arvind Thomas explains, “[t]he



Parson's distinction between prose and verse and his emphatic preference for the former as the more appropriate means for narration may be understood in light of the documented trend in the later Middle Ages to treat prose as a mode rhetorically suited to address an audience about nonfictitious materials" (2012, 427).

Criticism of imaginative writing by writers unconnected to Lollardy is not limited to a disapproval of the capacity of verse to betray the truth in favour of a fine rhyme. Many orthodox Middle English writers take exception to certain kinds of fiction for an altogether different reason: these writers conspicuously employ verse to question the moral utility of romances and frivolous stories. William of Nassington begins the *Speculum Vitae*, composed sometime in the third quarter of the fourteenth century,<sup>26</sup> with a strongly worded warning:

I warne yhow first at þe bygynnynge,  
I wil make na vayne carpynge  
Of dedes of armes ne of amours,  
Als dose mynstraylles and iestours  
þat mas carpynge in many place  
Of Octouyane and Isambrase  
And of many othir iestes,  
And namely whan þai cum to festes.  
Ne of þe lyf of Beuis of Hamptoun  
þat was a knyght of grete renoun,  
Ne of Sir Gye of Warwyke,  
Al-if it myght sum men lyke,

I thynk my carpyngge sal noght be,  
 For I hald þat noght bot vanyte.  
 Bot þis sal be my carpyngge  
 To carp of mast nedefull thyngge  
 Þat sykirest es for saul and lyf  
 To man and womman, mayden and wyf.  
 Þarefore gode men þat er here,  
 Listens to me, and yhe may lere  
 How yhe sal rewell here yhour lyf  
 And gouerne wele yhour wyttes fyue;  
 How yhe sal folow Goddes wille  
 And know bathe gode and ille,  
 And what yhe sal chese and what forsake  
 And what way yhe sal to heuen take. (Nassington 1: 35-60)

As Ingrid J. Peterson has observed, “Nassington distinguishes his work from the episodic romances read as court entertainments” by emphasising that “[i]n contrast to such works, the *Speculum Vitae* has a moral purpose” (Peterson 82). He insists that his work will teach his audience to “know bathe gode and ille,/And what yhe sal chese, and what forsake/And what way yhe sal to heuen take.” Robert Mannyng of Brunne similarly begins his circa 1303 reworking in English of the Anglo-Norman *Manuel de Pechiez* by disparaging the tales and poems that men favour:

For lewdē men y vndyr-toke  
 On englyssh tunge to make þys boke.

For many ben of swyche manere  
 Þat talys and rymys wyl bleþly here;  
 Yn gamys, & festys, & at þe ale,  
 Loue men to lestene trotēuale:<sup>27</sup>  
 Þat may falle ofte to vylanye,  
 To dedly synne, or oþer folye;  
 For swyche men haue y made þis ryme  
 Þat þey may weyl dyspende here tyme,  
 And þere-yn sumwhat for to here,  
 To leue al swychē foul manere,  
 And for to kunnē knowe þerynne  
 Þat þey wene no synne be ynne. (Mannyng 43-56)

In Mannyng's view, popular fiction is problematic for two reasons. First, his insistence that "[l]oue men to lestene trotēuale" makes plain that certain kinds of tales and rhymes are trifles in his estimation (Mannyng 48). Furthermore, the experience of listening to such tales and poems is not simply tantamount to wasting one's time frivolously. Mannyng maintains that fashionable tales are not only devoid of moral substance; they actually lead their listeners into sin. Mannyng's dispute with popular fiction, then, has to do, not with fiction per se, but with its lack of virtuous content and its surplus of morally wrong ideas. In contrast to the "trotēuale" he censures, his collection of delightful exempla has a series of moral lessons at its core. In his study of lay didactic literature, Duffy describes this sort of morally illustrative fiction: "many didactic poems,

like Mannyng's *Handlyng Synne*, did mix entertainment with edification, by providing vivid and often amusing exempla as illustrations of their serious points" (69).

Like Mannyng, the anonymous author of the late fourteenth-century *The Mirrur* begins his work by declaring that romances are worthless: "Mani men it ben þat han wille to heir rede romaunce & gestic. Þat is more þan idelschip, & and þat y wil wel þat alle men it witen" (qtd. in Furrow 1997, 254).<sup>28</sup> While the author of *The Mirrur* concurs with Mannyng that such fictions represent trifles, he departs from Mannyng by associating romances with lies. Romances and related works are a problem "[f]or hii ben contrued þoru mannes wit, þat setten her hertes to folies & trufles as þe lier doþ" (qtd. in Furrow 1997, 254). Such works, according to this author, have no value precisely because they are invented by men and are thus "nouzt drawn out of holi writ" (qtd. in Furrow 1997, 255). In the *Prologue* to his *Tale*, Chaucer's Parson similarly affirms his objections to fiction. Citing Saint Paul's directive that Christians should not attend to fables (I Tim. 1: 4),<sup>29</sup> the Parson maintains that he will tell a tale that is full of "[m]oralitee and vertuous mateere" (*ParsPro* 38). Since the Parson aims to tell a morally instructive tale, and since, in his estimation, tellers of fables "weyven soothfastnesse" (*ParsPro* 33), he adopts a detailed guide to penitence as his matter.

Both the author of *The Mirrur* and Chaucer's Parson espouse the position that there is something illegitimate about fiction. *The Mirrur* indicates that it is the elaborately contrived language employed by the writer of fiction that raises a red flag: "He makeþ his speche queintliche þat it mai be delicious to mennes hering" (qtd. in Furrow 1997, 254). In like manner, the Parson intimates that the delight derived from fables is unlawful: "I wol ful fayn, at Cristes reverence,/Do yow plesaunce leefful, as I

kan” (*ParsPro* 40-41). This mistrust of delightful tales can be traced back to Augustine’s position, as expressed in *Civitate Dei* (c412-427), that truthful writing that edifies should be distinguished from lying fables that delight (Manning 406). In a similar vein, *The Mirrur* author maintains that his work “is profitable bope to lif & to soule” (qtd. in Furrow 1997, 254). In this way, the author of *The Mirrur* insists that the enjoyment of literature ought to come from “the satisfactions of using literature to further one’s understanding of right action or right belief” (Olson 20). What these texts tell us about the contemporary controversy concerning the moral utility of fiction is that there is no single motivating force behind the disapproval of fiction. For some, like Mannyng, content is what distinguishes good fiction from bad fiction; fiction is acceptable, even beneficial, as long as it focuses on expounding a moral message. For others, like the author of *The Mirrur*, fiction is always open to suspicion because of its close association with lies.

The competing medieval, pan-European criticisms of fiction generally belong to one of two camps. As I have already indicated, the first has no problem with verse or elaborately contrived language as long as the content of the work is morally instructive; the second views verse or elaborately contrived language as a problem because it distorts the truth. Lollard writing of the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries further develops the positions of these two camps. Lollards take exception to the content of writing that is not Scriptural, and they champion simple, direct, and plain language when they take aim at the long and windy tales they claim that the friars tell. The late fourteenth-century Lollard *Dialogue Between Jon and Richard* shares Mannyng’s

aversion to “trotëuale,” or trifling literature, but the dialogue’s author specifically targets the friars’ tales and characterises these as trifles:

But techinge of freres faileþ many weyes, for þei preche many tyme  
lesings or troufulinges or cronicles of þe worlde to plese more þe puple, so  
þat wat þei trowe more to plese þe pupul and wynne more monei, al if it  
harne þe soule, þat þei chargen and leuen Cristis lawe. (*JR* 15: 459-462)

The dialogue’s author indicates that the fables the friars tell are trifles and lies. He also suggests that these fables are problematic because they are too worldly and unscriptural. Similar to Mannyng, the dialogue’s author concedes that these mundane fables may be delightful to people but they endanger the souls of their listeners. Also like Mannyng, the dialogue’s author expresses strong feelings about content. In a typically Lollard move, the author of the dialogue breaks with Mannyng when he condemns the content of the friars’ fables because it departs from Scripture and, therefore, represents a trifle and a lie.

The oft-quoted, heterodox “Tretise of Miraclis Pleyinge”<sup>30</sup> (*circa* late fourteenth to early fifteenth century) evinces a strong disapproval of the artistic representation of theological truths, and, like *The Dialogue Between Jon and Richard*, it articulates its author’s objection to falsehood and lies. Pertinently, Kendall argues that Lollard opposition to the drama “is preoccupied more with methodology than subject matter” (Kendall 53). The central message of the treatise on miracles is that the fictional enactment of the works of God is commensurate with lying. The anonymous author of the treatise asserts, for example, that “...þese myraclis pleyinge been verrey leesyng as þei ben sygnis wiþoute dede and for þei been verrey idilnesse, as þei taken þe myraclis of God in idil<sup>31</sup> aftur þeire owne lust” (“Treatise” 101). The companion sins of falsity and

idleness, the author dramatically warns, are the principal snares of the devil: “And certis idilnesse and leesyng been þe most gynnys of þe dyuul to drawen men to þe byleue of anticrist” (“Treatise” 101). Accordingly, priests who “bysien hem aboute siche pleyis ... ben verry ypocritis and lyeris” precisely because they are the ones that “shulde been þe gynne of God to cacchen men to holden men in þe bileue of Crist” (“Treatise” 101). The fictional enactment of the works of God should be avoided because, as a falsehood, it does nothing to sustain a Christian’s faith.

The conventional object of Lollard criticism about fiction is the fables friars tell during sermons,<sup>32</sup> and the most common reason given for such criticism relates to the content of the friars’ stories, specifically that they stray from Scripture. An early fifteenth-century Lollard tract condemning mendicants furnishes another typical example of the Lollard antipathy toward friars’ fables:

When [þise freris] wandren aboute to preche, it semeþ þat þei louen more worldliche goodis þen heelpe of soulis þat þei visiten; & who dredip þat siche ordris ne ben brouzt in bi þe fend? þei leuen to proue bi goddis lawe hey3nesse of þingis þat þei preysen so; but bi talis byneþe bileeue, & bi bull of þe pope þei prouen hey3nesse of heere patroun & holynesse of here ordre.... (“Tractatus de Pseudo-Freris” 310)

The author of the “Tractatus de Pseudo-Freris” affirms that friars err by delivering sermons that deviate from Scripture and by including stories in their sermons that are undeserving of belief. A Lollard tract, “Of the Leaven Pharisees” (c1383), also criticises friars’ fables for being unscriptural and insists that friars tell these stories because of worldly concerns: “þei techen opynly fablyis, cronyklis, and lesyngis and leuen cristis

gospel and þe maundementis of god, and ... don þei þis principaly for worldly wynnynge, frendschipe or veyn name..." ("Of the Leaven" 16). Notably the tract writer also characterises the friars' fables as lies. Later in the tract, the author contrasts "trewe prechoris of þe gospel" with "prechours of lesyngis, fablis & cronyclis" ("Of the Leaven" 26). The late fourteenth-century Lollard tract "Hou þe Office of Curatis is Ordeyned of God" specifically targets saints' lives; its author argues that duplicitous curates misuse saints' lives in their sermons to justify their worldly lives. These false curates, the tract's author asserts, teach

fals cronyclis & fablis to colour here worldly lif þerby, & leuen þe trewe gospel of ihū crist;<sup>33</sup> for þei louen welle to telle hou þis seynt or þis lyuede in gay & costly cloþis & worldly aray, & 3it is a grete seynt. But þei leuen to teche þe grete penaunce & sorow þat þei diden after ward, for which þei pleseden god & not for here worldly lif, & þus þei make þe peple to wene þat worldly lif of prestis & veyn cost of hem & waste of pore mennus goodis plesip god & is vertuous lif, azenst cristis lif & his techynge & his apostlis also.... ("Office" 153)

The problem with saints' lives, this writer suggests, is a problem of emphasis. The content of a saint's life narrative should highlight the penitential process experienced by the relevant saint, but, as told by the false curate, the focus instead is on the worldly life of the individual described therein.

To recapitulate, the Lollard literature of the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries strongly indicates that the typical Lollard position about fiction is that it represents lies because its content is unscriptural. In addition to censuring the content of



friars' fables, Lollards condemn the language the friars employ when telling such tales. "The Rule and Testament of St. Francis,"<sup>34</sup> a tract that dates from the late fourteenth or early fifteenth century, criticises friars for telling long, windy tales instead of spreading the gospel in a straightforward fashion and in plain language: "And zit þei tellen not schortly ne plenerly þe gospel, & vices & vertues, & peynes and ioie, but maken longe talis of fablis, or cronyclis, or comenden here owen nouelries" ("The Rule" 50). In the English version of Wyclif's *De officio pastorali*, the author develops this argument when he condemns the friars for saying that "it is heresy to write þus goddis lawe in english... & make it knowun to lewid men" (*De officio* 429). The treatise's author points out that "crist & his apostlis tauzten þe puple in þat tunge þat was moost knowun to þe puple" (*De officio* 429). He further asks, "why shulden not men do nou so?" (*De officio* 429). To buttress his argument that lewd Englishmen should have access to a Bible that they can read in their own language, he cites the example of France where Bibles are accessible in the vernacular:

Also þe worþy reume of fraunse ... haþ translatid þe bible & þe gospels wiþ oþer trewe sentensis of doctours out of lateyn in-to freynsch, why shulden not englische men do so? As lordis of englond han þe bible in freynsch, so were it not azenus resoun þat þey hadden þe same sentense in englisch; for þus goddis lawe wolde be betere knowun & more trowid for onehed of wit.... (*De officio* 429)

The treatise's author indicates here that English lords already have access to the Bible in a vernacular tongue, so what is the harm, he wonders, in their having a copy in the vernacular of England? The benefit of an English Bible accessible to Englishmen is, the

author suggests, that God's law would be better known. More importantly, however, the treatise's author asserts that access to an English Bible would strengthen the English Christian's belief because it would bring about a unity in Christian thought. Lewd men would have access to Bibles they could read, and this access to Scripture would lead people to understand the Christian faith in the same way. This represents a striking argument, since it is precisely lay access to and misreadings of vernacular Scripture that prompt the Church to place legislative limitations on such access in the early fifteenth century.

The Lollard notion that lewd men and women should have access to Bibles they can read in their own language is closely associated with the sect's engagement in the medieval and pan-European truth-fiction controversy. As we have seen, earlier in the Middle Ages, some writers objected to poetry because it distorted the truth in favour of embellishing a rhyme. By contrast, other writers openly used rhyme to tell morally instructive tales whilst eschewing trifling fiction that leads readers and listeners into sin. Lollards further developed these two schools of thought by suggesting that fables with unscriptural content represented lies and by insisting that the friars' long tales failed to spread the truth of the gospel in a straightforward fashion in simple language. Consequently, Lollard polemical writing tended to expound theological opinions by employing verses of Scripture to support its arguments and by keeping its use of figurative language to a minimum. At the same time, as the lines between heterodoxy and orthodoxy hardened, orthodox writers too began to resist fiction, rhyme, and dramatic embellishments as they sought with increasing urgency to ensure clarity of meaning.<sup>35</sup>

Four notable Wycliffite dialogues emerge from this culture that insists on simplicity and clearness of expression: *The Dialogue between Jon and Richard*, *The Dialogue between a Friar and a Secular*, *The Dialogue between Reson and Gabbyng*, and *The Dialogue between a Clerk and a Knight*. These dialogues are highly animated and are unusual when compared to the many Lollard tracts or sermons that are “unremittingly serious-minded, grimly polemical with the message impersonally and sometimes censoriously purveyed” (Hudson 1993, liii). As I argue below, these dialogues stand out as Lollard artefacts because they exploit fiction in order to communicate their messages as clearly as possible. However, despite the fact that *The Dialogue Between Jon and Richard*, as I note above, specifically criticises the friars’ unscriptural tales, these dialogues do not address the fact that they are inherently unscriptural tales. Fiona Somerset has commented on the unusual characteristics of these dialogues:

Most notable is the dialogues’ common concern with staging a debate not only on the ostensible topic or topics under dispute, but on the issue of who has the right to speak and to be heard, and on what basis. A dialogue in which each disputant represents a type or class of person (as in JR,<sup>36</sup> FS, and CK), or an aspect or quality of personhood (as in RG), is obviously an ideal arena for such debate. Thus, Reson evaluates the force of reasoned argument, while the Knight advocates lay criticism of the clergy, and Jon (a secular university clerk) defends the importance of fraternal correction through sharp speech. In addition, the dialogues have in common a concern not only with the representative or exemplary qualities of their

disputants, but also of their arguments: the claims they make are, quite self-consciously, examples of how to make such claims.

(Somerset 2009, xv)

Although all four dialogues are extant in single manuscript copies, Somerset indicates that “three of the four are preserved in three of the best-known lollard compilations, heavily quarried by early editors and much studied by scholars” (Somerset 2009, xiii). She indicates that “[t]he inclusion of FS and RG in large anthologies suggests that they circulated among lollard readers” (Somerset 2009, xliv). All four dialogues were written during the years *c*1380 to *c*1420 (Somerset 2009, xiii), a period in which the Church was actively, and with increasing urgency, endeavouring to legislate conformity of belief as a means to combat the Lollard heresy. Under these circumstances of composition, these dialogues are remarkable precisely because they serve as fictional models of Lollard challenges to the Church’s authority. As Somerset asserts in her *Four Wycliffite Dialogues* proposal to the Early English Text Society, “by staging challenges to the Wycliffite disputant’s right to argue against the authority of the church, these dialogues provide exemplary self-justifications for the Wycliffite position” (Somerset 2007).

The late fourteenth-century *Dialogue between Reson and Gabbyng*<sup>37</sup> (Trinity College Dublin MS C.5.6), one of the two dialogues I intend to focus on in greater detail, is a free translation and adaptation of chapters one to twelve of Wyclif’s *Dialogus* between Veritas and Mendacium. Neither Wyclif’s *Dialogus* (*c*1379) nor *Reson and Gabbyng* is a carefully crafted literary disputation. Both Veritas and Reson give lengthy speeches, and Mendacium and Gabbyng offer very few lines by way of rebuttal. Hudson observes, for example, that *Reson and Gabbyng* “could easily be rewritten in the form of

a tract without dialogue” (Hudson 1985, 196). In a similar vein, in the introduction to his edition of Wyclif’s *Dialogus*, A.W. Pollard notes that “from a literary point of view [the *Dialogus*] is open to some criticism” (Pollard vi). Both of these works employ elements of personification by way of the names of their disputants, and both begin by proclaiming that Veritas and Reson stand for Christ and Mendacium and Gabbyng stand for the devil, but this use of characterisation soon breaks down when Veritas and Reson begin to refer to Christ in the third person. Pollard testifies to the exceptional popularity of Wyclif’s *Dialogus* when he observes that “no less than ten manuscripts [of Wyclif’s *Dialogus*] have come down to us, a greater number than any other of his works” (Pollard v). Somerset similarly remarks that “[a]mong all Wyclif’s works, the *Dialogus* seems to have been especially popular. There are more extant manuscripts of the *Dialogus* than any other work by Wyclif: twenty-two manuscripts contain all or part of the original Latin text, two more manuscripts contain a shorter Hussite redaction in five chapters know the *De triplici ecclesia*, and one contains seventeenth-century extracts” (Somerset 2009, xlix). Pollard’s assertion that “in the list of writings of Wyclif condemned in 1410 the *Dialogus* comes first” is noteworthy because it indicates that the work attracted particular attention from the Church (Pollard v, n.1).

As I note above, the use of characterisation in the English adaptation of Wyclif’s *Dialogus* breaks down early on in the text when Reson, who has been introduced to the audience as Christ (*RG* 43: 4), begins referring to Christ in the third person.

Nevertheless, this dialogue, and other Lollard ones like it, is notable as a Lollard document because it is a fictional dialogue, and Lollard writing consistently shows Lollards to be opposed to unscriptural fiction. Notwithstanding the Lollard opposition to

unscriptural fiction, in the years preceding the *Constitutions*, Lollard dialogue writers are employing literary features as a means to persuade effectively. *Reson and Gabbyng* is not an impartial dialogue where each disputant is given an equal opportunity to speak; instead, it represents a very unbalanced argument. Gabbyng's three counter arguments account for a total of seventeen out of the dialogue's three hundred and eighty-three lines. What is more, Gabbyng's first counter argument is not presented until line 264. Wyclif's *Dialogus* exhibits a similar imbalance: Mendacium does not get to present his side of the debate until chapter eight, and even then, he is allowed only three brief paragraphs during the remainder of this section of the debate in which to outline his counter arguments. Unlike other Middle English debates between representative figures, like *Wynnere and Wastoure* (c1352) for example, *Reson and Gabbyng* neither acknowledges the validity of anything Gabbyng has to say nor confers any positive attributes on him. Consequently, despite exploiting the framework of a dialogue, the *Reson and Gabbyng* author produces an exemplary, didactic work that suppresses the dialectic.

On the surface it seems contradictory that a Lollard text should be exemplary,<sup>38</sup> but an exemplary text is an efficient way of presenting a particular position to an untrained audience that one is trying to persuade. As Elizabeth Allen argues, exemplary narratives contain "embedded interpretations [that] curtail variation and imbue a narrative with a sense of inevitability" (Allen 5). By structuring his text as an exemplary dialogue, the *Reson and Gabbyng* author ensures that his text is didactic rather than dialectic. Because the speeches of the non-Lollard character are so limited in both number and length, the arguments of the Lollard speaker are made to appear more worthy of belief because he has more to say. In effect, the dialogue's author instructs his reader to accept

Reson's point of view rather than enabling the reader to arrive at his own conclusions based on logical argumentation. Whereas in the English version of Wyclif's *De officio pastoralis*, we encounter an author who suggests that access to vernacular Bibles will lead lewd laypeople to unity of belief, the author of *Reson and Gabbyng* clearly exhibits apprehension about the lewd reader's ability to come around to his way of thinking, so he shapes his text as an exemplary dialogue rather than a tract. As Elizabeth Schirmer explains, "Lollards and their opponents alike were ... equally concerned to contain and control, as well as to educate, lay readers" (Schirmer 2010, 3). As a dialogue, *Reson and Gabbyng* has a superstructure imposed upon it that controls the course the reader's interpretation of the text will take. In Reson's challenges to the Church's doctrinal positions, the dialogue offers model arguments that might be used to controvert the Church's claims, and it indicates that these Lollard assertions represent the correct doctrinal positions to espouse because of the disproportionate amount of dialogue devoted to Reson's point of view.

Because *Reson and Gabbyng* is so heavily indebted to Wyclif's *Dialogus*, it is worth noting that a crucial difference between Wyclif's work and *Reson and Gabbyng* is the names of the disputants. As Somerset observes, "Reson, of course, is not identical with what would seem the most direct vernacular equivalent for 'veritas', that is, truth" (Somerset 2009, xlix-1). Whereas Wyclif's *Dialogus* stages a debate between the allegorical<sup>39</sup> figures of Truth and Falsehood, the *Reson and Gabbyng* author acts out a debate between the figures of Reason and Falsehood. Somerset argues that "the relationship between reason and truth is what the author sets himself to explore and finally to anatomize" (Somerset 2009, 1). The relationship between theological truth and

reason is affirmed in *Reson and Gabbyng* and, to a lesser extent, in the other three dialogues.<sup>40</sup> The pairing of these two concepts in works designed to exemplify and justify the Lollard position is critically important. Stephen Lahey succinctly summarises the Lollard view of the relationship between reason and theological truth:

...[T]hroughout Wyclif's works on understanding the Bible, he rails against those who would use new-fangled logical tools to demonstrate the incompatibility of cold, clear Aristotelian reason with revealed truth. Every truth, however it might appear to be in conflict with Scripture, must be, if it is indeed true, found primarily in Holy Scripture. This, Wyclif contended, is because Scripture is the embodiment of the eternal logic of divine understanding, the source of all truth. Since God's knowing a thing to be true is that by which the thing is true, and since Scripture is the primary source of every truth in creation, "all law, all philosophy, all logic and all ethics is in Holy Scripture;" if our reason judges something to be so, the foundation for that judgment must rest in Scripture primarily, and only secondarily in the operation of created reason. (Lahey 2001, 345)

While there is no evidence to suggest that the Church reacted to the dialogues contained in *Four Wycliffite Dialogues*, Arundel's *Constitutions* and Nicholas Love's Church-sanctioned alternative to English Scriptural translations,<sup>41</sup> as I argue below, demonstrate that the Church specifically sought to challenge Lollard claims about the association between Scripture, reason, and theological truth precisely because these claims challenged the Church's authority and its traditions.



In his efforts to challenge the Church's dominion, the *Reson and Gabbyng* author invests heterodoxy with the authority the Church claims for itself by invoking reason and Scripture: "zif autorite be souzt, we han more autorite bi Crist þat is boþe God and man þen antecrist bi ony man. If þat resoun be chargid here, certis þe law þat Crist haþ zeuen acordiþ more to state of blisse and to state of innocens and mak iþ men to sauer heuenly þingis and to leue foule erþely þingis" (RG 51: 293-297). Reson later insists that the pope's law is meaningless unless God sanctions it and adds that, in the pursuit of God's approbation for a law of the pope, only reason and Scripture should be accepted as suitable sources of verification: "And as anentis þe popis lawe, it is nouzt but if þat God conferme it. And so reson wiþ Goddis lawe schuld oonly be acceptid here" (RG 51: 304-306). As Somerset explains, "[r]eason and Scripture are very frequently cited as a pair in Wycliffite writings as the necessary grounds for any legitimate argument" (Somerset 2009, 104 n. 305). Following Reson's insistence on the supremacy of reason and Scripture, Gabbyng advances his second counter argument: "Hit semiþ a presumpcioun þat men schulden telle siche nouelrie. But oolde custome of many seyntis schulden be holden as Goddis lawe, siþ a þousand men wolen witnesse azeins a fewe eritikis" (RG 51: 307-310). In this way, Gabbyng is shown to be espousing William of Ockham's view that "revealed laws take precedence over naturally known norms ... because revealed laws are contingent decrees of God" (Clark 16). In other words, Gabbyng challenges the Lollard position that doctrinal truths can be arrived at through Aristotelian reason. As an exemplar of how to dispute the Church's authority, *Reson and Gabbyng* gives the impression that the Church's justification for its own authority is feeble. As I have already indicated, by affording Gabbyng only three brief opportunities to make his point,

the dialogue suggests that he has very little to say by way of justification. What is more, Gabbyng is set up to lose the debate from the start. As in Wyclif's *Dialogus*, the Church's champion is called Falsehood, and, therefore, represents a signal to the untrained reader because his lack of credibility is highlighted from the outset. In this way, the dialogue's author exploits the use of allegory, though in a very underdeveloped fashion, to persuade his readers of the truth of his position.

Unlike Wyclif's *Dialogus* or *The Dialogue between Reson and Gabbyng*, the late fourteenth-century *Dialogue between a Clerk and a Knight*<sup>42</sup> (MS Cosin V.III.6) does "giv[e] the impression of a real argument" (Hudson 1985, 196). In addition, "[t]he opinions voiced by the disputants are those that would be expected from their professions" (Hudson 1985, 194). While *The Dialogue between a Clerk and a Knight* lacks the elements of personification allegory that are present by way of the characters' names in the *Dialogus* and *Reson and Gabbyng*, it nevertheless acts out a debate between a figure who represents the Church and a figure who represents the secular world. The dialogue contains dramatic qualities that characterise the work as distinct from many Lollard writings. Hudson comments on this aspect of the dialogue when she notes that the text testifies to "the skill of the dialogue writer: all the polemical points are made, the authorities cited and interpretations disputed, with a colloquial liveliness" (Hudson 1985, 198).

The appeal of *The Dialogue between a Clerk and a Knight* is not limited to its use of lively language. Like *Reson and Gabbyng*, it stages an exemplary challenge to the Church's authority. In particular, the Knight asserts that he wishes to learn about the pope's authority from the Clerk: "I hope to be wele tatz bi þe of þat matere þat we haue

spoken of” (CK 55: 33-34). In response, the Clerk affirms that he hopes to show the Knight that the authority of the pope cannot be denied by reason: “I hope I schall schewe þe openliche þat þe pope and þe clergi han siche powere þat it may nozt be wiþsaid bi no resoune” (CK 55: 45-47). Nevertheless, the Knight employs a typical Lollard strategy when he repeatedly accuses the Clerk of failing to defend his arguments with resoun: “now I se wele þat þou art at þi wittes ende. For be þin own wordes it semeþ þat þou ne canst no resoune ne skill for to defend þi cause” (CK 66: 417-419). The dialogue makes plain, however, that the Clerk does not mean to defend his arguments with Aristotelian reason, as Lollards would have him do. On the contrary, he implies that reason ought not to play a part in a discussion of the pope’s authority:

Lo, sir Knizt, what mischeue schuld fall, bot zeue þe pope and þe clergie were misti bi Goddes power, after þe gspell and þe lawes of holi chirche, to gouerne þe pepil to helþe of soule. And þerfor, sir, be wele war þat þou ne speke no more azaines holi chirch. For in gode faiþ it ne was neuer meri siþen þat a borell clerk, þat had lerned a littel to vnderstonde Latyn, schuld mell him of holi writt and of þe decrees and decretalles and þe popes lawe and his power. For þerwiþ ne haue ze nozt to done. And þerfor ze ne schuld nozt mell zow of men of holi chirch, bot liuen and kepe zoure degre and done as holi chirch teche zow. (CK 63: 308-317)

The Clerk intimates here that reason is irrelevant to a discussion of the pope’s authority because the pope’s authority is grounded in Scripture and the customs of the Church. In doing so, the Clerk affirms that he espouses the Ockhamist position that established theological traditions of the Church and Scripture are the sources of authority in doctrine.

In the concluding argument of the dialogue, the Knight takes aim at what he views to be the Church's misuse of Scripture: "It es litel wonder þof 3e ouerlede þe comone lewde pepil wiþ sich fals exsposiciones of holi writt" (CK 67: 446-448). *The Dialogue Between a Clerk and a Knight*, then, openly challenges the Church's traditions and its interpretive glosses of Scripture, and, therefore, provides its readers with model arguments to counter the Church's doctrinal claims. In addition, as in *The Dialogue of Reson and Gabbyng*, the heterodox disputant gets the last word and the orthodox disputant's counter arguments are considerably shorter than those of the Knight. By favouring the Lollard line of argumentation in this way, the dialogue exemplifies the Lollard view that the Church's authority is unjustifiable. Lest the lewd reader be inclined to side with the Church's representative figure, the Clerk, the dialogue's author has ensured that the Clerk's position seems untenable by strictly limiting his speeches in both number and length and by giving the Knight, the representative figure from the secular world, the last word. This dialogue is, then, scarcely a logical argument, but instead betrays a preference for didacticism over the dialectic. The dialogue's author exploits the form of the fictional dialogue in order to control carefully the course that his readers' interpretation will take. This may be a very meagre use of fiction, but, in the interests of clarity of doctrine for an untrained reader, it is profitably deployed.

Lollard doctrinal writing of the sort found in the dialogues and tracts, among other writings, elicited a strong institutional response. The 1401 statute, *De haeretico comburendo*, specifically targets Lollards because they instruct and inform people orally and in writing of teachings contrary to those of the Catholic faith and, thus, might incite people to rebel against the Church's authority. While the 1401 legislation commanded

that no one teach or write anything contrary to the Catholic faith, it did not put a stop to the promulgation of Lollard doctrine in English. In 1409, Archbishop Arundel formally issued his *Constitutions* in an effort to permanently extinguish the Lollard heresy. Somerset argues that while the “*Constitutions* had effects, ... [these were] nothing like the effects they claim to intend or that have been attributed to them” (Somerset 2003, 153). Furthermore, she maintains that the *Constitutions* “were ... much less than a fully implemented system of draconian censorship” (Somerset 2003, 153). And, yet, as Watson points out, there is a discernible change in vernacular theological writing in the years following the promulgation of Arundel’s 1409 legislation. This new era in Middle English literature, Watson asserts, is characterised by “the axiom that ‘fifteenth-century’ equals ‘inferior’” (Watson 1995, 823). David Lawton humorously describes this critical point of view as one that sees “fifteenth-century English poets as reverse alchemists transmuting Chaucerian gold into Lydgatean lead” (Lawton 761). Both Watson and Lawton problematise this critical position to a certain degree. Watson highlights the fact that Margery Kempe is often referred to as “a fourteenth-century mystic” even though she is writing in the 1430s (Watson 1995, 823). In like manner, Lawton notes that “[m]odern scholarship has done much to show that Lydgate and particularly Hoccleve were at least highly competent versifiers (though there is a curious oscillation between high and plain styles)...” (Lawton 762). He further suggests “that the uncertain metrical oscillations between high and plain styles reflect ... two impulses, in part contradictory, that constitute the public sphere [of the fifteenth century]: elevation, social and stylistic, and the desire to address all people in the plain accents of speech” (Lawton 793). It is my view that the desire to address a public in plain and simple language emerges directly

from the Lollard heresy of reading and related concerns, both heterodox and orthodox, about the potential for lay readers to misread profound theological matter that concerned important doctrinal questions but was tailored to an untrained readership.

To be sure, the Lollards' emphasis on lay access to Scripture in the vernacular, coupled with their "ambitious attempt to ensure the broad distribution of [English Scriptural translations]" (Wogan-Browne 92), motivated Arundel's prohibition of the translation of any Biblical verses. Arundel's *Constitutions* indicate, however, that he was not only reacting against heterodox dissemination of Scripture in English; he was also responding to Lollard claims—made available in English to a lay public in both oral and written forms—about the relationship between theological truth and reason. Arundel's preamble to his *Constitutions* dismisses the arguments of those who presume to challenge the Church's authority:

It is a manifest and plain case, that he doth wrong and injury to the most reverend council, who so revolteth from the things being in the said council once discussed and decided; and whosoever dareth presume to dispute of the supreme or principal judgment here in earth, in so doing incurreth the pain of sacrilege, according to the authority of civil wisdom and manifold tradition of human law. Much more then, they, who, trusting to their own wits are so bold to violate, and with contrary doctrine to resist, and in word and deed to contemn, the precepts of laws and canons rightly made and proceeding from the key-bearer and porter of eternal life and death, bearing the room and person not of pure man, but of true God here in earth; which also have been observed hitherto by the holy

fathers, our predecessors, unto the glorious effusion of their blood, and voluntary sprinkling out of their brains, are worthy of greater punishment, deserving quickly to be cut off, as rotten members, from the body of the church militant. (Arundel 187)

Arundel finds fault with those who “trus[t] to their own wits” and criticise the Church because, in doing so, they erroneously challenge the pope’s laws that have “been observed hitherto by the holy fathers, our predecessors.” According to Arundel, the Christian faith is a faith grounded in the customs of the Church. The laws of the pope ought to be accepted not because they are fathomable but because they are issued by the pope. As both the head of the Church and as God’s representative on earth, the pope “bear[s] the room and person not of pure man, but of true God here in earth.” Later in the preamble, Arundel reiterates the Church’s position that “the sound doctrine of the church [was] determined from ancient times by the holy forefathers” (Arundel 188). In the tradition of Ockham, then, Arundel holds that revealed truth trumps truths reached through the process of Aristotelian reason.

Arundel does not simply censure those who reason about the Christian faith; his fifth constitution explicitly identifies and prohibits the kind of disputation exemplified in *The Dialogue between Reson and Gabbyng* and *The Dialogue Between a Clerk and a Knight*. Specifically, Arundel’s fifth constitution forbids schoolmasters from allowing the children they instruct to “to dispute openly or privily concerning the catholic faith, or sacraments of the church” (Arundel 192). Arundel’s eighth constitution also prohibits disputation, but it does so in a way that underscores the Church’s view that God and the laws of the Church transcend Aristotelian reason:

Item, For that Almighty God cannot be expressed by any philosophical terms, or otherwise invented of man: and St. Augustine saith, that he hath oftentimes revoked such conclusions as have been most true, because they have been offensive to the ears of the religious; we do ordain and specially forbid, that any manner of person, of what state, degree, or condition soever he be, do allege or propone any conclusions or propositions in the catholic faith, or repugnant to good manners<sup>43</sup> (except necessary doctrine pertaining to their faculty of teaching or disputing in their schools or otherwise), although they defend the same with ever such curious terms and words. For, as saith blessed St. Hugh of the sacraments, “That which oftentimes is well spoken, is not well understood.” (Arundel 192-193)

Arundel here proclaims that God cannot be explained by Aristotelian reason, and he forbids people from attempting to prove or disprove any doctrine related to the Catholic faith. His eleventh constitution declares that it is the monthly responsibility of the heads of the colleges at Oxford to determine whether any scholar has “holden, alleged, or defended, or by any means proponed, any conclusion, proposition, or opinion, concerning the catholic faith, or sounding contrary to good manners, or contrary to the determination of the church, otherwise than appertaineth to necessary doctrine” (Arundel 194). Simply stated, Arundel’s eighth and eleventh constitutions aim to put an end to the use of reasoned arguments by Lollards to undermine the Church’s authority.

Arundel’s *Constitutions* sought to eliminate its chief targets—heretical preaching and Scriptural translation—by way of examination by an ordinary. It was illegal to preach or to produce a translation of Scripture without receiving the approval of a



diocesan bishop or provincial archbishop. These examinations, as Thorpe indicates in his *Testimony*, were rigorous investigations of the subject's orthodoxy. As far as orthodox preachers were concerned, they were free to translate and gloss passages from Scripture in their sermons. As Watson notes, "Arundel never attempted to prevent preachers from translating and expounding biblical passages in their sermons, even though he did drastically restrict the topics such expositions could cover" (Watson 1995, 828). Arundel's *Constitutions* are not the only tool the Church used after 1409 to combat the Lollard heresy and to enforce conformity of belief. Nicholas Love's *The Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ* (henceforth *The Mirror*) served as an orthodox alternative to English Scriptural translations and a challenge to Lollard doctrines. In c1410, Love submitted *The Mirror* to Arundel as per the *Constitutions*, and Arundel inspected it, approved it, and then decreed that it be widely circulated for the religious instruction of the faithful.

As I argue in Chapter 5, Love begins *The Mirror* by claiming apostolic authorisation for his heavily glossed Gospel translations, suggesting that his text is a counterpart to the Bible. Later in *The Mirror*, Love minimises the allure that vernacular Scripture might have for his lay readers by calling attention to the shortcomings of the Bible. For example, Love focuses on the lack of information about Christ's youth contained in the canonical Scriptures. Like Arundel, Love also challenges the heterodox view that an understanding of theological truth can be reached by way of Aristotelian reason. Love affirms that the Lollards err in their criticism of the Church because they adhere too rigidly to the association between reason and theological truth. He asserts that Wyclif's teachings on the Sacrament of the altar are erroneous because Wyclif reached

these conclusions as a result of being deceived by his great learning and his knowledge of philosophy (Love 236). In addition, Love urges his readers to accept the wisdom of the Church; he intimates that Church doctrine, such as the doctrine of the Trinity, represents the established theological tradition of the Church and is based on revealed truth. Most importantly, Love openly directs *The Mirror* towards an untrained audience of “lewde men & women & hem þat bene of symple vndirstondyng” (Love 10). As a result of Love’s glossing of his Gospel translations for simple readers, he imposes a superstructure on his text that instills in *The Mirror* an embedded orthodox interpretation. As an orthodox instrument to combat the Lollard heresy, *The Mirror*, like Arundel’s *Constitutions*, seeks to prevent the lay intellectualisation of the Christian faith and aims to prevent unlettered readers from directly interpreting Scripture or musing about profound doctrinal questions.

In the fifteenth century, there is a discernible shift in writing practices that initiates an immensely different literary culture from the one that had thrived under Chaucer, Gower, Langland, and others in the 1380s and 1390s. Watson argues that Arundel’s legislation was “successful in limiting the quantity and scope of fifteenth-century religious writing” (Watson 1999, 345). By extension, shaping theological truths within the structures of fiction would become an extremely hazardous enterprise because, as Arundel put it, quoting St. Hugh, “[t]hat which oftentimes is well spoken, is not well understood” (Arundel 193). Owning such works could be similarly dangerous. Hudson cites the example of the late fifteenth-century heresy trial in which “a copy of *The Canterbury Tales* was produced for the prosecution” (Hudson 1985, 142). Thomas Hoccleve (c1370-c1450) illuminates the reasons for the marked absence of what I

perceive to be boldly imaginative fifteenth-century vernacular theology that exploits fiction. In his “Address to Sir John Oldcastle” (c1415), Hoccleve chastises his subject for “slipp[ing] in to the snare of heresie” because the latter “[climbed] ... in holy writ so hie” (“Oldcastle” ll. 26, 194). Importantly, Hoccleve also argues against the Lollard practice of settling doctrinal questions using reasoned arguments. Accordingly, Hoccleve maintains that the Christian cannot justify his faith by reason:

Lete holy chirche medle of the doctryne  
Of Crystes lawes/ & of his byleeue,  
And lete alle othir folke/ ther-to enclyne,  
And of our feith noon argumentes meeue.  
For if we mighte our feith by reson preeue,  
We sholde no meryt of our feith haue. (137-142)

Hoccleve not only asserts that Christians ought not to attempt to resolve doctrinal questions with Aristotelian reason; he insists that Christian faith must be belief without the verification of reason or it has no value. A few lines later, Hoccleve overtly discourages Christians from intellectualising faith:

Oure fadres olde & modres lyued wel,  
And taghte hir children/ as hem self taghte were  
Of holy chirche/ & axid nat a del  
‘Why stant this word heere?’/ and ‘why this word there?’  
‘Why spake god thus/ and seith thus elles where?’  
‘Why dide he this wyse/ and mighte han do thus?’  
Our fadres medled no thyng of swich gere:

þat oghte been a good mirour to vs. (153-160)

Hoccleve's "Address to Sir John Oldcastle," like Arundel's *Constitutions* and Nicholas Love's *The Mirror*, renders meddling with Scripture and the lay intellectualising of faith off limits.

Strikingly, when Hoccleve again advises Oldcastle to meddle no more with Scripture, he counsels him to turn instead to romances:

Bewar Oldcastel/ & for Crystes sake  
Clymbe no more/ in holy writ so hie!  
Rede the storie of Lancelot de lake,  
Or Vegece of the aart of Chiualrie,  
The seege of Troie/ or Thebes/ thee applie  
To thyng þat may to thordre of knyght longe!  
To thy correccioun/ now haaste and hie,  
For thow haast be out of ioynt al to longe. (193-200)

The notion that literature can assist in the moral instruction of its readers is, as we have seen, not new to Hoccleve; however, the idea that reading about Lancelot can help the heretic to correct his ways is unusual. Whereas William of Nassington and Robert Manning of Brunne are critical of romances because they find them to be characterised by frivolity, Hoccleve suggests that romances are safer reading materials than Scripture. Oldcastle is better off reading about the siege of Troy than getting mixed up with theological questions.<sup>44</sup> Hoccleve instructs Oldcastle to apply himself to things like the stories of knights because they belong to the order of knighthood; this enjoinder neatly recalls the Clerk's advice to the Knight in the Lollard *The Dialogue Between a Clerk and*

*a Knight*: “And þerfor 3e ne schuld no3t mell 3ow of men of holi chirch, bot liuen and kepe 3oure degre and done als men of holi chirch teche 3ow” (*CK* 63: 315-317). Much like Hoccleve, the orthodox disputant advises the heterodox knight to stop meddling with issues relating to the Church and to start minding his rank.

Just as Hoccleve suggests that romances are good material for Oldcastle to read because they tell the stories of knights and Oldcastle is a knight, Lydgate attributes a similarly didactic purpose to his vernacular poem in the Prologue to his *c*1412 *Troy Book*. In the Prologue, Lydgate explains Henry V’s motivation for having him compose the *Troy Book*:

For God I take hyghly to wytteneſſe  
That I this wîrk of hertly lowe humblesſe  
Toke upon me of entencioun,  
Devoyde of pride and preſumpcioun,  
For to obeie withoute variaunce  
My lordes byddyng fully and pleaſaunce,  
Whiche hath deſire, ſothly for to ſeyn,  
Of verray knyghthod to remembre ageyn  
The worthynes, yif I ſchal nat lye,  
And the prowesſe of olde chivalrie  
By cauſe he hath joye and gret deynté  
To rede in bokys of antiquité,  
To fyn only vertu for to ſwe  
Be example of hem and alſo for to eſchewe

The cursyd vice of slouthe and ydelnesse. (*Troy Book* 69-83)

Henry V, Lydgate informs us, wishes to read a tale of the chivalry of long ago because he wishes to remember the worthiness of knighthood. More importantly, Henry V enjoys reading romances for the purpose of pursuing virtue. Lydgate's patron reads stories about chivalry, the poet asserts, because the characters in them are exemplary and teach him not only to be virtuous but also to eschew sin. As I have already shown, this is precisely the argument William of Nassington makes about his *Speculum Vitae* when he distinguishes his writing from the "vayne carpynge" of romances (Nassington 1: 36). In her study *Expectations of Romance*, Melissa Furrow argues that "the reading of romance developed differently on the English side of the Channel in the context of Lollardy" (Furrow 2009, 190). She asserts that "Hoccleve's advocacy of romance-reading implies Lollard opposition to it" (Furrow 2009, 196-7). Pertinently, Hope Emily Allen and Anne Hudson have both commented on the anti-romance commentary in a Lollard tract in Cambridge University Library, MS li. 6.26, p. 131:<sup>45</sup> "But summam seiþ, I preie þee leeue þees spechis And telle me a mery tale of giy of warwyk, Beufiz of hamtoun, eiþer of Sire (??), Robyn hod, eiþer of summe wel farynge man of here condiciouns and maners" (qtd. in Allen 140, n. 15). In light of this evidence, Furrow affirms that "the Lollard position on reading for layfolk is pro-Scripture, anti-romance, [and] the orthodox position becomes pro-romance, anti-Scripture" (Furrow 2009, 197).

Furrow's argument that "what makes fifteenth-century romance distinctive is the degree to which it insists it is instructive" accords with both Hoccleve and Lydgate's assertions about the instructive value of romances (Furrow 2009, 196). William Caxton also makes claims about the didactic function of romance when, at the end of the fifteenth

century, he argues that Sir Thomas Malory's romances are exemplary works for all readers: "humbly bysechyng al noble lordes and ladyes wyth al other estates, of what estate or degree they been of, that shal see and rede in this sayd book and werke, that they take the good and honest actes in their remembraunce, and to folowe the same" (Caxton xv). As Hoccleve's injunctions to Oldcastle suggest, the fifteenth-century impulse to view romances as suitable and morally instructive material for lay readers proceeds from the fourteenth-century proliferation of, and lay access to, profound theological material in English. Whereas fourteenth-century lay readers had access to a wide variety of vernacular theological works that were open to misinterpretation, lay readers of the fifteenth century were encouraged to read secular fiction and to find moral instruction there because it lacked the potentially confusing profound matter found in doctrinal writing.

There is thus a palpable transition from the beginning of the fourteenth century, when many writers expressed the view that romances were trifling stories devoid of moral substance and inclined men towards sin, to the first quarter of the fifteenth century, when romances were identified as a suitable source for lay moral instruction. Secular stories proved to be an ideal alternative to vernacular theological writing because they could be both exemplary and unscriptural. Romances could teach readers "good and honest actes" without creating the danger that those same readers would engage in Scriptural interpretation or reasoning about the Catholic faith (Caxton xv).

Correspondingly, at the end of the fourteenth century, the Lollard truth-fiction controversy led to a proliferation of heterodox texts geared towards simple readers in plain language that deployed Scripture to support their campaign to challenge the

Church's authority. The Church's counterattack, which itself involved adapting religious works for untrained readers, generated a literary culture in which anxieties about misreading led to an aesthetic impoverishment of vernacular theological writing as religious writers favoured clarity of meaning over bold imagery, the exploitation of poetic form, and the use of fiction. Vernacular theological writing of the early fifteenth century exhibits an unwillingness to be open to interpretation and is especially didactic as opposed to dialectic. Yet as we will see, the Church's participation in this new literary culture did not curtail the potential for misinterpretation. Instead, it created an even greater urgency among heterodox and orthodox writers to pare down embellishment as they insisted on clarity; consequently, works such as *The Lanterne of List* and Reginald Pecock's writings either seek to anatomise their subjects or to communicate their meaning painstakingly by degrees. As the Church's enforcement of the *Constitutions* later in the fifteenth century demonstrates, its anti-Lollard activities effectively put a stop to the kind of vernacular theological writing that concerned itself with important doctrinal questions but was tailored to simple readers in plain English.



### Chapter 3:

“For Holy Churche hoteth alle manere peple/Vnder obedience to be, and buxum to þe lawe”: Langland’s Self-censoring in The C-text and Misreadings of *Piers Plowman*

In William Langland’s C-text of *Piers Plowman* (c1385-87),<sup>46</sup> the poet exhibits anxieties about his readers’ engagement with the sort of theological interpretation that, as noted in the previous chapter of this thesis, Hoccleve so memorably discourages thirty years later in his 1415 “Address to Sir John Oldcastle.” Langland’s C-text represents a major revision of the oft-studied B-text of *Piers Plowman*. Derek Pearsall comments on the nature of the poet’s revisions in C when he observes that “[t]he C-reviser seems to have worked piecemeal, outward from certain cores of dissatisfaction rather than systematically through B from beginning to end” (Pearsall 1978, 10).<sup>47</sup> In *Pursuing History*, Ralph Hanna III describes Langland’s process of revision as one in which “it is at least inherently likely that traces of authorial activity intermediate among the accepted ‘versions’ have survived” (Hanna 203). In the ABC sequence of the poem, Hanna finds revealing evidence of the “authorial activity” that accounts for the different versions of *Piers Plowman*:

Unlike Chaucer, Langland never considered withdrawing (or retracting) the poem, already in some measure estranged from him in a world of social production. Instead, Langland reedited it to insist upon what he meant—as if through an on-the-page gloss to enshrine and fix the text in opposition to those ways in which it had already been (mis)read.

(Hanna 241)

What Langland “meant,” to borrow from Hanna, is a murky point in question, as evidenced by the fact that his poem became associated with the leaders of the Peasants’

Revolt in 1381. References to Piers and to Dowel and Dobet are preserved in a letter to insurgents that is attributed to John Ball:

Iohon Schep, some tyme Seynte Marie prest of York, and now of Colchestre, greteth wel Iohan Nameles, and Iohan the Mullere, and Iohon Cartere, and biddeth hem that thei bee war of gyle in borugh, and stondesth togidre in Godes name, and biddeth Peres Ploughman go to his werk, and chastise wel Hobbe the Robbere, and taketh with yow Iohan Trewman, and alle his felawes, and no mo, and looke schappe you to one heved, and no mo.

Iohan the Mullere hath ygrounde smal, smal, smal;

The Kynges sone of hevene schal paye for al.

Be war or ye be wo;

Knoweth your freend fro your foo;

Haveth ynow, and seith 'Hoo';

And do wel and better, and fleth synne,

And seketh pees, and hold you therinne;

And so biddeth Iohan Trewman and alle his felawes.

(qtd. in Godden 1990, 17)

As Godden notes, Ball's "use of the name Piers Plowman could be a coincidence, but the phrase 'do wel and better' shows that [he] was indeed thinking of Langland's poem" (Godden 1990, 17). Importantly, many scholars see Langland's revisions and additions in C as evidence that he aimed "to discourage association of his work with either Lollard views or the actions of the 1381 rebels" (Middleton 1988, 6).<sup>48</sup> Accordingly, Pearsall

affirms, “[t]his latest revision seems to have been prompted by an urgent desire to clarify the meaning of the poem and to reshape certain sequences, perhaps partly as a result of the trend of contemporary events and the new context in which they placed the poem, in particular the Peasants’ Revolt of 1381 and the increasing suspicion of Wycliffite ideas” (Pearsall 2010, 158).<sup>49</sup> Hanna similarly remarks that “[a]s a great many commentators have always argued of the C version, it is often obsessively interested in thematic clarity, in getting down the sense the poet intended” (Hanna 240-1).

One of the chief aims of this chapter is to investigate exactly what it is about the C-text of *Piers Plowman* that causes critics to view it as evidence that Langland attempted to distance his work from the actions of the 1381 rebels and to clarify doctrinal positions that seem either unclear or potentially subversive in the B-text. Related to this aim is the issue that many of the same critics who view Langland’s C-text in this way also note that the C-text is an artistically inferior poem to the B-text. Although there is no evidence that medieval people viewed Langland’s C-text as aesthetically impoverished, in my twenty-first century judgement Langland’s C version of the poem pares down the use of bold poetic imagery in particular instances in order to limit the potential for misinterpretation and to clarify doctrinal positions. Pearsall similarly argues that “generally there seems a concern in C to tone things down, using less vivid images where those of B might be inflammatory and introducing more defensively orthodox citations and allusions” (Pearsall 2003, 21). Contemporary chronicles provide evidence that the rebels misread *Piers Plowman*, and Langland’s C revisions indicate that he responded to these misreadings. This chapter will also explore the ways in which the major revisions to the poem—and to a lesser extent some of the minor ones—support the

view that the poem suffers as a result of Langland's changes. To begin, I will consider the dating of the poem and the historical events that triggered Langland's C-text revisions. It is my contention that Langland's emendations and deletions in the C-text are the aesthetically impoverishing result of the author's desire to limit the potential of his text to be misread and his accompanying wish to dissociate himself and his work from ideas affiliated with the Peasants' Revolt and the Lollard movement. As I note in Chapter 1, Watson has observed that the age of innovation in Middle English religious writing ended abruptly at the beginning of the fifteenth century and was replaced by an era that was characterised by, among other things, "caution" (Watson 1995, 823); he also highlights the well-established view that "'fifteenth-century' equals 'inferior'" (Watson 1995, 823). It is my view that the C-text of *Piers Plowman* works well as a case-study of what happens to English letters as a result of the Lollard movement and the authorities' efforts to stifle it. Although Langland is working on the C-text well before the clampdown on heterodox ideas becomes fully determined, he is nevertheless revising at a time when the authorities' efforts to enforce conformity of belief is gaining momentum.

I want to be clear here about what I am arguing: the C version of *Piers Plowman* can offer significant insights into what happens to English letters in the years leading up to the culminating restrictions of Arundel's *Constitutions* because Langland is writing during the early stages of restriction and this leads to the production of the C version. There are powerful voices on the other side of this question: Hudson has pointed out that portions of the C version seem to argue against the view that Langland was censoring his work to dissociate the poem from Wycliffite views:

Its potential as a ‘revolutionary’ poem was apprehended from an early date; but of clear sympathy with specifically and unequivocally Wycliffite positions its author, in any version, gives little sign; any local indication that Langland in C was tempering his words to avoid any implication of such sympathy seems to be countered by other local indications of the reverse. (Hudson 1988, 408)

However, the C version, while it is a major revision of B, is an incomplete revision. I have already cited Pearsall who notes that the process of revision in C is unsystematic and marked by fits and starts. He further observes that “[t]he later passus are relatively little altered, and the last two not at all” (Pearsall 1978, 10). Regarding the incomplete nature of the C-text, Elizabeth D. Kirk and Judith H. Anderson have observed that “whether the C-reviser was satisfied with [the final few sections] or whether his work was interrupted (by death, for example) we do not know” (Kirk and Anderson viii). As a result of the incomplete nature of the C revisions, I am not arguing that the C version can offer us a complete picture of what happens to English religious writing in the period leading up to 1409, but I am asserting that several of its major revisions—including the absence of Haukyn the Actif Man and the blunted additions to Christ’s lofty speech after His Harrowing of Hell—demonstrate the effects of the early efforts to restrict heterodox ideas. There is sufficient evidence, as I will show, that the C version demonstrates that Langland worked to distance his poem from ideas associated with the Lollard movement and the 1381 rebels, and that his efforts to do so had negative aesthetic repercussions. To be clear, I am not making any claims about Langland’s aesthetic aims, but I am suggesting that his endeavours to ensure clarity of meaning in the C-text had aesthetic

consequences; specifically, Langland's C version of the poem tones down or omits significant instances of bold imagery contained in the B version.

In order to determine what triggers Langland's insistence on clarity of meaning in the C version, it is first necessary to comment on the date of the poem. In the introduction to his critical edition of the B-text of *Piers Plowman*, A. V. C. Schmidt suggests that the date of the C version is most likely 1384-5 (Schmidt xxv). Derek Pearsall similarly argues that "the C-text was probably complete by 1387, when Thomas Usk, who was executed in 1388, borrowed some phrases (which are in C only) in his *Testament of Love*" (Pearsall 1978, 9).<sup>50</sup> In like manner, E. Talbot Donaldson asserts that "we seem to have a definite *terminus ad quem* for the C-text—or for a considerable portion of it" (Donaldson 19). Hudson likewise observes that "C was evidently written after Wyclif's views had been condemned in the Blackfriars Council of 1382" (Hudson 1988, 402).<sup>51</sup> As we consider the events that may have provoked Langland's revisions in C, Hudson wisely suggests that we not allow our knowledge of Arundel's later legislation—*De haeretico comburendo* of 1401 and the *Constitutions* of c1407-1409—to interfere with our reading of the poem: "It is ... important not to read back into the 1380s and 1390s our knowledge of the 1401 and 1407 legislation" (Hudson 1988, 402). Acknowledging Hudson's caveat, it is my contention that the C revisions anticipate the sort of tailoring for simple readers that we see in the fifteenth century. Therefore, it will be the focus of the next section of this chapter to establish precisely what it is that Langland is reacting to as he puts together the C version of the poem. Accordingly, I will examine the anti-Wycliffite activities of the successive Archbishops of Canterbury, Simon Sudbury and William Courteney, that take place from 1377 to 1382; I will highlight relevant elements

of the Peasants' Revolt of 1381 and its connections to Lollardy; and I will discuss the Wonderful Parliament of 1386 in which the king's prerogative was successfully challenged by the commons.

Joseph H. Dahmus remarks that the first record of Wyclif's being examined for his conclusions occurs in 1377, when he was "directed to present himself at St Paul's in London on 19 February 1377, to answer to charges of heresy, and he had come, not alone but in the entourage of the duke of Lancaster" (Dahmus 54). Dahmus later observes that "[a]s events transpired, ... Gaunt and William Courteney, the spirited bishop of London, became involved in a bitter altercation, which ignited the smouldering anger of the assembled crowd against the duke, and the meeting broke up in a riot" (Dahmus 55). Henry Ansgar Kelly notes that Wyclif's examination in 1377 "was broken up by a riot, sparked by a quarrel between Courteney and Gaunt as to whether Wyclif should be seated or remain standing, and apparently not reconvened and concluded" (Kelly 4). Thus, Wyclif's first examination ended amidst much confusion. A year later, in 1378, Wyclif was summoned to appear before an episcopal tribunal at the archbishop's residence in Lambeth. As Dahmus observes, "[t]he pope had himself ordered this trial and had instructed the English hierarchy to question Wyclif on the nineteen heretical propositions said to be his, to seize him if he were found guilty, and to hold him pending further directions" (Dahmus 55). Nevertheless, Wyclif's second examination came to an abrupt end when "Sir Lewis Clifford, an emissary from the queen mother, 'pompously' announced himself and forbade the prelates to pass formal judgment" (Dahmus 55). Significantly, Kelly argues that the 1378 examination of Wyclif does not conform to established procedures for such investigations:

The usual papal commission of this sort ordered the commissioners to try the suspect on the charges and arrive at a definitive sentence. But we find deviations here from such a procedure. In the first bull, *Regnum Anglie gloriosum*, the pope orders Sudbury and Courteney to inform themselves secretly about the matter, and if they find it true that Wyclif has been holding and preaching the reported propositions, a list of which the pope encloses, they are to arrest and imprison him and endeavor to receive a confession from him concerning the propositions; then, revealing their actions to no one, they are to send to the pope a copy of such confession and of whatever else he may have said or written to "induce," or prove, the propositions, and to send as well an account of all else they have done in the matter, while keeping Wyclif in chains and awaiting further instructions. (Kelly 5)

Kelly further asserts that "the pope was contemplating [a] sort of violation of due process ... [in] attempting to secure statements of heterodox beliefs from a defendant without making formal charges" (Kelly 5). In a similar vein, Kelly shows that the Archbishop of Canterbury, Simon Sudbury, actually disobeyed the pope's orders by not pursuing Wyclif in the way that the pope had instructed:

Wyclif was to be warned that whether he presented himself or not, the process would go forward against him, as the papal letters directed and required. We note that the archbishop was following the pope's first letter to the extent of ordering a secret investigation, but his conformity ended there. Rather than awaiting the result of the investigation, and, if it turned



out to verify the allegations against Wyclif, having him arrested and transferred under guard—or, if he became suspicious and escaped, to cite him to appear before the pope—the archbishop ordered him cited to appear by his own volition for a local trial, while alleging that this was what the pope had ordered. (Kelly 8)

The Archbishop's soft approach to the Wyclif problem here was never concluded by Sudbury because he was murdered during the Peasants' Revolt.

A renewed effort to investigate Wyclif's ideas was undertaken by Courteney, now Archbishop of Canterbury, when the Blackfriars Council was convened on 17 May 1382. Among others, Philip Repingdon, Nicholas Hereford, and John Aston were summoned to appear. As Kelly notes, from the outset of this round of examinations, Courteney repeatedly contravened procedure:

As we will see, they do not seem to have been formally charged with holding the condemned theses. In a normal inquisition (one that followed the *ordo juris*), the defendant would either confess or deny the charges; if he denied them, the judge would attempt to prove them by documents or by the written testimony of witnesses; and if he lacked sufficient evidence of actual guilt, but could establish only the *fama* of guilt—that is, testimony of trustworthy persons who believed him guilty—the judge could order purgation. This meant that the defendant was required to swear, not to his orthodox belief or to agreement with actions taken by a synod or tribunal, but rather to his innocence of the offenses charged against him. He would also have to find a stipulated number of neighbors

or associates who would swear to his credibility and good reputation.

(Kelly 11-12)

In addition, Aston was improperly condemned not based on evidence that he wrote, preached, or taught erroneous opinions in the past

...but because he refused to confess, as Holy Church teaches, that the body of Christ is truly there in its own corporal presence, and for holding that the substance of material bread or wine remains after consecration; moreover, he contemptuously refused to declare his faith concerning the twenty-four heresies and errors solemnly condemned by the Church and publicly required by the heresy inquisitor, having been canonically admonished.... (Kelly 18).

Thus, Courteney's violation of due process meant that the defendant's refusal to make a statement of faith was taken as silence, and this in turn was taken to be a sign of guilt (Kelly 16). At the same time, the defendant was improperly asked to give an account of his private opinions. As Kelly points out,

The 1382 procedure... was intended as a new kind of purgation, not of past offenses against orthodoxy, but of present unorthodox belief. John Aston's desire to remain silent should have been honored, but it was not. He did not think of Joan of Arc's brilliant defense, when Bishop Cauchon required her to recite the Our Father and Hail Mary. She replied that she would only do so in confession. Only a confessor had the right to inquire into one's thoughts and beliefs, and whatever was disclosed had to remain under the seal of secrecy. (Kelly 27)

It seems likely that Courteney's violation of due process became public knowledge. The Archbishop specifically asked Aston to respond to his questions in Latin because of the laymen present, but Aston replied in English, and Courteney apparently regarded this as Aston's attempt "to incite the people against the archbishop" (Kelly 17). In addition, Philip Repingdon and Nicholas Hereford, excommunicated *in absentia* because of their failure to appear before Courteney at the appointed time, posted a written appeal to the Pope on the doors of two London churches. Significantly, they posted their appeal on the door of St. Paul's; the cross outside the church was one of the major preaching locations in London. Although the content of their appeal is unknown, as Kelly muses, "[i]t would be interesting to know if they included Aston's implicit objection, that the church authorities had no business judging secret thoughts or forcing a person to speculate on matters that one could not be proved to have written or spoken about in the past" (Kelly 18). We may never know how publicly known Courteney's 1382 violations of the requirements of *ordo juris* were among the people; however, Aston's testimony in English and Hereford and Repingdon's appeal to the Pope suggest that it was known around London. Moreover, Courteney's violation of due process is a marked contrast to Sudbury's soft approach to Wyclif in 1377 and 1378.<sup>52</sup> Put simply, Courteney's violations of the requirements of *ordo juris* indicate that he was being heavy handed in his examinations of suspected heretics during the Blackfriars Council. This heavy-handedness, once publicly known, would surely have incited fear among many, including writers and thinkers.

Courteney's heavy-handedness at the Blackfriars Council appears to be, in part, a response to the events of the Peasants' Revolt. In her article "Corpus Christi and Corpus

Regni: Heresy and the Peasants' Revolt," Margaret Aston clarifies the association of the Peasants' Revolt and Wyclif's ideas by exploring the relationship between the Peasants' Revolt and Wyclif's arguments about the nature of the Eucharist. Aston cites the example of the Cistercian, William Rimington, who associates the Peasants' Revolt of 1381 with the Wycliffite heresy concerning the Eucharist:

Talis doctrina pestifera verisimiliter fuit causa nuper movens  
communitatem ad insurgendum contra regem et proceres huius regni . . .  
Et tercio . . . londiniis que est capitalis civitas regni, et in festo corporis  
christi de quo hec secta sentit erronee permisit deus abiectissimam  
communitatem liberam potestatem habere, quasi ostendens  
regi et regno causam sue offense quia videlicet heretica pravitas in istis  
partibus confovetur vel saltem non permittitur per locorum ordinarios  
castigari. (qtd. in Aston 1994, 37 n. 85)

This pestiferous teaching was probably a cause that lately moved the community to rise against the king and nobles of this realm ... And in London, the capital city of the kingdom, and on the feast of Corpus Christi, about which this group (secta) has erroneous opinions, God allowed the most despicable community to have complete control, as if to show king and kingdom the cause of their offence, namely, for supporting heresy in these parts, or at least not allowing it to be punished by the church authorities. (Aston 1994, 37)

This interesting attribution of the atrocities of the Peasants' Revolt to a failure of authorities to aggressively combat the Lollard heresy neatly explains Courteney's vigorous and improper examinations of suspected heretics on, as Aston observes, the ecclesiastical anniversary of the rising. The Peasants' Revolt occurred during the feast of Corpus Christi in 1381 (Aston 1994, 3). In like manner, the Blackfriars Council was convened on May 17, a couple of weeks before Corpus Christi on June 5, 1382, and continued into July 1382.

Evidence from contemporary chronicles indicate that a number of Wycliffite ideas resonated with the rebels. David Carlson maintains that "whatever may have been the Wycliffite allegiances of the rebels in 1381, the notion that the rebellion had been a lollard rebellion was soon and widely asserted" (Carlson 24). Justice concurs that the idea "that [Wyclif's] teachings, if not his person, gave impetus to the rising was the view of contemporary chroniclers" (Justice 1994, 75). Justice advances a persuasive argument that Wyclif's ideas about clerical possession led directly to Sudbury's murder and the subsequent symbolic exhibition of his severed head on London bridge. Justice affirms that, to Wyclif, the canon-law maxim *Bona ecclesiae sunt bona pauperum* meant that the possessions of the church actually belonged to the poor, and that churchmen were there, not to own these goods, but to oversee and administer them (Justice 1994, 84 & 93). In addition, Justice shows that it was Wyclif's position that laypeople must censure and judge clerics who are guilty of expending the goods of the church (Justice 1994, 93). When the 1381 rebels insisted, in their letters and in the rebel cry at the Savoy,<sup>53</sup> that they were not thieves, "the rebels were not evading an accusation but leveling one: that the goods being thrown into the river were the fruits of unjust possession" (Justice 1994, 92).

When Sudbury was taken hostage, the rebels called him a *traditor*,<sup>54</sup> and Justice argues that this connects the rebels with the Wycliffite challenge to clerical possession because “the accusation simply does not make sense if it means something like collusion with the French” (1994, 99). Wyclif’s writings insisted that clerical authority comes from following Christ’s example, especially Christ’s poverty, and the symbolic display of Sudbury’s remains suggests that he represented, in the eyes of the rebels, an inversion of this model (Justice 1994, 98 & 99). Sudbury’s head, complete with its red cap, was stuck on a spike along with many others, but his head was in the middle and was elevated above the others, as if to reverse the image of the Crucifixion where Christ hanged between two thieves (1994, 99).

From the years 1377 to 1382, then, England witnessed Sudbury’s soft and ineffectual efforts to restrain Wyclif which were followed by the violence of the Peasants’ Revolt in which Sudbury was killed, and finally Courteney’s apparently retaliatory violations of due process aimed at eliminating the Lollard heresy. Four years after the Blackfriars Council, the crown experienced a meaningful challenge to its authority. In the Parliament of 1386, the king’s prerogative was challenged when “Michael de la Pole, chancellor (minister with overall responsibility to Richard for government), was impeached by the commons on charges of corruption and abuse of office” (Scase 2007, 65). The lords and the commons boldly “claimed that ancient law provided that it was lawful to depose a king if he did not rule in accordance with law and good counsel” (Scase 2007, 65). The commons insisted that “Richard ...be mindful of this fact and remove incompetent counsellors” (Scase 2007, 66). As a result of the demands of the commons, Richard was forced to acquiesce. In 1387, Richard assembled

a panel of judges to consider the legality of the claims and demands of the 1386 parliament. In the end, the judges determined that the 1386 parliament's demands violated the king's prerogative and amounted to treason (Scase 2007, 65-66). Thus, in 1387, Richard overtly reasserted his power. Later in this chapter, I discuss the ways in which Langland engages with the question of the king's prerogative in the C version of *Piers Plowman*.

The historical circumstances of production of Langland's C-text, then, include the Peasants' Revolt, increasing suppressive activity on the part of the Church against Wyclif's followers, and a powerful reassertion of the king's prerogative. It is my view that Langland's response to these events, particularly to the Lollard-influenced rebel misreadings of the B-text which I address later in this chapter, manifested itself as a desire to eliminate or make plain parts of the poem in an effort to achieve clarity of meaning. In my judgement, these endeavours to limit interpretation directly result in an impoverishment of the poem's imagery. A significant body of scholarship on the C-text of *Piers Plowman* has been devoted to this impoverishment of the poem's imagery when compared with the imagery of the B version of the poem. Kirk and Anderson state that the B-text "has generally been preferred, at least on aesthetic grounds, since the nineteenth century" (Kirk and Anderson viii). Margaret E. Goldsmith affirms that "[e]ven those who prefer the C-version—and there are certainly some good new passages in it—will probably admit that the B-text is more brilliant, lively, enigmatic and audacious" (Goldsmith 1). She further argues that "[t]he value of the C-text is that it shows the working of the poet's mind more openly" (Goldsmith 91 n. 2). In the same vein, Pearsall maintains that "indeed it is quite possible to show that in vividness,

picturesque concretion and ‘poetic’ quality [C] is often inferior [to B]” (Pearsall 11).

Additionally, Pearsall observes that “C may be less exciting, but it makes better sense” (Pearsall 11).

Donaldson and Pearsall investigate the changes Langland makes to the opening lines of the Prologue of *Piers Plowman* and comment in their respective studies on the ways in which Langland’s C revision prunes moments of poetic embellishment.

Consider the following parallel passages from the Prologue of the B and C versions of the poem:

In a somer seson, whan softe was þe sonne,

I shoop me into shroudes as I a sheep were,

In habite as an heremite vnholy of werkes.

Wente wide in þis world wondres to here.

Ac on May morwenyng on Maluerne Hilles

Me bifel a ferly, of fairye me þoste.

I was wery [of]wandred and wente me to reste

Vnder a brood bank by a bournes syde;

And as I lay and lenede and loked on þe watres,

I slombred into a slepyng, it sweyed so murye.

Thanne gan [me] to meten a merueillous sweuene —

That I was in a wilderness, wiste I neuere where.

As I biheeld into þe eest and heiz to þe sonne,

I seiz a tour on a toft trieliche ymaked.... (B Prol. 1-14)<sup>55</sup>



In a somur sesoun, whan softe was þe sonne,  
 Y shope me into shroudes and Y a shep were,  
 In abite as an heremite vnholy of werkes,  
 Wente forth in þe world wondres to here,  
 And say many sellies and selkouthe thynges.  
 Ac on a May mornyng on Maluerne Hulle  
 Me biful to slepe, for werynesse of-wa[ndr]ed;  
 And in a launde as Y lay, lened Y and slepte,  
 And merueylousliche me mette, and Y may 3ow telle.  
 Al þe welthe of the world and þe wo bothe —  
 Wynkyng, as hit were, witterliche Y sigh hit:  
 Of treuthe and tricherye, tresoun and gyle —  
 Al Y say slepyng, as Y shal telle.  
 Estward Y beheld aftir þe sonne

And say a tour, as Y trowed: Treuthe was thereynne. (C Prol. 1-15)

There are a number of meaningful differences between these parallel passages. In the B version, the dreamer describes the experience that befalls him as a “ferly” and associates it in his mind with “fairye.” By contrast, this element of wonder and fantasy is absent in C. Pearsall argues that “[t]he rejection of the suggestive and mysterious in favour of the didactically explicit is typical of C” (Pearsall 28 n. 14-18). In his notes to lines 10 to 13 of the C version, Pearsall also remarks that “[t]hese lines in C replace further scenic description and dream-setting in B, and are an example of the characteristic exclusion in C of non-functional ‘poetic’ ornament” (Pearsall 28 n. 10-13). Consequently, whereas

the dreamer in B describes falling asleep to the sound of the merry sway of the waters, the dreamer in C simply falls asleep. Donaldson considers the loss of the allure of this scene in C:

In these opening lines of the poem the most conspicuous of C's alterations is that of AB, 6-12, the passage that in the earlier versions contains the charming description of the surroundings among which the Dreamer lies down to the first of his many naps. Grace is not a common characteristic of *Piers Plowman* in any of its forms, and the gracious, ingenuous beginning of A and B cannot fail to delight the reader. Yet C's revision destroys much of the charm. (Donaldson 49)

Interestingly, by eliminating the element of wonder and fantasy in favour of the "didactically explicit," Langland creates a moment of inconsistency in C's Prologue when the dreamer identifies the occupant of the tower he sees and states that "Treuthe was thereynne." Donaldson pinpoints the problem in this scene: "... if one is looking for minor discrepancies, one might observe that he gives the reader information that he himself does not learn until later and then only after he implores Lady Holy Church to explain the meaning of the tower..." (Donaldson 49). As it happens, the dreamer in C does not learn for himself that Truth is in the tower until Holy Church tells him in line 12 of Passus One. Thus, Langland's efforts to exclude the "non-functional 'poetic' ornament" from C's Prologue leads to a failure of logical cohesion in that Prologue. This is not a glaring failure in a work of medieval literature, but it is a failure that is not present in the earlier versions of the poem.

One of the most conspicuous differences between the B and C versions of the poem is the absence of Haukyn the Actif Man in C. The omission of Haukyn's stained coat fits neatly together with Donaldson's view that "[t]he elimination of vivid visual images is rather characteristic of C" (Donaldson 51). Because Donaldson uses the example of Meed's attire to illustrate his point, I will turn for a moment to the parallel B and C passages describing Meed's attire before returning to a discussion of Haukyn's coat and its absence in the C-text. The parallel B and C Meed passages follow:

Fetisliche hire fyngres were fretted with gold wyr,  
And þereon rede rubies as rede as any gleede,  
And diamauendes of derrest pris and double manere saphires,  
Orientals and ewages enuenymes to destroye.  
Hire robe was ful riche, of reed scarlet engreyned,  
Wiþ ribanes of reed gold and of riche stones.  
Hire array me rauysshed, swich richesse sau3 I neuere.

(B II. 11-17)

On alle here fyue fyngeres ful richeliche yrynged,  
And thereon rede rubies and othere riche stones.  
Here robynge was rychere þen Y rede couthe;  
For to telle of here atyer no tyme haue Y nouthe:  
Here aray with here rychesse raueschede my herte.

(C II. 12-16)

Donaldson observes that this change to the description of Meed's attire shows that "C is reluctant to linger over the detail of B's description" (52). He later asserts that "[t]his impatience with the physical detail appears even in so small a point as the revision of a half-line" (Donaldson 52). Thus, Donaldson notices that the description of Phisik's attire in C—"And his cloke of Callabre for his comunes legge" (C VIII. 292)—omits the decorative "knappes of golde" from B (B. VI. 272). The absence of Haukyn's coat in C is, then, an example of the way in which C focuses less closely on vivid visual details. Pearsall characterises the change from Haukyn in B to the figure of *Activa Vita* in C as a "process of extensive surgery on Haukyn that turns him into the colorless impersonal *Activa Vita*" (2003, 19). The absence of Haukyn's coat in C is also noteworthy because the dreamer in B demonstrates that it is by way of Haukyn's clothing that we can come to an understanding of what Active Man represents.

The B dreamer asserts that he pays close attention to Haukyn and how he is dressed as if how he is dressed is as important as who he is: "I took greet kepe, by Crist, and Conscience boþe,/ Of Haukyn þe Actif Man, and how he was ycloþed" (B XIII. 271-272). When Langland omits Haukyn in favour of a pared down version of *Actiua Vita*, one of the things the poem loses is the memorable image of the stained coat that symbolises a human life tainted by falls into sin:

He hadde a cote of Cristendom as Holy Kirke bileueþ;  
 Ac it was moled in many places wiþ manye sondry plottes —  
 Of pride here a plot, and þere a plot of vnbuxom speche,  
 Of scornynge and of scoffynge and of vnskilful berynge....  
 (B XIII. 274-277)

The omission of Haukyn and his coat in C significantly eliminates the need for B's highly organised section in which Haukyn confesses and Conscience gives him a lesson on the penitential process. What we are left with instead in C is an *Actiua Vita*<sup>56</sup> who learns about patience from Pacience, and the message about shrift is reduced to a short speech given by Pacience:

‘Riht so haue reuthe on vs alle, þat on þe rode deydest,  
And amende vs of thy mercy and make vs alle meke,  
Lowe and lele and louynge, and of herte pore.  
And sende vs contricion to clanse with oure soules,  
And confessioun to kulle alle kyne synnes  
And satisfaccioun þe whiche folfilleth þe Fader wille of heuene.  
And these ben Dowel and Dobet and Dobest of alle.  
*Cordis contricio* cometh of sorowe of herte,  
And *Oris confessio*, þat cometh of shrifte of mouthe,  
And *Satisfaccio*, þat for soules paieth and for alle synnes quyeth:  
*Cordis contricio*, *Oris confessio*, *Operis satisfaccio* —  
Thise thre withoute doute tholieth alle pouerte  
And lereth lewed and lered, hey and lowe to knowe  
Ho doth wel oþer bet, or beste aboute alle;  
And Holy Churche and charite herof a chartre made. (C XVI. 22-35)

B's Haukyn episode is both memorable because of its vividness and highly organised in a way that recalls Chaucer's Parson's lesson on the penitential process. Modern readers would hesitate to call *The Parson's Tale* a lively piece of prose, but B's

Haukyn episode represents a striking example of the impulse to anatomise that we find in *The Parson's Tale* even as the episode exploits fiction and bold imagery as it does so.

What, then, about the Haukyn section motivates Langland to cut it out and replace it in C with Pacience's much more straightforward explanation of contrition, confession, and satisfaction? The answer has to do with the problem of Conscience's promise to teach Haukyn how to clean his coat:

‘And I shal kenne þe,’ quod Conscience, ‘of Contrition to make  
That shal clawe þi cote of alle kynnes filþe —

*Cordis contricio...*

Dowel shal wasshen it and wryngen it þoru3 a wis confessour—

*Oris confessio...*

Dobet shal beten it and bouken it as bright as any scarlet,

And engreynten it wiþ good wille and Goddes grace to amende þe;

And siþen sende þee to Satisfaccion for to sonnen it after:

*Satisfaccio* — Dobest.

Shal neuere my[te] bymolen it, ne moþe after biten it,

Ne fend ne fals man defoulen it in þi lyue.

Shal noon heraud ne harpour haue a fairer garnement

Than Haukyn þe Actif man, and þow do by my techyng'....

(B XIV. 16-26)

Whereas Pacience's explanation of shrift in C is clear about the fact that the three parts of the penitential process are doing well, doing better, or doing best, Conscience's promise

to Haukyn in B gives the impression that after satisfaction a man will never again be tainted by sin. Haukyn himself tells us that this is not so:

‘Allas,’ quod Haukyn þe Actif Man þo, ‘þat after my cristendom  
I ne hadde be deed and doluen for Dowelis sake!  
So hard it is,’ quod Haukyn, ‘to lyue and to do synne.  
Synne seweþ vs euere,’ quod he, and sory gan wexe,  
And wepte water wiþ hise eighen and weyled þe tyme  
That euere he dide dede þat deere God displesed;  
Swouned and sobbed and siked ful ofte  
That euere he hadde lond or lordshipe, lasse oþer moore,  
Or maistrie ouer any man mo þan of hymselfe.  
‘I were nozt worþi, woot God,’ quod Haukyn, ‘to werien any cloþes,  
Ne neiþer sherte ne shoon, saue for shame one  
To couere my careyne,’ quod he, and cride mercy faste,  
And wepte and wailede.... (B XIV. 320-332)

In this moment verging on absolute despair, Haukyn pinpoints the problem with Conscience’s promise; since sin always pursues us, the penitential process is one we will regularly have to repeat. We cannot, as Conscience intimates in B, keep ourselves free of sin simply by following his teaching. Thus, John Alford notes “[i]t is a condition of his humanity that Haukyn will continue to stain his coat again and again, no matter how often he does penance...” (Alford 137). Moreover, the image of Haukyn’s coat tells the same story. By virtue of being a coat, it can never remain free of filth but will have to be laundered again and again.

The trouble with Conscience's promise is that the text that follows shows that contrition, confession, and satisfaction do not work as he says they do. Although the Church teaches that the penitential process is one that requires repetition (since the 1215 Lateran Council, Catholics were required to confess annually), Conscience gives the impression that this is not so. His suggestion that shrift can keep Haukyn's coat clean when it cannot, coupled with Haukyn's despair at recognising that Conscience's suggestion is inaccurate, implies that this tripartite process is ineffectual, and this is in direct opposition to Church teaching and verges dangerously close to Wyclif's comments on auricular confession which had been condemned as heresies in 1382. Of the twenty-four of Wyclif's conclusions condemned at the Blackfriars Council,<sup>57</sup> Wyclif's conclusion that all outer confession is superfluous and unprofitable to the truly contrite and penitent was among those deemed heretical. I am not suggesting that the Haukyn episode advances, inadvertently or otherwise, a Wycliffite view of auricular confession, but I am arguing that the figurative illustration of the way the penitential process operates is not in keeping with the Church's teaching on the matter and is, therefore, heretical. As Thomas explains, "the C-text is more closely aligned with institutional penance than is the B-text" (2011, 148), and the C-text "clarif[ies] the poem's alignment with the institutional Church" (Thomas 2011, 148). Because this memorable episode in B is a dramatic enactment of the impotence of auricular confession in the life of an ordinary person,<sup>58</sup> Langland omits the scene in C and replaces it with Pacience's simpler outline of the penitential process in order to achieve doctrinal clarity.

Another example of Langland's attempts to achieve greater doctrinal clarity in his poem is his revisions in C to Christ's post-Harrowing of Hell speech from Passus 18 in B.



Importantly, Langland magnifies Christ's mercy and minimises the importance of learning in true Christian belief, thus upholding the Church's stance against the lay intellectualisation of the Catholic faith.

For I þat am lord of lif, loue is my drynke,  
And for þat drynke today, I deide vpon erþe.  
I faust so, me þurstēþ yet, for mannes soule sake;  
May no drynke me moiste, ne my þurst slake,  
Til þe vendage falle in þe vale of Iosaphat,  
That I drynke rist ripe must, *resureccio mortuorum*. (B XVIII. 366-371)

For Y þat am lord of lyf, loue is my drynke,  
And for þat drynke today Y deyede, as hit semede.  
Ac Y wol drynke of no dische ne of deep clergyse,  
Bote of comune coppes, alle Cristene soules;  
Ac thy drynke worth deth and depe helle thy bolle.  
Y fauht so, me fursteth zut, for mannes soule sake:  
*Sicio*.

May no pyement ne pomade ne precieuse drynkes  
Moiste me to þe fulle ne my furst slokke  
Til þe ventage valle in þe vale of Iosophat,  
And [Y] drynke riht rype must, *resureccio mortuorum*. (C XX. 403-412)

Murray J. Evans observes that in this episode “the narrator ... has what many scholars have called a sublime<sup>59</sup> vision of Christ's victory in the Crucifixion and the

Harrowing of Hell” (421). Appropriately, J.A. Burrow refers to Christ’s “sublime speech at the Harrowing of Hell” and identifies it as “a speech of triumph, celebrating the recovery of the first company of souls ... to be received into heaven” (302, 303). If Christ’s speech in B is sublime because it transcends the human in its lofty assertion that no drink can quench the divine Christ’s thirst except for love, then the speech is brought down to earth in C when Christ maintains that he will not drink “of deep clergyse.” The C version’s emphasis on Christ’s refusal to engage in learning or scholarship returns us to the familiar, and interestingly anticipates Love’s assertion in *The Mirror* that “symple creatures ... as childryn hauen nede to be fedde with mylke of lyzte doctryne & not with sadde mete of grete clargye” (Love 10).

Christ’s minimisation of the relationship between knowledge of Scripture and salvation is further emphasised a few lines later:

And þou3 Holy Writ wole þat I be wroke of hem þat diden  
ille

*(Nullum malum impunitum...)*

Thei shul be clesed clerliche and [clene] wasshen of hir synnes

In my prisone Purgatorie, til *parce* it hote.

And my mercy shal be shewed to manye of my breþeren;

For blood may no3t se blood blede, but hym rewe.

*Audiui archana verba que non licet homini loqui.*

Ac my rightwisnesse and right shal rulen al helle,

And mercy al mankynde bifore me in heuene.

For I were an vnkynde kyng but I my kyn holpe—

And nameliche at swich a nede þer nedes help bihouep:

*Non intres in iudicium cum seruo tuo.*

(B XVIII. 391-400)

For Holy Writ wol þat Y be wreke of hem þat wrouhte ille —

*As nullum malum impunitum, et nullum bonum irremuneratum.*

And so of alle wykkede Y wol take veniaunce;

And zut my kynde, in my kene ire, shal constrayne my wille—

*Domine, ne in furore tuo arguas me —*

To be merciable to monye of my halue-bretherne.

For blood may se blood bothe afurst and acale,

Ac blood may nat se blood blede, bote hym rewe.

*Audivi archana verba que non licet homini loqui.* (C XX.432-438)

Christ's merciful nature is highlighted in both passages, but the C-text Christ unequivocally maintains that his will to do as Holy Writ commands—“[to] be wreke of hem þat wrouhte ille”—will be restrained by his nature. In this way, Christ's

mercy trumps Scriptural injunctions to punish those who do ill. Whereas in B the souls of the wicked are cleansed of their sins in Purgatory<sup>60</sup> until an order to spare them determines otherwise, the wicked in C are never actually punished because Christ's natural disposition compels him to show them mercy. We again here have a shift from B's elevated vision—"my prisone Purgatorie"—to C's familiar outlook. Thus, in C, Christ references the opening line of Psalm 6—"Domine, ne in furore tuo arguas me" (God, do not find fault with me in your rage)—and, in doing so, relocates the wicked from the divine realm of purgatory in the B version to the human sphere in the C version where we find them seeking mercy. The consequence of this change is that the sublimity of Christ's victory speech in the B-text is sacrificed in the C-text in order to make the orthodox point that Scripture and learning belong exclusively to the learned class and that a knowledge of Scripture is not necessary for one's salvation.

Somerset points out that "[u]nlike vernacular scientific, devotional, and pastoral treatises, historical writings, and even romances, the poem lacks a formal prologue of the sort that so often addresses and directs readers" (Somerset 1998, 22). *Piers Plowman* contains a prologue that represents an example of estates literature and sets the stage for the story that follows, but its prologue is not the kind of prologue one finds in works like Love's *Mirror* or Thorpe's *Testimony* that identifies the anticipated reading audience and offers some indication of how the text is meant to be read. Nonetheless, the C-text contains numerous episodes in which Langland clarifies doctrinal positions that seem unclear or potentially subversive in B and, consequently, they serve to direct readers' interpretations in ways that are either in keeping with the Church's teachings or less provocative. A noteworthy example of Langland's attempts at clarification is discernible

in the early part of the poem. In the Prologue of the B-text, Langland launches into what appears to be an implicit criticism of Holy Church's role in the proliferation of greedy friars who interpret and elucidate Scripture as they like:

I fond there freres, alle the foure ordres,  
Prechyng the peple for profit of [the] womb[e]:  
Glosed the gospel as hem good liked;  
For coveitise of copes construed it as thei wolde.  
Many of these maistres freres mowe clothen hem at likyng  
For hire moneie and marchaundise marchen togideres.  
For sith charite hath ben chapman and chief to shryve lordes  
Manye ferlies han fallen in a fewe yeres.  
But Holy Chirche and hii holde bettre togidres

The mooste meschief on molde is mountyng up faste. (B Pro, 58-67)

The clause “[b]ut Holy Chirche and hii holde bettre togidres” (unless Holy Church and the friars co-operate better) unintentionally intimates that Holy Church bears equal responsibility for the consequences of the friars' actions. I say unintentionally because, while Holy Church has the power and even the duty to bring these friars back into the fold, the bulk of the passage enumerates the wrongdoings of the friars and not the shortcomings of the Church. Thus, in the C-text, Langland alters the passage in significant ways:

I fonde þer freris, alle þe foure ordres,  
Prechyng þe peple for profyt of þe wombe,  
And glosede þe gospel as hem good likede;

For coueytise of copis contraryed somme doctours.  
 Mony of þise maistres of mendenant freres,  
 Here moneye and marchandise marchen togyderes.  
 Ac sith charite hath be chapman and chief to shryue lordes  
 Mony ferlyes han falle in a fewe 3eres.  
 And but Holi Chirche and charite choppe adoun such shryuars  
 The moste meschief on molde mounteth vp faste. (C Pro, 56-65)

Notably, the friars in C are not simply interpreting Scripture as they see fit; they are also contradicting Church Fathers. In a similar vein, Holy Church is no longer called upon to co-operate with the friars. Instead, Holy Church and charity are entreated to stamp out these bad friars. In this way, Holy Church no longer seems complicit in the behaviour of bad friars, but is instead empowered to put an end to it.

Langland's C-text of *Piers Plowman* frequently softens or deletes apparent criticism of the Church; it also deletes episodes that might provoke debate about controversial doctrinal topics. One such episode is the moment in Passus 11 in B when the narrator comments on the fate of infants who die before receiving the sacrament of baptism:

Ac a barn wiþouten bapteme may noȝt [be so] saued —  
*Nisi quis renatus fuerit.*

Loke, ye lettred men, wheiþer I lye or do noȝt. (B XI. 82-83)

As Sarah Beckwith remarks, according to orthodox teaching, “without the faith conferred in baptism, all the other sacraments are supposedly annulled, and so baptism alone is necessary for salvation” (270).<sup>61</sup> That Langland omits this assertion from C is

suggestive of its potential to stir up conflicting opinions. While the concept of *limbus infantum* has never been fully defined as Church doctrine, it has certainly been a subject about which many Church theologians have commented. Because unbaptised infants die, according to Church teaching, in a state of original sin, the supposition is that they are deprived of the beatific vision and, thus, communion with God.<sup>62</sup> The point of debate among orthodox writers relates to the question of whether or not those souls relegated to *limbus infantum* experience a state of happiness or mild to moderate punishment.

The question of the fate of unbaptised infants is not limited to the speculation of orthodox theologians. Beckwith observes that “[i]ssues about the possibility of salvation without baptism were enacted around the sacrament of baptism in the writings of the first formulators of sacramentality, just as they were later to become the focus of Lollard controversy” (270). In the late fourteenth-century Wycliffite *Dialogue Between a Friar and a Secular*, the Secular implicitly dismisses the concept of *limbus infantum* when he challenges the orthodox view that infants are in a state of original sin: “For þere is no child now, be it neuere so zonge, þat is in þe personel synne of Adam, siþ Adam is in heuene and haþ now no synne” (35: 120-122). However, when he criticises the Friar’s view that unbaptised infants are without the bliss of heaven but unaware of it and feel no pain because of it, the Secular insists that all those who are deprived of the beatific vision are cognizant of and distressed by it:

And rizt as alle þe spirites in helle, as þei of children or of oþere, knowen þat þei ben idampned and why þei ben idampned, so þei knowen þat þey lacken þe sizz of God and þe blisse of heuene, to þe whiche in kynde þei were imarkid. As a blynde man in birþe and contynuellyche aftirward

knowiþ þat he is blynde, and þat þat blyndnesse is peyne to him, so boþe þe seyntis in heuene and alle þe yuel spiritis in helle knowen þat þe lackynge of þe sict of God and of his blisse is to hem þe grettest peyne.

(FS 36: 153-160)

The Secular contests the idea of *limbus infantum*, then, but he holds that all doomed souls, including those of children, know what they have lost and are pained by it.

More detailed evidence of Lollard teachings about infant baptism occur in heresy trials of the second quarter of the fifteenth century. Steven Justice examines a number of these trials that took place in early 1429 in which the topic of infant baptism recurs.

During one such examination, Richard Grace recanted the following doctrine:

That the sacrament of Baptem doon in water in fourme custumed of the Churche ys litell to be pondred for as much as whan a child cometh to yeres of discrecion and receyvyth Cristis lawe and hys commaundments he ys sufficiently baptized and so he may be saved withowtyn ony other baptem. (qtd. in Justice 1996, 307)

In like manner, John Skilly was reproved for adhering to heretical beliefs about infant baptism. Simply stated, Skilly was accused of believing

That the sacramentes of Baptem doon in watir and of Confirmacion doon be a bissop in fourme custumed in holi Churche be but of litell availe and not to be pondred if the fadir and the modir of a child hadde Christendom. (qtd. in Justice 1996, 306)

Justice argues that “[t]he recorded statements suggest simply that the milieu of the Christian family, the beliefs and practices of those parents ‘of Cristene beleve,’ is the



source of the justified Christian life” (1996, 307). He later describes the recorded statements as showing that “justification comes from the life and belief of the individual, not the *opus operatum* of baptism, whether that given to the child or to his parents” (Justice 1996, 307). That the Lollard questioning of infant baptism endures from the late fourteenth century to remain a central focus of heresy trials in the late 1420s suggests that this issue was a continuing point of contention for those who adhered to heterodox beliefs. In view of the fact that questions about the fate of unbaptised infants’ souls were disputed subjects among orthodox and heterodox thinkers alike, and because *limbus infantum* was not a fully defined teaching of the Church, I think it likely that Langland deleted the reference to it in C to avoid inciting debate about a doctrinal question that could not be clarified because of its contested status within the Church.

The major changes in the C version of *Piers Plowman* insist, as do many of the minor ones, that people have an obligation to be obedient to the teachings of Holy Church and to the law, the rule of conduct imposed by authority. Thus, the narrator asserts in C (not in B) that

For Holy Churche hoteth alle manere peple  
 Vnder obedience to be, and buxum to þe lawe;  
 Furste, religious of religioun a reule to holde  
 And vnder obedience be by dayes and by nyhtes;  
 Lewede men to labory, lordes to honte.... (C IX. 219-223)

Appropriately, the name of Piers’s son is shortened in the C-text. Whereas his name in the B-text is “Suffre-þi-Souereyns-haue-hir-wille-:/Deme-hem-no3t-for-if-þow-doost-þow-shalt-it-deere-abugge;/Lat-God-yworþe-wiþ-al-for-so-His-word-techeþ” (B VI. 80-

82), it is abbreviated in the C version by omitting the third and final clause of the name in B, thereby making the sole focus of the son's name obedience to the king. Immediately following the naming of his son, and to further emphasise the importance of being loyal to the king, Piers asserts "Consayle nat so þe comune þe Kyng to desplese,/Ne hem þat han lawes to loke, lacke hem nat, Y hote" (C VIII. 84-85). Piers makes plain that those who maintain the law have an obligation to protect the commons, but he also foregrounds the point that the commons ought not displease the king. Michael D. C. Drout suggests that this passage is a significant addition to the C-text of *Piers Plowman* because, among other things, "it may represent a reaction by Langland to the use of his work by the rebels of 1381" (Drout 51).

Langland's efforts to press home the point that the commons is subject to the king is corroborated by a related passage in the C Prologue in which Langland significantly divests the commons of power:

Thanne kam þer a Kyng: Kny3thod hym ladde;  
Might of the communes made hym to regne.  
And þanne cam Kynde Wit and clerkes he made,  
For to counseillen þe Kyng and þe Commune saue.  
The Kyng and Kny3thod and Clergie boþe  
Casten þat þe Commune sholde hem [communes] fynde.  
The Commune contreued of Kynde Wit craftes,  
And for profit of al þe peple plowmen ordeyned  
To tilie and to trauaille as trewe lif askep.  
The Kyng and þe Commune and Kynde Wit þe þridde

Shopen lawe and leaute — ech lif to knowe his owene.

(B Prol. 112-122)

Thenne cam ther a Kyng: Knyghthede hym ladde;

Myght of tho men made hym to regne.

And thenne cam Kynde Wyt and clerkus he made,

And Conscience and Kynde Wit and Knyghthed togedres

Caste þat þe Comune sholde here comunes fynde.

Kynde Wyt and þe Comune contreued alle craftes,

And for most profitable to þe puple a plogh gonne þei make,

With lele labour to lyue while life on londe lasteth.

(C Prol. 139-146)

What these variant passages are getting at is that all members of the social organisation have roles they must fulfil. While much of the essence of the passage in B is preserved in C, the portion of the poem that credits the might of the commons for making the King a ruler in B is in C emended so as to make it seem that it is the might of Knighthood, or “tho men,” that make the King so. Marginalising the commons as he does in the passage from C, Langland emphasises the subordinate role of the commons and its duty to be obedient to the ruling class. Thus, the commons in the C version must lawfully labour to fulfil the rules of social organisation that the ruling class arranged. Langland’s emphasis in C on the commons’ subordination to the king is especially meaningful in light of the 1381 Peasants’ Revolt, but it may also reflect his reaction to the Wonderful Parliament of 1386 in which the lords and the commons successfully argued that it was lawful to

depose a king if he did not rule on the authority of law and good counsel. In doing so, as I note above, they managed to compel the crown to remove the chancellor, Michael de la Pole. Disturbed by this outcome, Richard assembled a panel of judges in 1387 to evaluate the legality of this challenge to the king's prerogative (Scase 2007, 66). Predictably, the judges found that parliament did not have the authority to pass sentence on a minister of the crown without the king's approval, and anyone who challenged the king's prerogative in this manner would be guilty of treason (Scase 2007, 66). Thus, Langland's insistence in the C version that the commons are subordinate to the king dovetails with contemporary political events.

Larry Scanlon proposes a reading of the above-noted B Prologue passage and its relationship to the 1381 rebels and Langland's anxieties about misreading that is quite in conflict with mine and, thus, deserves to be mentioned. Scanlon concedes that "it is true there is little in *Piers Plowman* that can be construed as advocating armed insurrection" (222), but he insists that there are ideas in the Prologue passage in B that correspond to what he perceives to be the political goals of the rebels. This alleged congruence of ideas leads Scanlon to argue that "there seems little point in describing the rebel appeal to Langland's poem as a misreading" (223). In Scanlon's view, the key idea that Langland and the rebels share is that "they saw themselves as taking an active role in defining ... justice and royal authority" because "they understood royal authority as originating in the commons" (213). Notwithstanding, Scanlon later acknowledges that "[t]here is no record of those ideals that can be traced with certainty to the rebels themselves" (213). Scanlon's foundation for arguing that Langland shared the rebels' ostensible belief in the notion of "popular sovereignty" (Scanlon 215) is found especially in the opening lines

from the Prologue passage in B: “Thanne kam þer a Kyng: Knyzthod hym ladde;/Might of the communes made hym to regne” (B Prol. 112-113). Instead of adopting the commonly accepted view that the B Prologue passage as a whole reflects the medieval concept of social organisation,<sup>63</sup> Scanlon regards it as Langland’s articulation of his belief in the concept of popular or “communal sovereignty” (Scanlon 213).

Although Scanlon grants that there is no direct evidence linking the 1381 rebels with the concept of “popular sovereignty,” he finds corroboration for this view in the *Anonimalle Chronicle*, a chronicle he terms “the least overt in its biases of all the chronicles” (Scanlon 214). The *Anonimalle Chronicle* reveals that the 1381 rebels had a watchword. When asked with whom he holds, a rebel would respond “Wyth kynges Richarde and wyth the trew communes” (qtd. in Scanlon 215). Scanlon argues that this evidence of a rebel watchword is so compelling because “[t]his moment constitutes one of very few where the *Anonimalle* chronicler quotes rebel speech in English ... [and that the] departure from the French emphasizes ... the authenticity of this rebel notion” (215). The chronicler points out that those who did not know the watchword would be put to death: “et ceux qe ne savoient ne vodroient, furount decolles et mys a la mort” (qtd. in Scanlon 215). Scanlon regards this revelation from the chronicle as evidence of Langland’s and the rebels’ shared sense of “popular sovereignty”: “In the most direct and brutal of senses, this slogan establishes a community, then murderously polices the community’s borders. Here is Langland’s might of the commons put into fairly drastic practice” (Scanlon 215).

In *Writing and Rebellion: England in 1381*, Justice also underscores the fact that “[t]he rebels claimed that the royal power lay ultimately with the whole commons”

(1994, 125), but he argues that this claim is an indicator not of shared values with Langland but of “what [the rebels] revised in *Piers Plowman*” (1994, 124). In support of his thesis, Justice cites the example from B Passus V at line 513 (also in C Passus VII at line 158) when the folk have prayed for grace to find Truth but instead stumble about the hills like beasts: “Lacking any notion of who Truth is or how to find him, the folk are “beestes,” lacking (as animals do) both autonomous reasonability and communal cooperation; Piers must guide them” (1994, 124). Justice further argues that “[b]east” is of course a characteristic epithet for the rural laborer in virtually every genre of clerical and aristocratic literature; it is also a figure for the untempered will. In either case it symbolizes what lacks its own principle of order, coherence, or purpose; the folk need Piers Plowman to guide and direct them” (1994, 124). Nevertheless, as Justice shows, the rebels’ letters—five of which appear in Knighton’s chronicle and a sixth in Walsingham’s chronicle (Justice 1994, 13-14)—indicate that they misread or amended *Piers Plowmen* when they characterised themselves as already being in possession of truth, and, therefore, as “true men” (Justice 1994, 124). One of the John Ball letters from Knighton’s chronicle asserts that the rebels ought to “[s]tonde manlyche togedyr in trowþe” (qtd. in Justice 1994, 14 & 124). Justice further argues that the rebels’ misreading of *Piers Plowman* B Passus V, as evidenced by the letters, affirms that they transpose the association between ruler and ruled that Langland countenances in this section of the poem. Justice cites the letter of Jack Carter from Knighton’s chronicle in which the author asserts “lat peres þe plowman . . . duelle at hom” (qtd. in Justice 1994, 13), and he argues that the rebels’ letters show that “they invert the relation: the folk govern Piers” (Justice 1994, 124).

Justice asserts, like Scanlon, that the rebels professed that they held with the king. He states that “all the major chroniclers notice that the rebels called themselves the allies, almost the delegates, of the king” (Justice 1994, 59), but Justice suggests that the rebels did so because they appealed to the king as the dispenser of justice. He notes that, through the medium of the petition, “[t]he petitioner conventionally addressed herself or himself directly to the king who was, in form if not in fact, the dispenser of grace” (Justice 1994, 60). Justice points out that the shire court—in which these petitions were drafted—“was also a court, and there was a legal form of access to the king’s political person that might be said to encourage . . . an identification with him by those who felt aggrieved” (Justice 1994, 60). He bolsters his argument that the rebels appealed to the king’s justice by way of their claim that they held with the king by citing the example of the plaintiff, a blend of civil and criminal action. Because the plaintiff “was an action of trespass, which was by definition a breach of the king’s peace as well as a personal injury, the king figured as reserve plaintiff in every such action” (Justice 1994, 60). As a result, Justice argues, “the procedural form of the plaintiff, an action designed to prosecute the violence and extortions practiced by the king’s lieges and ministers, broadly implied that the king and complainant were allied against extortionate lords and ministers” (Justice 1994, 60-61). Consequently, when the rebels maintained that they stood with the king, they were indicating that they sought the king’s justice. When they held that royal power resided with the commons, they demonstrated that they had conferred to the commons a power Langland never authorised.

Rebel misreadings of *Piers Plowman* are not limited to the political goals of the rebels. Sudbury’s detention and execution, for what looks like a rebel engagement with

Wyclif's position that laypeople must accuse and judge clerics who consume the goods of the Church, has, Justice affirms, a close connection to Wit's speech from B IX 90-94a (Justice 1994, 106):

‘Bisshopes shul be blamed for beggeres sake;  
[Than Iudas he is wors] þat ȝyueþ a iaper siluer  
And biddeþ þe beggere go, for his broke cloþes:  
*Proditor est prelatus cum Iuda qui patrimonium Christi  
minus distribuit. Et alibi, Perniciosus dispensator est  
qui res pauperum Christi inutiliter consumit.* (B IX 90-94a)

This passage declares that prelates who fail to distribute the Church's endowment to the poor waste the things belonging to Christ's poor. Significantly, it is absent in the C-text. Justice suspects that it is in this passage that "Ball found the epithet that dictated Sudbury's execution" (1994, 106). He also argues that "Wit himself imagines no remedy more profound than a better crop of bishops" (Justice 1994, 106). Langland's removal of this part of Wit's speech from the C-text of the poem suggests that Justice's view is correct and that Langland deleted the passage in response to a rebel misreading.

Scanlon's principal reason for rejecting the view that the C revision signifies Langland's reaction to rebel misreadings is that, in his view, it requires us to accept a troubling position advanced by Donaldson that the parallel lines in B and C are in substance synonymous. Scanlon dismisses the notion that "in his C-revisions, Langland was reacting to a rebel misreading" (207) because "that conclusion depends on taking Donaldson's reading for granted" (207). However, as Scanlon himself makes plain, Donaldson's argument about the insignificance of the changes from B to C in this



passage is the direct result of Donaldson's efforts to challenge the arguments of Thomas Wright and J. M. Manly that the C revision of this passage is the work of an author other than Langland (205).<sup>64</sup> Donaldson explains that "in admitting that C was more cautious and conservative than B, one leaves the door open to further attacks upon the unity of authorship, since not everyone will accept [the conservatism of old age] as an excuse for [Langland's] apparent change of heart" (89). As Scanlon observes, Donaldson "attempts to demonstrate not only 'unity of authorship' in relation to the B and C versions of this passage, but also a unity of authorial intention—that is, that both versions mean essentially the same thing" (206). Thus, Donaldson asserts, "[w]hat we have, I think, is a pair of lines in which the author assures us that the rule of a king depends upon the power of the commonwealth" (106). Donaldson's dubious conclusion that the Prologue passages in B and C mean the same thing is the unfavourable result of his attempt to dismiss the multiple author theory put forward by Wright and Manly, and it does not follow, as Scanlon indicates, that we must accept it as true if we are to accept that the 1381 rebels misread Langland's B version of the passage.

Scanlon's position that either the rebels did not misread Langland or the Prologue passages in B and C mean basically the same thing is untenable because it fails to acknowledge the myriad of possible reasons for Langland's revision of the passage. In other words, the scope of his argument is too narrow. Additionally, he makes inferences about Langland's political views based on a single brief passage from Langland's long poem without considering the other meaningful changes from B to C. Curiously, Scanlon also sets very particular limits on how we are to interpret the importance of the Prologue passage in B. Even Scanlon's concession that the misreading theory might be sound is

presented in so narrow a fashion that it easily provokes counter arguments. He indicates, for example, that “even the misreading hypothesis requires us to posit the passage is at some level potentially radical” (207). The passage is indeed potentially radical, but the fact that it is drastically toned down in C strongly suggests that Langland alters the passage because it was misinterpreted and provoked a radicalism he did not intend. In order to stave off this counter argument, Scanlon maintains that “to argue that rebels misread the B-text on the basis of political views revealed in the C-text seems slightly illogical” (Scanlon 206). Instead, Scanlon remarks that

the Langland of the B-text was fully committed to social change, and that his rebel readers were responding to an urgency in his poem that he fully intended. Then in the aftermath of the Rising, he became more conservative, as often happens to aging radicals. Under this possibility, his revisions to the C-text would represent a repudiation of the rebellion, but they would also represent a disavowal of his own former radicalism. (Scanlon 224)

Scanlon’s view that it is more likely that Langland changed his mind “as often happens to aging radicals” is predicated on his argument that Langland was a dissenter who supported the goals of the 1381 rebels. Scanlon’s presentation of this argument is again problematic because of its narrowness. He acknowledges that there is an “ideological spectrum defined by the degree of commitment to social change, with *revolutionary* at [one] end, and in the middle terms like *moderate*, *liberal*, and *reformer*” (198). Nevertheless, on the basis of his reading of a single passage in B, Scanlon implies that Langland is a fully committed revolutionary. I say implies because, while he describes

Langland as a traditionalist or a conservative—and he argues that “the term [*conservative*] tends to be understood as a position at one end” of the ideological spectrum of commitment to social change (Scanlon 198)—he casts the poet as a person who favours extreme changes in political and social conditions. Most notably, his view that the C-text Langland fits in with “aging radicals” is profoundly at odds with his earlier suggestion that Langland belongs on the least subversive end of the spectrum. By suggesting that Langland’s B version shows him to be a radical, Scanlon displays a restricted view of the concept of a reformer. There is really no spectrum at all when it comes to Scanlon’s depiction of Langland’s commitment to social change. According to Scanlon’s thesis, Langland was a reformer, and therefore, supported the rebels. It is eminently more plausible that Langland was a reformer<sup>65</sup> and that he emended the B Prologue passage after it became clear that extremists misread the work and effectively used it as a call to arms. Thus, Langland insists in the C Prologue passage that the commons is subject to the king and not the other way around.

Just as the duty of the commons to be obedient to the king is given prominence in the C version of *Piers Plowman*, so the importance of doing as Holy Church commands is also affirmed in new and forceful ways in the C-text. One particularly striking addition is to Pride’s confession when she confesses to being “[i]nobedient to Holy Churche and to hem þat þer serueth;/Demed for here vuel vices, and exitede opere/Thorw my word and my witt here euel werkes to shewe...” (C VI. 19-21). Significantly, Pride now asserts that disobeying the Church includes judging the clergy and inciting others to notice the shortcomings of those who serve the Church. Judging the clergy and prompting others to observe their faults is a prominent characteristic of the B version of

*Piers Plowman*. Pride's argument here, as I discuss in Chapter 7, is one that is advanced by Bishop Reginald Pecock in his comprehensive efforts to combat the Lollard heresy (c1443-1455). Other minor additions to the C version also share points in common with written efforts to combat Lollardy. Conscience insists in the C version (not in B) "þat alle maner men, wymmen and childrene/Sholde confourme hem to o kynde on Holy Kyrke to bileue" (C III. 396-397). Similarly, Abraham/Faith in C (not in B) discourages the intellectualisation of faith when he instructs the dreamer not to think too deeply about the nature of the Trinity: "'Muse nat to moche þeron, quod Faith, 'til thow more knowe,/Ac leue hit lelly al thy lyf-tyme" (C XVIII. 199-200). As I show in Chapter 5, Nicholas Love makes comparable arguments in *The Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ*, a Church-sanctioned alternative to banned Scriptural translations in English. In Love's discussion of the Trinity, for example, he asserts "when þou herest any sich þinge in byleue þat passeþ þi kyndly reson, trowe soþfastly þat it is soþ as holy chirch techeþ & go no ferþer" (Love 23). These points of commonality between Langland's additions in C and the arguments of post-*Constitutions* opponents of Lollardy support the view that Langland's C revisions are strongly influenced by contemporary efforts on the part of authorities to enforce conformity of belief.

As I argued at the beginning of this chapter, Langland's revisions in C reflect his efforts to dissociate his work from the actions of the rebels in the Peasants' Revolt and ideas associated with the Lollard movement. The example of John Aston's interrogation at the Blackfriars Council in 1382 shows, as Kelly asserts, that suspected heretics were being improperly questioned about their private beliefs rather than about documented evidence of their questionable writings or teachings (Kelly 18). Moreover, a defendant's

silence was viewed to be a confession of guilt (Kelly 16). Archbishop Courteney's contravention of the requirements of the *ordo juris* set out by Pope Innocent III at the Fourth Lateran Council demonstrates that England experienced a period of restriction two decades before Archbishop Arundel drafted his *Constitutions* in 1407. Given this manifest environment of suspicion and restriction, it is not surprising that Langland would attempt to clarify his positions out of fear that his work would be held against him as evidence of heterodox thoughts, but it is my position that Langland was not principally concerned with his work being condemned. Rather, his concern with clarifying portions of the work that might undermine the Church and the King strongly suggests that Langland feared the harm his work might do and may also reflect, as many critics have argued, his efforts to remove elements that might have already done harm insofar as they encouraged rebels during the Peasants' Revolt. The changes from B to C, as Pearsall argues, appear to be designed "to avoid occasions for being misunderstood" (2003, 21), and, therefore, "there are not so many fundamental problems of interpretation as there are in the B-text" (Pearsall 2010, 165). By insisting on what it means, the C-text favours the didactic over the dialectic. Importantly, the C revisions had aesthetic consequences: significant instances of bold imagery from the B-text were sacrificed in order to achieve doctrinal clarity in C and to reassert the supreme and unrestricted power of the sovereign. The C-text of *Piers Plowman*, with its emphasis on clarity of meaning, anticipates the sorts of tailoring for simple readers that become prominent in the vernacular theological writing of the later fourteenth- and fifteenth-centuries. Because this emphasis on simplicity and clearness of expression so often accompanies a resistance to fiction,

dramatic embellishments, and rhyme on both sides of the heterodox-orthodox divide, the remaining texts under discussion in this thesis consist of non-fictional prose works.

#### Chapter 4:

##### “Bi Ensampler of Him”: *The Testimony of William Thorpe* as a Lollard Reader’s Guide to Remaining Firm During an Ecclesiastical Examination

While Langland’s C-text revisions offer insight into the consequences of early pro- and anti-Lollard activities on vernacular theological writing, *The Testimony of William Thorpe* furnishes a significant example of the pre-*Constitutions* Lollard writer’s impulse to tailor religious writing to untrained readers by employing both plain language and literary features. Thorpe writes his narrative in English, and he foregrounds familiar generic conventions of saints’ lives in order to persuade his readers effectively. Significantly, his narrative represents a challenge to the Church’s authority that is contemporaneous with the drafting of Arundel’s *Constitutions* in 1407. Because Thorpe had quarrels with ecclesiastical authorities before the examination recorded in his *Testimony*, he requires some introduction. In 1407, the Lollard priest composed what purports to be an accurate account of his examination for heretical preaching in Shrewsbury’s St. Chad’s Church. John Lydford, a canon lawyer, kept a book that includes two entries concerning Thorpe. The first is a list of articles composed by Lydford’s associate, Baldwin Shillingford, for Robert Braybrooke, bishop of London, accusing Thorpe of heretical preaching at St. Martin Orgar and elsewhere in London in about the year 1395 (*John Lydford’s Book* 108). Hudson argues that the list of articles against Thorpe was more likely earlier, and she gives it a date of 1386 (Hudson 1993, xlix). In the final section of *The Testimony*, Thorpe refers to his imprisonment in Bishop Braybrooke’s jail and indicates that his release coincides with Arundel’s exile in 1397 (91: 2173-2178). The second item concerning Thorpe in Lydford’s book is Thorpe’s reply to the accusations made in Shillingford’s complaint. A record of excommunication

immediately follows the Lollard priest's defence, but, as Rita Copeland argues, "[t]here is no evidence that the mandate for excommunication was carried out" (Copeland 1996, 202). The record of Thorpe's excommunication is written in a different hand than Thorpe's defence. Consequently, Hudson asserts that Lydford's book was "intended to provide model documents" and that the note concerning Thorpe's excommunication was likely added later due to the absence in the manuscript of any such document (Hudson 1993, xlix).

Until Maureen Jurkowski's landmark 2002 article "The Arrest of William Thorpe in Shrewsbury and the anti-Lollard Statute of 1406," there was no known evidence to substantiate the historicity of the examination recorded in *The Testimony of William Thorpe*. As Copeland noted in 1996,

[w]hile [a] reference in the text is linked (however ambiguously) to earlier historical records of Thorpe, the actual proceedings reported here, the interview with Arundel, have no similar corroboration in external record. Yet, of course, the 'Examination' asks to be read as historical record, as direct translation of a life, an event, occluding its own literary textuality. (Copeland 1996, 202-203)

She further observed that "[s]ince so little else is recorded of him we must assume that the Thorpe who was known at least to later generations in England is the figure who emerges from this quasi-fictive, quasi-documentary account" (Copeland 1996, 203). Hudson's edition of *The Testimony* also predates Jurkowski's discovery of the writ of *habeas corpus cum causa* that establishes the circumstances of Thorpe's detention.<sup>66</sup> In her introduction to the text, Hudson maintains that "[w]hilst it is reasonable to think that



Thorpe's account of the archbishop's discomfiture, and his frequent outwitting by the heretic, may be fictional, there seems no reason for Thorpe's falsification of these details" (Hudson 1993, xlvi). The discovery of the writ confirms Hudson's suspicions that *The Testimony* describes actual events. Nevertheless, the authenticity of Thorpe's examination by Arundel should not stand in the way of a study of the text's use of literary strategies. As I show below, Thorpe makes plain that his text is not simply an account of his examination, but a narrative that is directed towards a designated reading audience and one that has a particularised function.

On the surface, it seems a fruitless endeavour to examine *The Testimony*'s use of literary strategies. After all, on a number of occasions Thorpe expresses his typically Lollard disdain for the "sensyble solace" that is generated by art (Thorpe 66: 1374). In one instance he proffers a hyperbolic vignette of men and women taking pleasure in music while on pilgrimage, and he takes the opportunity to slip in a jab at tale telling:

Also, sire, I knowe wel þat whanne dyuerse men and wymmen wolen goen þus aftir her owne willis and fyndingis out on pilgrimageyngis, þei wolen ordeyne biforehonde to haue wiþ hem boþe men and wymmen þat kunnen wel synge rowtinge songis, and also summe of þese pilgrimes wolen haue wiþ hem baggepipis so þat in eche toun þat þei comen þoru3, what wiþ noyse of her syngynge, and wiþ þe soun of her pipinge, and wiþ þe gingelynge of her Cantirbirie bellis, and wiþ þe berkyngge out of dogges aftir hem, þese maken more noyse þan if the king came þere away wiþ his clarioneris and manye oþer mynstrals. And if þese men and wymmen

ben a moneþe out in her pilgrymage, manye of hem an half zere aftir  
schulen be greeete iangelers, tale tellers and lyeris.

(Thorpe 64: 1320-1331)

In a second example, he explains his disapproval of the presence of organs in churches:

... lusti men and worldli louers delyten, coueiten and traueile to haue alle  
her wittis quykned and scharpid wiþ dyuerse sensyble solace. But alle the  
feipful louers and suers of Crist haue al her delite to heeren Goddis word,  
and to vndirstonden it truly, and to worchen þeraftir feipfuli and  
continuelli. (Thorpe 66: 1372-1376)

Thorpe also finds fault with “þe synful and veyn craft of keruyng, zetyng<sup>67</sup> or of  
peyntynge” (58: 1124-1125). Despite Thorpe’s stated objections to some forms of  
artistry, as Elizabeth Schirmer has argued, “William Thorpe’s *Testimony* is clearly a  
highly crafted, if not largely fictional, account of whatever may have transpired between  
Thorpe and Arundel” (2009, 271).

It is my view that *The Testimony* represents Thorpe’s efforts to bolster the morale  
of untrained Lollard readers who might themselves be subjected to an examination by  
ecclesiastical authorities. His vernacular account defends the Lollard positions on the  
Eucharist, images, pilgrimages, tithes, and oaths, and, therefore, presents a sort of  
anatomisation of Lollard doctrine and provides model arguments with which one might  
defend these doctrinal positions against the Church’s challenges to them. More  
importantly, however, he emphasises the centrality of himself and his experiences while  
under examination. By insisting on his own exemplarity as a figure of the martyr, he  
infuses his narrative with an embedded interpretation: Thorpe’s resistance to the Church

places him on the side of right. In his Prologue, and elsewhere in his account, Thorpe indicates that his examination will show that since he can hold firm during an examination by ecclesiastical authorities, whatever the odds, so too can his Lollard readers. As I show later in this chapter, Thorpe consciously develops those elements of his account that are consistent with the generic conventions of saints' lives, more specifically those of the *passiones*. These points of commonality with the culturally pervasive and highly recognisable conventions of saint's life narratives serve to signal the reader that Thorpe's steadfastness is legitimate and worthy of belief and emulation. In this way, his narrative is meticulously tailored to the readership he has in mind.<sup>68</sup>

Thorpe is very precise about the reading audience to whom his narrative is directed and what he means for his narrative to accomplish. The Wycliffite dialogues that I discussed in Chapter 2 direct the course of the reader's interpretation as well, but they do so by challenging the credibility of the orthodox position by way of the disputants' names and/or by limiting in length and number the speeches of the orthodox representatives, so as to make their points of view appear to be lacking in justification. Thorpe escalates this directive impulse of the Lollard dialogue writer when he very clearly articulates that he is writing with a particular audience in mind and that he deliberately tailors his text for the profit of this audience:

And so þanne I, ymagynyng þe greet desire of þese sondir and diuerse  
frendis of sondri placis and cuntrees, acoordinge alle in oon, I occupiede  
me herwiþ diuerse tymes so bisili [in] my wittis þat þoru3 Goddis grace I  
perseyued, bi her good mouynge and of her cheritable desir, sum profit þat  
my3t come of þis writing. (Thorpe 25: 41-45)

Having explained this motivation for preparing his text, Thorpe immediately proceeds to describe what he envisions the benefit of his account to be:

For truþe haþ þis condicioun: whereuere it is empugned, þer comeþ þerof  
odour of swete smel, and þe more violentli þat enemyes enforsen hem to  
oppressen and to wiþstoonde þe truþe of Goddis word, þe ferþir þe swete  
smel þerof strecchiþ. And no doute, whanne þis heuenli smel is moued, it  
wol not as smoke passe awei wiþ þe wynde; but it wol descende and reste  
in summe clene soule þirstinge þeraftir. (Thorpe 25: 45-51)

Thorpe significantly intimates that his text will convey “þe truþe of Goddis word” and that this truth “wol not as smoke passe awei wiþ þe wynde.” This is a striking use of metaphor: because of Arundel’s threats to have Thorpe burned at the stake for his heretical activities, the Lollard preacher’s life and all that he stands for are in real danger of literally passing away as smoke in the wind.

Thorpe’s repeated statements that he writes because “dyuerse freendis in sunder placis” and “diuerse frendis of sondri placis and cuntrees” have asked him to document his examination (24: 22-23, 25: 41) indicate that he has a waiting audience and that this audience is not limited to a single geographic area. That Thorpe openly conceives of the transmission of his text’s message is a critical point, for in both *The Testimony* and *The Constitutions*, Arundel expresses anxiety about the circulation of heterodox arguments challenging the Church’s authority. In his *Constitutions*, drafted the year of Thorpe’s examination, Arundel observes that news of Lollard doctrines has travelled beyond England’s borders. His eleventh constitution complains that the dissemination of

heterodox doctrines has weakened the reputation of both the University of Oxford and the Church of England,

our province being infected with divers and unfruitful doctrines, and defiled with a new and damnable name of Lollardy, to the great reproof and offence of the [the ancient university of Oxford], being known in foreign countries, and to the great irksomeness of the students there, and to the great damage and loss of the church of England, which in times past by her virtue, as with a strong wall, was wont to be defended, and now is like to run into ruin not to be recovered. (Arundel 194)

In *The Testimony*, Arundel also displays concern about the broad circulation of Lollard challenges to the Church's authority. Towards the end of Thorpe's account, an angry Arundel tells Thorpe he will vigorously pursue the Lollard sect and leave no trace of it behind:

God, as I woot wel, haþ clepid me azen and brouzt me into þis londe,<sup>69</sup> for to distrie þee and þe fals sect þat þou art of. And, bi God, I schal pursue zou vnto Acle,<sup>70</sup> so þat I schal not leue oo stap<sup>71</sup> of zou in þis londe!  
(91: 2180-2184)

Arundel's threat that he will "not leue oo stap" of the Lollard sect in all of England indicates that while he is apprehensive about the circulation of Lollard doctrines he also means to suppress the dissemination of these opinions.

Notwithstanding Arundel's aim to prohibit the circulation of Lollard doctrines that challenge the Church's authority, Thorpe shapes his account into a form that is highly suited to the task of legitimising Lollard challenges to the Church's dominion. As

Somerset observes, *The Testimony* is “itself, among other things, a dialogue” (Somerset 2009, xv-xvi). As a dialogue that presents Thorpe’s “aposynge and ... answeringe” (24: 26), *The Testimony* functions as an exemplification of the Lollard martyr bravely resisting the tyranny of the Church. Pertinently, Hudson argues that the work offers “a model of behaviour under inquisition” (Hudson 1988, 221). Throughout *The Testimony*, Thorpe makes plain that he is thinking about exemplariness. For example, he repeatedly affirms that the truth of the Christian religion lies in the example of Christ’s living and teaching. In every instance in which he embarks on this subject, Thorpe privileges Christ’s living and his teaching. In his treatment of images, for example, Thorpe passionately objects to the use of images as books for the unlearned. He insists that the holy living and teaching of priests would constitute more appropriate books for the people:

For certis, ser, if þe woundirful worchinge of God, and þe holi lyuyng  
and techyng of Crist and of hise apostlis and profetis weren maade  
knownen to þe peple bi holi lyuyng, and trewe and bisie techyng of  
preestis, þese þingis weren sufficient bokis and kalenders to knowe God bi  
and his seintis, wiþouten ony ymage maade wiþ mannes hond.

(Thorpe 58: 1133-1138)

Later in his account, Thorpe criticises the exacting of tithes by priests because it departs from the example of Christ. He argues that tithing is unlawful, as “Crist lyuede al þe tyme of his prechinge bi pure almes of þe peple, and bi ensaumples of him hise apostlis lyueden in þe same wise bi pure almes eiþer ellis bi þe traueile of her hondis” (Thorpe 71: 1528-1531). Citing Matthew 10:24-25,<sup>72</sup> Thorpe proceeds to assert that priests are

wrong to exact tithes, since every true priest “confessiþ in word and in werk þat a discipule owiþ not to be aboue his maistir, but it suffisiþ to a discipule to be as his maistir, symple, pore, and meke and pacient” (Thorpe 71: 1532-1534). He reiterates his argument that it is the duty of every priest to model his own life after that of Christ: “And bi ensauple speciali of his maistir Crist euery preest schulde rule him in al his lyuyng” (Thorpe 71: 1534-1536).

Even as Thorpe emphasises the importance of conforming to the example of the life of Christ, so he repeatedly underscores his sense that his own life and actions serve as a model to his fellow Christians. Like a good priest, Thorpe emulates Christ’s example, but he also follows his own advice that “aftir his cunnyng and his power a prest schulde bisie him to enforme and to rule whomeuere he schal mowe charitabli” (Thorpe 71: 1536-1538). Thus, from the moment that Arundel first indicates that he will ask Thorpe to “swere now here . . . þat [he] schalt forsake alle þe opynynouns whiche þe sect of Lollers holdiþ” (Thorpe 34: 349-351), Thorpe maintains that to act against his conscience would make him “be cause of þe deef boþe of men and of wymmyn, 3he, boþe bodili and as I gesse goostli” (Thorpe 35: 375-376). That he would be responsible for the deaths of fellow dissenters is straightforward enough. Arundel does not simply want Thorpe to abjure his religious beliefs; he wants him to publish the names of other followers and “make hem knowen to þe bischop of þe diocise þat þese ben inne” (Thorpe 35: 350-360). Thorpe’s principal concern here, however, is for the salvation of his fellow Christians, and he very clearly outlines his position for Arundel:

For manye men and wymen þat stonden now in truþe and ben in wei of saluacioun, if I schulde for þe leernynge and redinge of her bileue

pubblischen hem and putten hem herfore vp to vnpiteous bischopis and mynystris, I knowe sumdel bi experience þat þei schulden be so troublid, and disesid wiþ o perseccussioun and wiþ oþere þat manye of hem, I gesse, wolden raþer chese to forsake þe truþe þan to be trauailid, scorned, sclaudrid or ponyschid as bischopis and her mynystris now [vsen] for to constreynen men and wymmen to consenten to hem.

(Thorpe 35: 376-384)

Soon after this episode, Thorpe makes plain that he is distressed about the prospect of being a bad example: "... if I consentide þus to zoure wille, I schulde herynne bi myn yuel ensauple ... sle so manye folkis goostli þat I schulde neuere deserue to haue grace of God to edefien his chirche" (Thorpe 38: 494-496). Thorpe is apprehensive about leading his fellow Lollards away from the path of salvation by turning their names over to the authorities of the Church, but he is more concerned about endangering the salvation of many more than these by serving as a bad example.

The passage concerning Thorpe's worries about how his fellows would hold up under examination (Thorpe 35: 376-384) is most interesting because it immediately follows the author's reference to the figure of Susanna (Dan. 13: 22).<sup>73</sup> Susanna is falsely accused of adultery, but her trust in God saves her from execution, a fate she chooses rather than to commit adultery with her accusers. As the moment of her execution approaches, God raises up the spirit of a young man who exposes the dishonesty of the faithful Susanna's accusers. When Arundel attempts to compel Thorpe to forsake his unorthodox opinions and give up the names of fellow Lollards, it is to the story of Susanna that he turns his thoughts:



And I heerynge þese wordis þouzte in myn herte þat þis was an vnleeful askyng, and I demed mysilf cursid of God if I consentid herto; and I þouzte how Susanne seide ‘Angwysschis ben to me on euery side’, and forþi þat I stood stille musyng and spak not. (Thorpe 35: 365-368)

At this moment when Thorpe is being tested, he invokes the example of Susanna to bolster his morale. The invocation of the story works, for Thorpe does not give in to Arundel’s demands but instead he stands “stille musyng and [speaks] not” (35: 368). Thorpe’s refusal to name names itself becomes an exemplary story. Thorpe outlines for Arundel what he sees to be the consequences of giving up the names of fellow Lollards. First, the deed would cast him in the role of “apelour” and “traitour” and, therefore, like the elders in the story of Susanna, Thorpe would represent a kind of false accuser (35: 371, 380). Second, giving up the names of his fellows to “vnpiteous bischopis and mynystris” would cause these men and women to be “so troublid . . . and disesid wiþ o persecussioun and wiþ opere” that many of them would rather “chese to forsake þe truþe” than to be “ponyschid” (Thorpe 35: 376-384).

Like Susanna, Thorpe stands by his principles. He surpasses Susanna, however. By showing that he is willing to endure Arundel’s wrath in order to spare his fellow Lollards from the punishments of domineering bishops, Thorpe exemplifies the very ordeal he says will weaken the resolve of some of his fellows. Moreover, he is himself bolstered by the example of another withstanding persecution. Consequently, his example serves to bolster the morale of those who are susceptible to forsaking the truth. The vulnerability of his fellow Lollards is brought to the fore and Thorpe provides an applicable example that they can conjure up to strengthen their courage in times of

persecution. Thorpe's perseverance here is an inversion of the idea, highlighted in his Prologue, that God is "wraþþid greetli and moued to take hard veniaunce, not oonli on hem þat doon þis yuel, but also vpon alle hem þat consenten to þese antecristis lymes, which knowen eiper miste knowen her malice and her tirauntrie, and ouzten to wiþstonde her viciousnesse and wol not" (24: 13-17). In his identification with Susanna and his refusal to submit to the Archbishop's demands—even when Arundel threatens him with the stake—Thorpe illustrates for his readers that he is up to the task of withstanding the viciousness of the Church and that he is rewarded for his trouble with a strong spiritual confirmation: "more herþoru3 myn herte was confortid and stablischid in þe drede and loue of God" (36: 413-414).

Thorpe's reference to the example of Susanna is not unique among Lollards. The anonymous author of "Of Prelates" references Susanna in his criticism of unjust evidentiary rules that permit a man to be labelled a cursed heretic and forbidden from teaching the gospels simply because "four false witnesses hirid bi money" speak against him ("Of Prelates" 74). The "Of Prelates" author maintains that "þes false men seye in here doying þat crist was lafully don to deþ, & susanne also, for bi sich witnessis þei weren dampnyd" ("Of Prelates" 74-75). Curiously, the "Of Prelates" author mistakenly observes that Susanna is put to death when, in fact, she is spared because Daniel's intervention exposes the witnesses against her as liars. Nevertheless, what resonates with the "Of Prelates" author is that Susanna is falsely accused and put on trial. Thorpe's treatment of Susanna's exemplariness differs somewhat from that of the "Of Prelates" author in that Thorpe is more interested in her as a model of constancy of belief and purpose under duress. Just as Susanna refuses to save her life by committing adultery

with the elders because sinning against God is a transgression, so Thorpe maintains that he will gladly suffer whatever is in store for him rather than earn the wrath of God by consenting to Arundel's demands and naming other adherents of the Lollard sect:

Forþi, ser, if I consentid to 3ou to do herinne 3oure wille, eiþer for  
boncheef or myscheef þat mai falle to me in þis lyf, I deme in my  
conscience þat I were worþi to be cursid of God and so of alle seyntis....

(Thorpe 36: 395-398)

Susanna's story is useful to Thorpe precisely because it represents a model of the story of steadfastness in adversity he wishes to convey to his readers about his own examination.

In his Prologue, Thorpe makes the case that his examination has shown him that God does not fail to comfort or help those who abide by, and suffer for, the will of God. He intimates that the account of his examination will have the same effect on his readers:

And þe fourþe þing þat moueþ me to write þis sentence is þis: I knowe,  
bi my sodeyne and vnwarned apposynge and answeyng, þat alle þei þat  
wolen of good herte wiþouten feynyng oblischen hemsilf wilfulli and  
gladli aftir her kunnyng and her powere to suen Crist pacientli, trauelyng  
bisili, priuili and apeertli in werk and in word to wiþdrawen whom þei  
mowen fro vicis, plantyng in hem vertues if þei mowen, comforyng and  
ferþeryng alle hem þat stonden in grace, if herwiþ þei ben not enhauncid  
into veyn glorie þoruz presumcioun of her wisdam neiþer englaymed wiþ  
ony worldli prosperite, but meke and pacient, purposyng to abide  
perceuerauntli þe wille of God, suffryng wilfulli and gladli wiþouten ony  
grucchyng whateuer 3erde þat þe Lord wole chastise hem wiþ, þis good

Lord wole not þanne faile for to counforte, and helpe alle siche men and  
wymmen in euery moment and at euery poynt of ech temptacioun þat  
euery enemye purposiþ azens hem. (Thorpe 27: 108-122)

This passage represents the cardinal objective of *The Testimony*. Thorpe openly aims for his account to strengthen the resolve of his fellow Lollards. As a result of this goal, he shapes his text in such a way as to emphasise the didactic and exemplary message of his account. In other words, he controls the course that his readers' interpretation of his story will take. As Fiona Somerset argues, "...the text's value is not as a record of actual procedure but as a representation of ideal, even exemplary, steadfastness in adversity" (Somerset 1998, 179).

Kendall contends that "[t]he plot of Thorpe's displaced drama is ... that of Christ's examination" (Kendall 59). He goes on to argue that "Thorpe plays Christ, Arundel plays Caiaphas, and his clerks play the tyrant's minions" (Kendall 59). In the same vein, Somerset suggests that "[l]ike many a martyr or heretic on trial, Thorpe models his present predicament on Christ's passion and his dissenting activity generally on Christ's mission" (Somerset 1998, 179). It is undeniable that Thorpe employs Christ as a model. He repeatedly emphasises the importance of following the example of Christ's living and teaching. However, his examination is not modelled on Christ's examination. In at least one instance, Thorpe characterises himself in a way that seems inconsistent with Christ's story. In the episode in which Arundel advises Thorpe that he is worthy of execution and that the officials in Shrewsbury have asked the Archbishop to sentence Thorpe to death, Thorpe analyses his own feelings about this threatening information:

But certis, neiþer þis preier of men of Schrouesbori neiþer þe  
manassyng of þe Archebischoþ ferede me ony þing. But in þe  
rehersyng of þis malice and in þe heringe of it, myn herte was greetly  
reioisid.... (Thorpe 43-44: 657-660)

Whereas Thorpe highlights his lack of fear, Christ, when faced with similar  
circumstances, experiences distress as he struggles with his own predicament:

And he took Petir and James and Joon with hym, and bigan to drede, and  
to be anoyed.

And he seide to hem, My soule is soreweful to the deeth; abide ye here,  
and wake ye with me.

And whanne he was gon forth a litil, he felde doun on the erthe, and  
preiede, that if it myyte be, that the our schulde passe fro hym.

And he seide, Abba, fadir, alle thingis ben possible to thee, bere ouer fro  
me this cuppe; but not that Y wole, but thou wolt, be done.

*(Wycliffite Bible, Mark 14:33-36)*

And whanne the sixte hour was come, derknnessis weren made on al the  
erthe til in to the nynthe our.

And in the nynthe our Jhesus criede with a greet vois, and seide, Heloy,  
Heloy, lamasabatany, that is to seie, My God, my God, whi hast  
thou forsakun me?

*(Wycliffite Bible, Mark 15:33-34)*

Both in Gethsemane and on the cross, Christ appears uncertain and apprehensive about what lies ahead.<sup>74</sup> Thorpe, on the other hand, characterises himself as untroubled even though the Archbishop maintains that the bailiffs of Shrewsbury call for his execution in order to make an example of him:

þe bailies and þe comouns of þat toun haue writun to me, praynge me þat  
am Archebischop of Cauntirbirie, primate of al Yngelonde and chaunceler,  
þat I wolde vouchesaaf to graunte to hem þat, if þou schalt be deed, as þou  
art worþi, and suffre openli þi i[e]wise<sup>75</sup> for þin eresies, þat þou maist  
haue þi iewise openli here among hem, so þat alle þei, whom þou and oþer  
suche losels haue þere peruertid, moun þoru3 drede of þi deef ben  
reconseilid azen to þe vnyte of holi chirche, and also þei þat stoonden in  
trewe feiþ of holi chirche moun þoru3 þi deef be þe moore stablischid  
þerinne. (Thorpe 43: 644-653)

Thorpe's insistence that he is undaunted is especially meaningful given that Arundel, according to Thorpe, means to use the Lollard preacher's execution and the fear that it would incite in others as an example to bring lost Lollards back into the fold. Since the Archbishop and Thorpe are at cross-purposes on this point, Thorpe's emphasis on his steadfastness and his sense of wellbeing underscores the fact that Thorpe is on the side of right and that Arundel and the Church are in error.

In keeping with the Archbishop's willingness to make an example out of Thorpe, Arundel threatens to seriously consider martyring him by granting the Shrewsbury bailiffs' request: "Bi my þrifte, þis hertli preier and feruent request schal be þouzt on" (Thorpe 43: 655-656). The Archbishop's intimidatory remark is reinforced by his earlier

assertion that Thorpe will face execution if the heterodox preacher refuses to renounce his beliefs: “eiþir now anoon consente to myn ordynauce and submytte þee to stonde to myn decre, or bi seint Tomas þou schalt be shauen and sue þi felow into Smeþefelde” (Thorpe 36: 406-409). In addition to Arundel’s threatening remarks, various participants in the proceedings urge Arundel “to brenne [Thorpe] anoon” or “to drenche [him] in þe see” (Thorpe 92: 2201, 2202).<sup>76</sup> The repeated and escalating threats against Thorpe’s life duplicate Arundel’s legislative efforts to combat the Lollard heresy. That Arundel’s *Constitutions* existed in some preliminary form by 1407 demonstrates that the censorial environment in England, already underscored by the 1401 act of Parliament known as *De haeretico comburendo*, was increasing in intensity. In light of the fact that the principal aim of *De haeretico comburendo* was to block unauthorised preaching, Thorpe’s claim, specifically that his interrogation will show that God does not abandon those who persist in promulgating the truth of God’s word, is significant.

*De haeretico* is designed, finally, to silence those “divers false and perverse persons of a certain new sect ... [who] do perversely and maliciously in divers places within the realm under the colour of dissembled holiness, preach and teach these days openly and privily new doctrines, and ... heretical ... opinions contrary to the same faith and blessed determinations of holy church” (*De haeretico* 850). *De haeretico* further proclaims that “none henceforth preach, hold, teach, or instruct anything openly or secretly, or make or write any book contrary to the catholic faith” (*De haeretico* 851). Anyone found to be committing one or several of these acts was subject to be “arrested and to be detained under safe custody in ... [prison] until he [does] canonically purge [himself] of the articles laid against [him] in this behalf or ... abjure such wicked sect and

doctrines” (*De haeretico* 851). This 1401 act of Parliament affirms that if heretical preaching cannot be contained, then those who promote unorthodox opinions will be. The Archbishop’s warning that Thorpe may follow his companion to Smithfield is a formidable threat, as it refers to the burning at Smithfield of the heretical priest William Sawtry in 1401 (Cole 129). Moreover, Thorpe emphasises the fact that he is profoundly aware of this atmosphere of censorship when he responds to the Archbishop’s threat to condemn him to Smithfield by beholding inwardly that “þe Archebischoþ þirstide zit aftir þe schedynge out of more innocent blood” (Thorpe 36: 418-419).

Despite Thorpe’s attentiveness to the censorial conditions under which he is writing, he insists throughout his narrative that his interest lies in the saving of men’s souls and that this principle motivates his writing. Thorpe takes issue, for example, with the Archbishop’s assertion that the early Wycliffites who have abandoned their doctrine are now wise men by observing that

... þei schulden haue deserued myche grace of God to haue saved her owne soulis and manye oþer mennes if þei hadden perseyuered feiþfulli in wilful pouert and in oþir symple and vertues lyuyng, and speciali if wiþ þese forseid vertues þei hadden contynewid in her bisie and frutuou sowinge of Goddis word.... (Thorpe 39-40: 525-530)

Thus, Thorpe’s central complaint against the first-generation Wycliffites who renounced their faith is that, in so doing, they have endangered the spiritual lives of the people they might have saved had they continued in the promulgation of God’s word.

It is Thorpe’s grievance against the first-generation Wycliffites who renounced their beliefs, among other issues, that aligns Thorpe’s narrative with saints’ lives. As we



have seen, Thorpe maintains that it behooves priests to govern their lives by the example of Christ's living. In turn, Thorpe indicates, priests show their parishioners how to be good followers or servants of Christ. In his *Testimony*, Thorpe does not figure himself as a stand-in for the persecuted Christ, but as a devoted servant of the Saviour reminiscent of hagiography. Thus, he insists, the experience of his "sodeyne and vnwarned apposynge and answeyng" has taught him that "þei þat wolen of good herte ... suen Crist" will be comforted and helped by God (Thorpe 27: 109-110). In this assertion, Thorpe clearly characterises himself as a follower of Christ, and his previously mentioned identification with the figure of Susanna strongly suggests that his narrative is heavily indebted to hagiography. I say heavily indebted to hagiography because, while Thorpe's narrative represents a tremendously pared down sketch of a saint's life, the narrative nevertheless contains elements consistent with generic conventions that belong to this culturally pervasive and recognisable genre, and it is my view that Thorpe exploits these elements to signal to his readers that his perseverance is worthy of imitation.

Because hagiographical writing distinguishes between the lives of saints who are confessors and the lives of saints who are martyrs, a few comments about the different kinds of saints' lives are needed here. As Paul Strohm observes, "the fourth and fifth centuries saw an end to the persecutions [of Christians] and the development of the *vita*, a new hagiographical genre which treated the lives of confessors rather than martyrs" (Strohm 10.1, 65). He indicates that the hagiographical genre that dealt with martyrs, the *passio*, "originated during the great persecutions of the second, third, and early fourth centuries, in order to satisfy a Christian audience anxious to harmonize the fact of martyrdom with Christian teaching" (Strohm 10.1, 63). Thorpe himself associates

martyrdom with Christian teaching when he indicates that he would gladly die rather than be a bad example to other Christians by leading them away from the truth. It is highly appropriate, therefore, that Thorpe's narrative should conform in many instances to the conventions of the *passio*, given that like the early *passiones*, the events of his narrative take place during a period in which the persecution of Lollards was escalating. Because the term *martyrology*<sup>77</sup> or *martyrologium* in the period refers to "a more inclusive list of martyred saints according to the days of their festivals" (Strohm 10.1, 63), I will instead refer to Thorpe's narrative in what follows as a "substitute saint's life" (Hudson 1993, lvi), acknowledging that I borrow the term from Hudson.

The mistaken impulse to view Thorpe's narrative as one in which he casts himself in the role of Christ is attributable, in part, to a passage that comes at the very end of *The Testimony*: "For as a tree leyde vpon anoper tree ouerthwert on crosse wyse, so weren þe Archebisshop and hise þree clerkis alwei contrarie to me and I to hem" (93: 2245-2247). Schirmer suggests, for example, that "[t]his image, the culmination of Thorpe's Wycliffite hagiography, casts the persecuted Lollard priest in the role of the persecuted and crucified Christ, overlaying the narrative of Christ's life on Thorpe's own" (Schirmer 2009, 298). In reality, Thorpe's simile foregrounds only the fact that he and his examiners affirm incompatible positions. He is not a substitute for the persecuted Christ; he repeatedly insists that he is a persecuted follower of Christ, much in the same way as Christian martyrs are represented in saints' lives. The lives of St. Christopher, St. Sebastian, St. Christina of Bolsena, and St. Cecilia illuminate the methods Thorpe employs as he directs his readers to read *The Testimony*, not as a record of a legal procedure, but as the didactic and exemplary story of a Christian bravely facing

persecution. I choose these four particular saints' lives<sup>78</sup> principally because certain key episodes—such as the saint's rapid involvement with hostile authority (Strohm 10.2, 166) and the saint's exchange with the prison tempter—depicted in them closely parallel events described in *The Testimony*. Of the four saints' lives, two are now officially apocryphal. St. Christopher and St. Christina of Bolsena were removed from the General Roman Calendar in 1969 because of insufficient evidence to support the veracity of their legends. All four saints' lives exhibit the same fidelity to generic expectations. *The Testimony* itself adheres in many instances to the generic expectations of hagiography, and, therefore, Hudson remarks that *The Testimony* is “a blend of the saint's life and a simple tale of the people's hero made good” (Hudson 1988, 220). She further argues that “[e]ven if the underlying events are fact, the conversation has evidently been heavily embroidered and slanted, to show Thorpe in the best possible light and Arundel in the worst” (Hudson 1988, 220). Given the predicament in which Thorpe finds himself, his experience meets the generic expectations of hagiography, and he models himself on the protagonists of these stories.<sup>79</sup>

As I have already argued, one of the reasons Thorpe gives for not wanting to give up the names of fellow Wycliffites is that he knows some of them will choose to forsake the truth in order to avoid being “disedid wiþ o persecussioun and wiþ opere” (35: 380-381). In *The South English Legendary's* life of St. Christopher, Christopher himself displays a reluctance to suffer for Christ. Once Christopher recognises Christ as the highest lord on earth, he goes off in search of him and finds a hermit who provides a brief explanation of Christ's origins and also advises Christopher that he “most somwat for him þolie and faste eche Friday” (342: 69). The hermit's sentence structure makes clear

that abstinence from food is a sort of suffering, and Christopher indicates that he believes himself to be incapable of enduring such an experience: “I ne faste neuere ... ne zute i nemay” (342: 70). Christopher apparently does learn to endure suffering for Christ, for tradition tells us that he not only proceeds to convert more than a thousand men to Christianity, he also comforts Christians who are being tormented and executed. Even when he is imprisoned himself, Christopher continues to convert others. During his imprisonment, for instance, the king sends “to uaire wymmen” to entice Christopher into sin (346: 172). Instead, Nite and Aquilline are captivated by Christopher, and ask him to admit them to Christendom. Soon after, the women are executed on order of the king, and they willingly forfeit their lives for Christ.

Like St. Christopher who consoles the tormented Christians as they face death for their beliefs, Thorpe offers up his narrative as a form of comfort to those who face persecution. Thorpe’s text is exemplary and one of the things it means to exemplify is that the “good Lord wole not ... faile for to counforte, and helpe alle [Christians] in euery moment and at euery poynt of ech temptacioun þat euery enemye purposiþ azens hem” (Thorpe 27: 119-122). Thorpe’s account also shares in common with the life of St. Christopher the figure of the prison tempter. While Christopher is imprisoned, the king sends Aquilline and Nite to seduce him. Similarly, while Thorpe is confined to his cell, the Archbishop sends a man to the prisoner who raises the matter of auricular confession as a topic of conversation in order to ensnare Thorpe. Thorpe initially believes that the man visits him because “of ful feruent and charitable desyre” (80: 1833-1834), but realises later “þat he cam to tempte” (80: 1834). From the perspective of the examiners, this process of tempting Thorpe is successful because the tempter manages to elicit

heretical statements from the prisoner that the Archbishop and his clerk use against him in his examination. By contrast, Thorpe figures his exchange with the man as a model to be imitated because the episode demonstrates that Thorpe, like St. Christopher, successfully performs his Christian duty despite the danger of further incriminating himself. Pertinently, Thorpe tells the man that priests are bound “to counseile men and wymmen for to leue here synne, confortynge hem þat bisien hem þus to done for to hope stidefastly in þe merci of God” (82: 1888-1890). Early in his dialogue with the tempter, Thorpe enacts his priestly duty when he counsels the man to abandon his sinful life: “Ser, I counseile 3ou for to absente 3ou from al yuel companye, and to drawe 3ou to hem þat louen and bisien hem to knowe and to kepe þe heestis of God” (81: 1865-1867). Notwithstanding his deception, the tempter appears, like the seductresses converted by St. Christopher, to be receptive to Thorpe’s tutelage: “And, as he schewide to me bi his wordis, he was heuy of his beyng in court, and rist soreweful for his owne viciouse lyuyng” (81: 1844-1845).

In the *South English Legendary*’s life of St. Sebastian, Sebastian, like Christopher and Thorpe, attempts to direct others from their sinful living. Towards the end of his life, Sebastian attempts to persuade the emperor Diocletian to turn from idolatry to Christianity: “Sorore me greueþ þat þou nelt habbe reuþe on þi þo3t/And honure him þat þe made & þine maumetis bileue/Þat ne mowe þe helpe worþ a stre for hi beoþ dombe & deue” (17: 42-44). Also like Christopher and Thorpe, Sebastian comforts those facing death for Christ. Significantly, he is characterised as one who holds those in Christ who would have fled for fear: “Mani he huld in Cristendom þat fleichi wolde for fere” (16: 12). Additionally, he encourages persecuted Christians to “dradde nozt/To

fonge þane deþ for Godes loue” (16: 10-11). Sebastian testifies to the sincerity of his belief when he is condemned to death himself for counselling two brothers to hold on to their Christian beliefs though they should die for it. As a result of his having counselled Marcus and Marcelian, Diocletian threatens to torture Sebastian, but the prisoner meaningfully indicates that the emperor’s threats are ineffectual: “Sir sede sein Bastian þi þretynge ne drede ich nozt” (17: 41). Sebastian’s assertion that he does not fear the emperor’s threats and, by extension, the real violence they portend neatly complements Thorpe’s contention that he is not at all frightened by calls for his execution by the officials in Shrewsbury or by the threats of the Archbishop. As I argued earlier, Thorpe’s professed fearlessness should not be taken as a sign that he casts himself in the role of the persecuted Christ, since Christ is shown to exhibit apprehension about his own predicament whilst in Gethsemane and on the cross. Instead, Thorpe’s lack of fear links him with the protagonists of saints’ lives and underscores the exemplary purpose of his narrative. This is particularly noteworthy given Thorpe’s argument that the holy living and teaching of priests constitute “sufficient bokis and kalenders<sup>80</sup> to knowe God bi and his seintis” (58: 1137).

In his two-part article “Passioun, Lyf, Miracle, Legende: Some Generic Terms in Medieval Hagiographical Narrative,” Strohm has outlined a number of characteristics common to saint’s life narratives: “a brief account of the birth and early upbringing of the saint; a prolonged account of the trial, sufferings under torture, resolute conduct, and eventual death of the saint; and very possibly some added attention to miracles wrought at the shrine of the saint or by the relics of the saint after death” (10.2, 156). To illustrate

his point, Strohm cites Chaucer's "St. Cecilia" as an example and comments on medieval readers' expectations about the formula of saints' lives:

[a] reader would have expected a short account of Cecilia's birth and fostering ..., rapid involvement with hostile authority ..., a forceful defense of her faith (as in her comparison of Almachius's power to a "bladdre ful of wynd" and her reminder that he has power only over her earthly life, 424-511), and an exhibition of her perseverance and God's power to sustain her in torment (she is unharmed in a scalding bath and continues to preach for three days despite mortal wounds, 519-46).

(Strohm 10.2, 166)

These five generic conventions are present in Thorpe's *Testimony* and Thorpe's foregrounding of them serves as a means to control his readers' interpretation of his narrative by highlighting his role as a model of the Christian martyr that is worthy of emulation.

Like Chaucer's "St. Cecilia," William Paris's *Life of Saint Christina* and Thorpe's *Testimony* display the features Strohm identifies as common to the genre. As anticipated, Paris begins his work by offering a brief sketch of the early life of St. Christina:

In Itayle she was borne, Y wene,  
And come of kynne were grete of myghte,  
But she forsoke them all bedene  
And holle hir herte to Criste she highte.

She was so faire, that maiden myld,

That every wighte that ones hire see,  
If it were man, woman, or child,  
She wan theire lofe with hir beauté.  
Suche grace of God forsoth had shee  
To flee all vice and werkes wilde,  
And fully purposed hir to be  
Goddess owne servaunte and maide unfylde. (*St. Christina* 5-16)

In like manner, in a peculiar exchange with Arundel, Thorpe provides a brief account of his early education. I call this a peculiar exchange because Thorpe has just indicated that he plans to say no more than is necessary to the Archbishop and his clerks: “And I purposid to speke no more to þe Archebischop ne to þe clerkis þan me nede bihoued[d]” (36: 426-427). Yet, when Arundel again asks Thorpe to swear allegiance to Holy Church’s teachings (37: 435-436), he responds by launching into a mini autobiography:

And I seide þanne þus to him ‘Ser, my fadir and my modir, whoos soulis God asoile if it be his wille, spendiden moche moneye in dyuerse placis aboute my lore, in entent to haue me a preest of God. But whanne I cam into 3eeris of discessioun I hadde no wille to be preest; and herfore my freendis weren ofte rizt heuy towardis me. And þan me þouste her grucchyng azens me was so disesi to me þat I purposide herfore to haue laft her companye. ... But at þe laste whanne in þis mater þei wolden no longer suffre myn excusaciouns, but eiþir I schulde consente to hem eiþir I schulde bere euere her indignacioun, 3he, ser, her curse, as þei leten, I þanne, seyng þis, praieden hem þat þei wolden fouchsaaf for to 3eue me



lycence for to gon to hem þat weren named wyse preestis and of vertues  
conuersacioun to haue her counseile, and to knowe of hem þe office and  
þe charge of preesthode. And herto my fadir and my modir consentiden  
ful gladli and þei zauen to me her blessing and good leue to go, and þei  
token me money to spende in þis iornay.’ (37: 437-443, 450-459)

Thorpe recalls his early education here ostensibly to show that he has come to know God’s law “bi ensauple of þe doctryne of þese [wyse preestis] and speciali for þe goodlich and innocent werkis which I perseyuede þanne of hem and in hem” (38: 465-467). Nevertheless, this lengthy description of his youth and learning which runs some eighty lines hardly seems the concise reply that Thorpe suggests he is determined to provide. By contrast, this account of his youth affiliates *The Testimony* with hagiography on two fronts. First, as an account of his vocational and spiritual development, the episode fulfills medieval readers’ generic expectations of saints’ lives. Second, the fact that the account highlights Thorpe’s struggle to overcome his lack of interest in becoming a priest links it to narratives such as the life of St. Christopher in which the saint too must overcome an initial reluctance to serve Christ completely.

The second generic convention Strohm describes is the rapid involvement of the saint with hostile authority. Shortly after the description of Christina’s upbringing, the speaker describes her imprisonment by her tyrannical father:

Hir kynne wolde gife hir to righte non,  
For she shulde lyfe in mawmentrye;  
But in a tour of lyme and ston  
Hyr fader ordeyn hir to lye,

And twelfe maydens to be hir bye,  
Of whiche she myght triste never on;  
For thei were ordeyn for to aspie  
How that she lyved and made hyr mon. (*St. Christina* 33-40)

Just as Christina's life indicates that she was targeted early on by the hostile authority of her autocratic father, so Thorpe's *Testimony* indicates that he aroused Arundel's anger at least ten years before his 1407 examination.<sup>81</sup>

And I seide, 'Sere, þer mai no liif preue lawefulli þat I ioiede euere of þe manere of zoure outgoynge of þis londe. But, sere, to seie þe soþe, I was ioieful þat, whanne ze weren gon, þe bischop of London, [in] whose prison ze putten me and lafte me, fond in me no cause for to holden me no lengir in prisoun.' (91: 2173-2177).

Both Christina's life and Thorpe's *Testimony* employ Strohm's third convention of the saint's life; both protagonists present a forceful defence of their faith. Despite her father's repeated attempts to dissuade her from her belief in the Christian religion, for example, Christina insists that she will not perform sacrifices to her father's false gods but will continue instead to believe in the Trinity: "The Fadire in hevyn, the Son also,/The Holy Goste – the thirde He is;/To this Y wille, and to no moo,/With al myn herte do sacrifice" (117-120). Similarly, in one of his final exchanges with Arundel, Thorpe is asked once more to submit himself to the Church's authority, but he refuses to recant his beliefs:

And I seide þanne to þe Archebischof, 'Ser, as I haue seide to zou dyuerse

tymes todaie, I wole wilfuli and lowely obeie and submitte me to be obedient and buxum euer aftir my kunnyng and my power to God and to his lawe, and to eury membre of holy chirche as ferforþ as I can perseyue þat þese membris acorden wiþ her heed Crist, and wolen teche, reule me or chastise me bi autorite specially of Goddis lawe.’ (92: 2215-2221)

A few lines later, Thorpe indicates that his refusal to submit to the Church’s authority led Arundel to have him “brouzt into a ful [vn]honest prisoun where [he] cam neuere bifore” (93: 2234-2235).

Thorpe’s *Testimony* and the life of Christina also contain the fourth of Strohm’s conventions of a saint’s life. Christina dramatically reminds her father that he has power only over her earthly life. Urban has his men scrape off Christina’s flesh, and she responds by throwing a piece of her flesh at him: “Have here a morcell, teraunt – take it! –/Of the flesche was getyn of thee” (239-240). Christina’s throwing of the flesh symbolises her sense that her earthly life is both under Urban’s control and of secondary importance to her. Thorpe similarly intimates that Arundel has power only over his earthly life: “Forþi, ser, if I consentid to 3ou to do hereinne 3oure wille, eiþer for boncheef or myscheef þat mai falle to me in þis lyf, I deme in my conscience þat I were worþi to be cursid of God and so of alle seyntis” (36: 395-398). The fifth of Strohm’s conventions of a saint’s life—an exhibition of perseverance and God’s power to sustain the saint in torment—is also represented in the life of Christina and Thorpe’s account. Christina is unscathed by the fire her father lights under her: “Full grete fyer, to chaunge hir mode,/He bad make under, as she lay;/Full of oile the fier powred thei./Fro hir it

wente – she felyd but goode” (243-246). In like manner, Thorpe explains how God has sustained him throughout his ordeal:

And I was þanne gretli confortid in alle my wittis, not oonly forþi þat I was þan delyuered for a tyme fro þe sist, fro þe heeringe, fro þe presence, fro þe scornynge and fro þe manassinge of myn enemyes, but myche more I gladid in þe Lord forþi þoru3 his grace he kepte me so boþe amonge þe flaterynge specialli, also amonge þe manassingis of myn aduersaries [þat] wiþouten heuynesse and agrigginge of my conscience I passid awei fro hem. (93: 2238-2245)

Despite the threats of Arundel and his associates, Thorpe maintains that he is sustained by God’s grace.

As a lengthy record of Thorpe’s trial, ordeal, and unshakable conduct, *The Testimony* also exhibits another important recurring trait of hagiography. Thorpe’s ordeal may not involve the kinds of excessive torture portrayed in the four saints’ lives under discussion in this chapter, but it is certainly punctuated by threats of physical violence, and no doubt Thorpe anticipated his being subjected to torture. We have already seen Thorpe threatened with burning and drowning. On another occasion, Archbishop Arundel’s threats are accompanied by intimidatory body language:

And þan þe Archebischof, smytyng wiþ his fist fersli vpon a copbord, spake to me wiþ a grete spirit, seiynge, ‘Bi Iesu, but if þou leue suche addiciouns, obeiyng þee now here wiþouten ony accepcioun to myn ordinaunce, or þat I go out of þis place I schal make þee as sikir as ony þee in Kent! And advise þee now what þou wolt do.’ (88: 2070-2075)

Undeterred by Arundel's repeated warnings, Thorpe further mirrors the protagonists of saints' lives. Following the instance in which Arundel threatens to burn Thorpe at Smithfield for his refusal to abjure his heretical views, Thorpe expresses gratitude to God for placing him in this situation:

And at þis seiynge I stoode stille and spak not. But in myn herte I þouzte þat God dide to me a greet grace if he wolde of his greet mercy brynge me into suche an eende, and [in] myn herte I was no þing maad agast wiþ þis manassyng of þe Archebischop. But more herþoru3 myn herte was confortid and stablischid in þe drede and loue of God. (36: 410-414)

In like manner, St. Christina, having been grilled in a fire and violently stripped of flesh, thanks God for using her to teach men of His might:

Seint Cristyn saide, "With herte and thought  
I thanke Thee, God in magesté,  
Of alle that Thou has for me wroughte  
To make men knowe the myghte of Thee.  
In alle my peynes Thou has kept me,  
That fiere ne watir grevyd me noght.  
Therefor me thinke right longe to Thee,  
To Thi faire blisse, that I were broughte. (*St. Christina* 449-456)

Thorpe's perseverance, like St. Christina's, extends beyond simply insisting that God comforts those who suffer in His name. Thorpe and St. Christina's thankfulness for being the vessels through which others will come to know the truth of the Christian religion exemplifies Kathryn L. McKinley's point that, in saints' lives, "the holy person

was the recipient of an extra-ordinary dispensation of grace enabling him or her to accomplish holy works” (McKinley 93).

Another chief feature of saints’ lives, as profiled by Strohm, is the death of the saint and possibly the account of miracles enacted by means of the saint’s relics or at his or her shrine after the death of the saint. Chaucer’s “St. Cecilia” depicts a martyr who, for three days, miraculously survives a fatal neck wound and continues to teach the word of God to the Christian folk who remain with her: “Thre dayes lyved she in this torment,/And nevere cessed hem the feith to teche/That she hadde fostred; hem she gan to preche” (*SN* 537-539). In William Paris’s *St. Christina*, Christina too miraculously survives a variety of lethal torments. When she finally gives up the ghost after giving thanks to God, her earthly remains are placed in a castle and many visitors to her place of rest are healed of infirmities:

Hir bodye lyeth in stronge castyll –  
And Bulstene, seith the boke, it highte -  
Wher many seke men have had hele  
And blynde also have had her sighte. (*St. Christina* 488-492)

Thorpe’s *Testimony* lacks a depiction or note about the author’s death and a display of miracles wrought through the protagonist’s intervention, and I suggest the absence of miracles is one of the elements that characterises Thorpe’s narrative as a *substitute* saint’s life. His account directs his readers to focus on the ways in which his *Testimony* functions as an exemplar of steadfastness in adversity; therefore, *The Testimony* invites readers to emulate him rather than venerate him. In addition, because Thorpe’s account is autobiographical, one would not expect to find an account of his death. His death<sup>82</sup>

may have been taken as a given by medieval readers because there is no trace of Thorpe in the English historical record after the examination recorded in his *Testimony*.

Notwithstanding the fact that *The Testimony* is a pared down version of a saint's life, the conclusion of his *Testimony* is also reminiscent of hagiography. Significantly, Thorpe's account ends with a request that his readers and listeners pray for all those who are in the midst of debate to be united in true faith, steadfast hope, and perfect charity:

And þat þus be, alle þat þis writunge reden or heere preieþ herteli to þe lord God, þat he fro his grete goodnesse þat may not be told oute graunte to vs, and to alle oþere þat in þe same wyse and for þe same cause specialy or for ony oþer cause ben at distaunce, to ben oonyd in trewe feiþ, in stidefast hope and in parfist charite. Amen, amen, amen. (93: 2250-2255)

This concluding prayer bears a strong resemblance to the concluding prayer in Paris's *St. Christina*:

Seint Cristyn, helpe thorought thi prayere  
That we may fare the better for thee,  
That hath ben longe in prison here,  
The Ile of Man, that stronge cuntré. (*St. Christina* ll. 497-500)

Paris prays for himself and his master, Sir Thomas Beauchamp, who are imprisoned because Beauchamp has been charged with treason. Though Paris's prayer differs from Thorpe's because it is less inclusive, it shares an important feature in common with Thorpe's appeal. Because Paris precedes his prayer with an account of the miraculous endurance of St. Christina and notes that many who visit her resting place are healed, his intercessory prayer to her is lent a degree of credibility. Similarly, Thorpe's appeal to

pray for those who, like him, are “at distaunce” to be united in steadfast hope is lent credibility by his perseverance. Although Thorpe’s account intimates that he expects to be martyred, it shows him facing that possibility with courage.

Thorpe’s deliberate indebtedness to hagiography, despite the historicity of his detention and examination, is elucidated by a contemporary analogue to Thorpe’s *Testimony*. The letter of Richard Wyche is the only other extant account from this period of an examination for heresy. In December 1402, Wyche was summoned to appear before Bishop Walter Skirlaw of Durham (1388-1406). The Bishop interviewed Wyche in December 1402, but Wyche remained in detention and continued to be periodically interviewed by Skirlaw until March 1403 (Copeland 2001, 152). Wyche’s letter of cMarch 1403 is addressed to a particular friend, though it is clear that he means for it to be read by a number of personal acquaintances (Von Nolcken 127). Although Wyche’s letter provides an account of his examination for heresy, his account differs from Thorpe’s because it is a private letter, and Thorpe’s *Testimony* is openly directed to, among others, the “special frendis” that have asked him to document his interrogation (Thorpe 25: 27). As Christina Von Nolcken observes, “Wyche’s letter is concerned with rather more than just the details of his questioning: enjoining a friend’s daughter to live the life of a virgin only if she is doing this for Christ, for example . . . , or warning another friend against the pride that can accompany poverty” (Von Nolcken 132). More importantly, “where the *Testimony* is highly crafted, . . . Wyche’s letter is rushed and informal” (Von Nolcken 132). Whereas Wyche’s letter is meant for private consumption and offers a summation of the circumstances of his questioning, Thorpe’s account is



meant for public consumption and employs recognisable literary strategies to highlight the exemplariness of his detention and interrogation.

Thorpe's exemplary account does more than simply cast him as a model Christian who refuses to yield even under the threat of death. In his debate with Arundel, Thorpe takes the unusual step of accusing the Archbishop of interpreting a Biblical passage too literally. After Thorpe characterises the singing and music playing that accompany pilgrimages as "noyse" (64: 1327), Arundel argues that "Daviþ in his laste psalme techiþ men to vsen dyuerse instrumentis of musik for to preise wiþ God" (65: 1350-1351). Thorpe's response to Arundel is unexpected principally because we tend to think of Lollards as proponents of taking the Bible in its most literal sense. What follows is Thorpe's explanation for challenging Arundel's interpretation of Psalm 150:<sup>83</sup>

And I seide, 'Sere, bi þe sentence of dyuerse doctours expownynge þe salmes of Daviþ, þe musyk and þe mynstralcie þat Daviþ and oþer seyntis of þe olde lawe speken of owen not now to be taken neiþer vsid after þe letter. But þese instrumentis wiþ her musyk owen to be interpretid goostly, for alle þei figuren hize vertues and grete, wiþ þe whiche vertues men schulden now plese God and preisen his name. (65: 1352-1357)

By Thorpe's account, Arundel is very displeased by his argument, but Thorpe indicates that the Archbishop proceeds to question him about the legitimacy of having organs in churches and the last few lines of this portion of Thorpe's questioning is taken up by this matter.

Thorpe's rendering of the enraged and bewildered Arundel moving on to the question of tithing because Thorpe has tripped him up with his arguments against the

validity of using musical instruments to worship is a distraction. This construing of events obscures the real issue. Thorpe's exemplary text that is so heavily indebted to hagiography and that intimates his audience should emulate him by challenging the Church's authority and standing up to persecution also depicts him engaging in the prohibited act of interpreting Scripture. As Schirmer points out, Thorpe's *Testimony* dates to 1407 and is thus positioned between the enactment of *De haeretico comburendo* and the promulgation of Arundel's *Constitutions* (2009, 268). Because of Thorpe's efforts to represent himself as a role model for others, his meddling with Scripture, coupled with his depiction of the Archbishop of Canterbury as inept at elucidating Biblical passages, is fraught with risk. Of course, throughout *The Testimony*, Arundel makes plain that Thorpe's heretical activities will quite possibly lead to his execution. However, the danger associated with Thorpe's depiction of the episode of Scriptural interpretation belongs as much to Arundel and the Church as it does to Thorpe. *The Testimony's* potential to encourage others to resist the Church's authority is deleterious to the Church, but it also has the capacity to encourage the interpretation of Scripture by the laity, one of the very things Arundel works so hard to limit. It seems to me entirely fitting that the Archbishop should authorise Nicholas Love's *The Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ* a mere three years after Thorpe's examination.

As I argued above, Arundel makes plain in his *Constitutions* and in *The Testimony* that he is concerned about the broad circulation of Lollard doctrines that challenge the Church's authority. His *Constitutions* specifically aim to put an end to the proliferation of such tenets. Although whatever may have become of Thorpe after his examination is unknown, his *Testimony* travelled as far as Bohemia. As Hudson notes, "[t]here are four

primary witnesses to the text of Thorpe's autobiographical account of his trial: one medieval manuscript in English, two medieval manuscripts in Latin and one early printed version in English" (Hudson 1993, xxvi-xxvii). The first Latin manuscript is written in Bohemian hands and dates to c1420 (Hudson 1993, xxviii); the second Latin manuscript is written in a number of Bohemian hands and dates to c1430 (Hudson 1993, xxviii and xxvix). The dissemination of Thorpe's version of his interrogation by Arundel must have been Arundel's worst nightmare come true. In a notable instance in *The Testimony*, Thorpe arouses the ire of Arundel and his clerks when he observes that a certain Lollard sermon "is writun bope in Latyn and in Engelisch, and many men haue it and þei setten greet priys þerbi" (85: 1984-1985). Like the Lollard dialogues under discussion in Chapter 2, Thorpe's account grounds his challenges to the Church's teachings in "þe autorite of Goddis word" and in "opin resoun" (85: 1975, 1976). It is highly appropriate that three years after Thorpe's examination Arundel buttresses his *Constitutions* with Nicholas Love's *The Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ*, as Love's project aims to supplant vernacular Scripture and means to undermine the Lollard emphasis on Aristotelian reason.

From the outset of *The Testimony*, Thorpe is clear about the fact that his project is concerned with bolstering the morale of his fellow Lollards. He does offer an anatomy and defences of Lollard doctrine of the kind that we find in other Lollard dialogues, but his principal concern is to highlight for his readers the ways in which his examination serves as a Lollard model of steadfastness in adversity. By foregrounding those elements of his account that are consistent with the generic conventions of hagiography, Thorpe shows that he tailors his narrative towards simple readers because *The Testimony's*

indebtedness to hagiography instils the work with an embedded interpretation that guides the course of his readers' interpretation: as a figure of the Christian martyr, Thorpe's resistance to the Church's authority places him on the side of right. Those instances in which Thorpe gives prominence to the generic conventions of saint's life narratives serve as signals to readers, familiar with these recognisable and culturally pervasive conventions, that Thorpe's steadfastness is worthy of belief and imitation. His exploitation of literary features as a means to clarify meaning is a strategy that is used by Lollard writers in the years leading up to the *Constitutions* but one that is abandoned soon after their promulgation.

## Chapter 5:

“Pe Mylke of Lyzte Doctryne”: Nicholas Love’s *The Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ* as an Orthodox Reader’s Guide to Church Teaching

Around the year 1410, the Carthusian monk and prior of Mount Grace, Nicholas Love, presented to Archbishop Arundel a copy of his *Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ* (henceforth *The Mirror*). Little is known about Love’s educational background or his career before this time (Sargent xiv). As Elizabeth Zeeman [Salter] observes, “[n]othing is recorded of him until his appointment first as Rector and then as Prior of the newly founded House of Mount Grace in the years 1409 and 1410” (113). Love’s *Mirror* is a translation and adaptation of the pseudo-Bonaventuran *Meditationes vitae Christi* (circa early fourteenth century) and functions as the second prong of the Church’s two-pronged attack on Lollardy and the related problem of lay misreadings of profound theological material in the vernacular. Circumstantial evidence indicates that Love and Arundel had a close association. Mount Grace was founded in 1397, but by 1400 its founder, Thomas Holland, Duke of Surrey, had died, leaving Mount Grace with neither a patron nor an income (Sargent xiv). At this time, Mount Grace was supported by royal subsidy and by the patronage of Archbishop Arundel and one of the new king’s half brothers, Thomas Beaufort (Sargent xiv). Because *The Mirror* contains translations of Scriptural texts in English, Love submitted his text to Arundel for inspection and examination in conformity with the seventh of the 1409 *Constitutions*. According to the memorandum appended to many copies of *The Mirror*, the Archbishop not only approved it but also ordered that it be widely circulated for the religious instruction of the faithful. After this time, as Zeeman [Salter] indicates, “as far as we know, Love undertook no more translation and applied himself for the next eleven years to the administration of

Mount Grace” (114). Michael G. Sargent argues that “to judge by the number of surviving manuscripts and early prints, [Love’s *Mirror*] was one of the most well-read books in late-medieval England” (ix). Sargent indicates that “[o]nly the Wycliffite Bible translation, the *Prick of Conscience* . . ., and Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales* survive in greater numbers of manuscripts” (ix). Similarly, Zeeman [Salter] argues that “[*The Mirror*’s] popularity seems to have been both rapid and sustained throughout the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries” (117). Sargent remarks that there are 64 extant manuscripts of Love’s *Mirror* and that 60 of these were originally complete (ix). He further notes that Love’s text was printed 9 times before 1535 (ix), and Zeeman [Salter] records that Caxton printed its first two editions in 1486 and 1495 (117).

While we know little of Love’s background before he becomes associated with Mount Grace, the nature of his order sheds some light on his production of *The Mirror*. Paul J. Patterson argues that Arundel’s *Constitutions* “facilitated a shift in the type of theological writings that were produced” (3). He observes that “[r]ather than long treatises that relied on scriptural translation to make points in English, compilations became the preferred style of mystical and theological authors of the period” (Patterson 3). Patterson asserts that these emerging religious writers “harken[ed] back to numerous Christian authorities such as Augustine, Jerome, and the *Legenda Aurea*” (4). Significantly, Patterson indicates that “[m]any of these *compilationes* were produced by the Carthusians, a conservative reformist order whose massive libraries and system of book-lending between their many English and Continental Charterhouses facilitated the kind of textual work needed to produce devotional works for lay readers” (4). The Carthusians produced many original religious works, as well as translations of existing

works (Patterson 4). Patterson characterises the transition of theological writing in the period after the *Constitutions* as one in which there was a shift from the “open style of religious writing to a more cautious mode of theological *compilatio*” (4).

As Patterson’s characterisation of this transition in theological writing suggests, Love’s *Mirror* exhibits the author’s apprehension about his readers’ engagement in unwanted theological speculation. As part of the Church’s efforts to combat the Lollard heresy and the related problem of lay misreadings of profound theological material, Love develops a programme of lay religious instruction in which he privileges imagination over interpretation. In an effort to control the course of his readers’ interpretation and to highlight those portions of his work that he deems most “edifyng to symple creatures” (Love 10), Love inserts in-text signals that alert his untrained readers to pay special attention to the material to which he gives prominence. In keeping with the text’s aims to limit lay thinking about profound theological matter, Love cuts doctrinal material from his source, the *Meditationes*. Another feature of Love’s *Mirror* that points to its role in the Church’s endeavours to counter Lollardy is that its heavily glossed gospel stories function as an alternative to the plain English translations of Scripture favoured and disseminated by the Lollards. In addition to making English Bible translations less enticing to his readers, Love’s *Mirror* challenges Lollard doctrine concerning auricular confession and the Sacrament of the altar.

In a brief treatise on the Sacrament that is appended to *The Mirror*, Love identifies what he regards to be the source of the Lollard Heresy as it pertains to the sect’s disavowal of the Sacrament:

And of þe first manere worching, we haue seene in our dayes, howe

þe disciples of Anticrist þat bene clepede Lollardes, hauen made mich  
dissension & diuision in holy chirch, & putte many men in to errour of þis  
blessede sacrament, by þe fals doctrine of hir maistere þe wech þorh his  
grete clergy & kunnyng of philosophye was deceyuede,<sup>84</sup> in þat he gaf  
more credence to þe doctrine of Arestotele þat stant onely in naturele  
reson of man, þan he dide to þe doctrine of holy chirche & þe trewe  
doctours þerof touching þis precieuse sacrament. (Love 236)

Following the example of Wyclif, Love maintains, the Lollards are in error because they favour Aristotelian reason over the wisdom of the Church. Love insinuates that Lollards question the nature of the Sacrament because they adhere too rigidly to reason. By contrast, Love advocates an Ockhamist perspective that sees Scripture and the theological traditions of the Church as the sources of authority in doctrine. By suggesting that Wyclif and, by extension, his followers are led astray by learning and knowledge, Love formulates a dichotomy between interpretation and imagination in which he privileges the benefits of imagination. As I will show, for Love, imagination is a tool used to instigate devotion, and it is akin to the orthodox practice of affective piety.

Michelle Karnes and I differ somewhat in our approaches to Love's treatment of the imagination in *The Mirror*. I agree with her argument that "Love clearly feared excessive speculation on the part of his audience" (Karnes 399), but I disagree with her about the precise means Love employs to restrict the excessive speculation of his lay readers. Karnes argues that Love's conception of imagination "constitutes a restriction . . . , a means to distance the meditator from his imagined scenes" (398). Moreover, she indicates that Love's changes to his source are problematic: "[w]here the *Meditationes*



enables the meditator to participate in biblical scenes directly, the *Mirror* describes a spiritual exercise that is unmistakably fictive” (396). In order to show that Love distances his readers from the scenes he describes, Karnes notes that “where the *Meditationes* declaratively narrates, ‘Jesus then walked between the two sisters,’ Mary and Martha, Love writes, ‘we mowe se by devout ymaginacion how oure lord Jesus goþ before bytwix þo tweyn sistres’” (Karnes 397). Karnes reasons here that “[s]eeing ‘by devout ymaginacion’ seems to be less potent than just seeing” (397). Yet, rather than distancing his readers from this scene, as Karnes suggests, Love draws them into it, first by inviting them to participate in the meditation—“*we mowe se by deuout ymaginacion*” (131; italics mine)—and then by bringing the scene into the present tense. In contradistinction to Karnes’s view, readers of the *Meditationes* are contemplating a distant and completed act, whereas the readers of *The Mirror* are devoutly imagining a present Christ who is walking and “talkyng homely with [þo tweyn sistres]” (131).

Imagination is central to the devotional practice Love describes in *The Mirror*. Karnes is right to observe that Love’s conception of imagination represents a kind of restriction; by definition, “deuout ymaginacion” suggests both a commitment to a specific belief system and a process that follows an established set of rules. Nevertheless, while Love plainly encourages his readers to employ their imaginations to kindle their religious devotion, he does so in a way that gives the perception of religious freedom:

Also seynt Jon seiþ þat alle þo þinges þat Jesus dide, bene not writen in þe Gospelle. Wherefore we mowen to stiryng of deuotion ymagine & þenk diuerse wordes and dedes of him & oþer, þat we fynde not writen, so þat it be not azeyns þe byleue, as seynt Gregory & oþer doctours seyn, þat holi

writte may be expownet & vnderstande in diuerse maneres, & to diuerse purposes, so þat it be not azeyns þe byleue or gude maneres.<sup>85</sup> (Love 10-11)

Love intimates here that devotees are at liberty to imagine Christ saying or doing any number of things that are not found in Scripture. In a similarly liberal fashion, Love proffers two competing views concerning the manner of Christ's crucifixion:

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

Herewiþ also a noþer harlote renneþ to, & draweþ done hese feete with alle his miht, & anoþer anone driueþ a grete longe naile þorh boþe hese feete ioynede to oþer.

þis is one maner of his crucifyng after þe opinione of sume men.

Oþere þere bene þat trowen not þat he was crucifiede in þis manere, bot þat first liggyng þe crosse on þe gronde, þei nailede him þere vpon, & after with him so hangyng þei liften vp þe crosse & festen it done in [to] þe erþe. (Love 175)

Following this passage, Love concludes that “wheþer so it be in one maner or in oþere, soþe it is þat oure lorde Jesus was nailede harde vpon þe crosse, hande & foote...” (175).

James Simpson comments on the implications of Love's method:

Love encourages his readers to make themselves "present to thoo thinges that bene here writen seyde or done of oure lord Jesu"; and he also encourages his readers imaginatively to embroider the biblical text for themselves, with the sole restriction that the imaginative reading be devout, "not by error affermyng," and that it be an imagination "by resoun." This interpretive freedom allows for a very personal reading....  
(Simpson 235)

Love's *Mirror* does indeed offer its readers a degree of inventive freedom, but it expressly and deliberately denies them interpretive freedom. To be clear, for Love, inventive freedom signifies the use of the pictorial imagination in contemplation and serves as a tool for engaging in spiritual and emotional reflection on the sufferings of Christ in his humanity. By contrast, interpretive freedom for lay readers without clerical training could result in eisegesis; therefore, Love does not condone interpretive freedom.

Simpson's view that Love encourages his readers to embroider Scripture is problematic because it conflates "biblical text" and *The Mirror*. Love does not advocate the amplification of the "biblical text"; he invites his readers to imaginatively develop the mediated version of Scripture he presents in *The Mirror*. Thus, Love asserts "[w]herefore þou þat coueytest to fele treuly þe fruyt of *þis boke*, þou most with all þi þought & alle þin entent, in þat manere make þe in þi soule present to þoo þinges þat bene *here* writen seyde or done of oure lord Jesu" (12-13; italics mine). This is not too subtle a point to make because, as I will argue later in this chapter, one of the aims of Love's project is to proffer *The Mirror* as an alternative to and not a companion to

vernacular Scripture. Love acknowledges that portions of his work are invented when he argues that “deuovte meditacions of cristes lyfe [þat bene] more pleyne in certeyne partyes þan is expressed in the gospell of þe foure euaungelistes” are particularly enlightening to simple souls (10), but he plainly establishes the limits of his readers’ imaginative freedom even as he openly urges them to conjure up extra-scriptural details about the types of food served up at Christ’s feast after his fast in the desert:

Here of spekeþ not holi writ, wherfore we mowe here ymagine by reson & ordeyne þis worþi fest as vs likeþ, not by errour affermyng bot deuoutly ymaginyng & supposyng, & þat aftur þe comune kynde of þe manhode. For if we take hede & speke of his miht aftur the godhede, þere is no question. For it is no doute, þat he miht make what þat him lust, & also haue of þo þat bene & weren made at his owne wille. Bot we shol not fynde þat he vsed þis mist & þis powere, for him self or for hees disciples, in hir bodily nede. Bot for þe peple to shewe his godhede, we reden, þat at twey tymes he fedde hem miraculously in gret multitude of a fewe loues & fyshes.

Bot of hese disciples is writen þat in his owne presence, þei plukkede eres of corn & eten hem for hungere.... (Love 72-73)

Love problematizes his own injunction that we readers may “ordeyne þis worþi fest as vs likeþ” (Love 72), however, when he asserts that we must imagine by “reson . . . , not by errour affermyng bot deuoutly ymaginyng and supposyng” (Love 72). Love’s previously cited treatise on the Sacrament criticises Wyclif’s followers for being too dependent on the “naturele reson of man” or Aristotelian reason (Love 236), but the “reson” Love urges

his readers to abide by as they imagine Christ's feast is clearly one governed by the doctrines of Holy Church. Our "reson," Love insists, ought to reflect our commitment to the Church's teachings and, therefore, ought not to assert mistaken beliefs. As David Aers explains, "Love maintains that any dissent from the Church's current definitions of Christian faith, including its attempts to describe the presence of Christ in the eucharist with neo-Aristotelian scholastic terms, is necessarily opposition to God" (17). Thus, Love indicates that when Christ first made the precious Sacrament during the Last Supper, the disciples "laft alle hir kyndely reson of manne, & onely restede in trew byleue" (Love 149).

While Love counsels his readers to be devout as they imagine Christ's feast, he also indicates that they are free to conceive of the feast as it pleases them within the parameters he has set out. These parameters cannot include, as Simpson suggests, an invitation to "embroider" Scripture, for this would mean that Love leaves the door open to his readers to interpret Scripture; the act of embellishing a text necessarily involves interpretive judgements. The freedom Love affords his readers, then, is not unlike the freedom with boundaries a parent extends to a minor child who is eager to experience the world around him. Accordingly, Love argues that his book is designed principally to be "edifyng to symple creatures þe whiche as childryn hauen nede to be fedde with mylke of lyzte doctryne & not with sadde mete of grete clargye" (Love 10). Simply stated, Love offers his readers a liberty to imagine that appears in principle to be much more generous than he means for it to be in practice. Love is apprehensive about excessive speculation on the part of his readers, and he tailors his text to limit the potential for his readers to engage in unwanted theological supposition.

Love's repeated references to Wyclif and his followers, coupled with Archbishop Arundel's endorsement of the work, raise questions about whether or not Love's *Mirror* is designed to serve as an alternative to English Bible translations. A revealing Latin statement accompanies copies of *The Mirror*:

Memorandum quod circa annum domini Millesimum  
quadringentesimum decimum, originalis copia huius libri, scilicet Speculi  
vite Christi in Anglicis, presentabatur Londoniis per compilatorem  
eiusdem .N. Reuerendissimo in Christo patri & domino, Domino Thome  
Arundell, Cantuarie Archiepiscopo, ad inspiciendum & debite  
examinandum antequam fuerat libere communicata. Qui post  
inspeccionem eiusdem per dies aliquot, retradens ipsum librum memorato  
eiusdem auctori, proprie vocis oraculo ipsum in singulis commendauit &  
approbavit, necnon & auctoritate sua metropolitana, vt pote catholicum,  
puplice communicandum fore decreuit & mandauit, ad fidelium  
edificacionem, & hereticorum siue lollardorum confutationem.  
Amen (Love 7)

Memorandum: that around the year 1410, the original copy of this  
book, that is, *The Mirror of the Life of Christ* in English, was presented in  
London by its compiler, N, to the Most Reverend Father and Lord in  
Christ, Lord Thomas Arundel, Archbishop of Canterbury, for inspection  
and due examination before it was freely communicated. Who after  
examining it for several days, returning it to the above-mentioned author,  
commended and approved it personally, and further decreed and

commanded by his metropolitan authority that it rather be published universally for the edification of the faithful and the confutation of heretics or lollards. (Sargent xv)

Kantik Ghosh argues that *The Mirror* “was licensed by Archbishop Thomas Arundel in 1410 as an implied alternative to the Lollard Bible, the reading of which had been restricted” (Ghosh 2000, 18). The memo unambiguously indicates that Love and Church authorities viewed *The Mirror* as a theological tool in the war on heresy, and the spirit of the memo is consistent with Love’s in-text claims about the aims of his work and his thoughts on Lollardy. Karnes alludes to the relationship between English Scriptural translations and *The Mirror* when she argues that “Love makes the Bible irrelevant to lay devotion (whether this is an anti-Lollard gesture or not) in the same way that he makes higher spiritual activities such as contemplation irrelevant to his lay audience” (403). She observes that “neither [Love] nor Arundel expressly opposed Gospel meditations to the vernacular Bible” (403).

Nevertheless, as Ghosh has shown, Love does claim apostolic authorisation for his writing:

The *Mirror* ... begins, in a prologue added to the *Meditationes*, with a reference to the Pauline Topos of ‘Quecum scripta sunt ad nostram doctrinam scripta sunt’, followed by a significantly polemical translation: ‘þerfore to strenkeþ vs & confort vs [...] spekeþ þe Apostle þe wordes aforseid to this entente seying *þat all thynges þat ben written generally in holi chirche ande specialy of oure lorde Jesu cryste þey bene wryten to oure lore*’ (p. 9/16-20; Ghosh’s italics). ... [T]he non-scriptural devotional

material in his translation must be shown to be as ‘fructuose’ and therefore as ‘authentic’ as the actual biblical passages, and the most efficient way of doing this is by citing a major scriptural authority (‘þe gret doctour & holy apostle *Powle*’). (Ghosh 2002, 153)

By claiming apostolic authorisation for his writing, Love intimates that *The Mirror* is a counterpart to the Bible. As I argued in Chapter 2, Lollards advocated lay access to the Bible in English, and they strongly disapproved of the Church’s glosses of Scripture. Ghosh observes that Love’s comments about the absence of information about Christ’s youth in the canonical Scriptures indicate that “there is required information in the work of secondary authors” (Ghosh 2000, 25). In addition, Zeeman [Salter] asserts that Love “has an expert knowledge of the Bible, quoting frequently, and, in the early chapters especially, often modifying his rendering of the *Meditationes* to bring it closer to the wording of the Vulgate” (Zeeman [Salter] 114). What Love supplies, finally, is precisely the opposite of what Lollards advocate: he produces a series of stories from the Gospels that are heavily glossed with the comments of Church doctors so as to direct his readers’ interpretation. As Schirmer suggests, “Nicholas Love and his backers in the ecclesiastical establishment ... develop[ed] an orthodox canon of scriptural material that mirrors—that is, both mimics and reverses—the Lollards’ own” (Schirmer 2010, 5). Love’s *Mirror* kills two birds with one stone. First, it serves as an orthodox alternative to English Bible translations, satisfying readers’ desire for translations of Scripture in English; that English translations of Scriptural texts were enticing is supported by the existence of the seventh constitution. Second, it functions as an orthodox challenge to



Lollard doctrine; Love outlines the Lollard positions on the Eucharist and auricular confession, for example, and then undercuts them with orthodox counter arguments.

While Love begins *The Mirror* by suggesting that his text is on a par with the Bible, he proceeds to reduce the importance of Holy Scripture. I argue that it is precisely because Love minimises the value and usefulness of Holy Writ that his text functions so well as an alternative to English Bible translations. Love does more than simply argue that it is spiritually beneficial to devoutly imagine undocumented words and deeds of Christ; he suggests that his embellished version of Christ's life offers his readers more complete access to Christ's story. For example, as I have already noted, in his treatment of Christ's youth, Love comments on the bewildering absence of information about Christ's adolescence in Scripture:

FRo þe tyme þat oure lorde Jesus was gone home to Nazareth with hees  
parens, when he was xij zere olde, as it is seide before, vnto his xxx<sup>ti</sup> zere,  
we fynde nozht expressed in scripture autentike, what he dide or how he  
lyued, & þat semeþ ful wondrousful. What sal we þan suppose of him in  
alle þis tyme, wheþer he was in so miche ydul, þat he dide noht or wrozt  
þinge þat were worþi to be writen or spoken of? God shilde. And on þat  
oþer side, if he dide and wrouht, whi is it not writen as oþer dedes of him  
bene? Sopely it semeþ merueilouse & wondrousful. Bot neuerles, if we  
wole here take gude entent, we shole mowe se þat as in nozht doying, he  
dide gret þinges & wondrousful. For þer is no þinge of hees dedes or tyme  
of his lyuyng withoute misterye & edificacion, bot as he spake & wrouht

vertuesly in tyme, so he h[e]lde his pees & restede & wiþdrowe him  
vertuesly in tyme. Wherefore he þat was souereyn maistere & came to  
teche vertues & shewe þe trewe wey of euery lastyng life, he began fro his  
zouþe to do wondurful dedes, & þat in a wondurful maner & vnknowen, &  
þat was neuer ere herde before, þat is to sey, shewyng him self in þat tyme  
as ydul & vnkonnyng & abiecte in þe siht of men in maner as we sal say  
aftur, not fully affermyng in þis or oþer þat we mowe not opunly preue by  
holi writ or doctours apreuede, bot deuoutly ymaginyng to edificacion &  
stiryng of deuocion, as it was seid in þe proheme of þis boke at þe  
begynnyng. (Love 61)

This passage is relevant to an understanding of Love's efforts to subvert English Bible translations. Whereas Love begins the chapter by merely observing that it is surprising that material concerning Christ's youth is not found in Scripture, he goes on to assert that the boy Christ most certainly did great things. Even as Love maintains that we cannot corroborate any of our suspicions about how Christ spends his adolescence by way of Scripture or Doctors of Piety, he proceeds to describe Christ's juvenile daily activities that have not been "herde before" (61): "And so we suppose þat oure lorde Jesus in þat tyme wiþdrowe him fro þe cumpanye & the felishipe of men, & went oft siþes to sinagoge ..., & aftur in tyme when he came home, halp his modere & also perauentur his supposed fadere Joseph in his craft" (61). With this episode, Love affirms that the Bible lacks information that will spiritually profit those devotees who meditate on the life of Christ. Moreover, by including a section on material that is conspicuously absent from Scripture, he calls attention to the shortcomings of the Bible. Much in the same way as

Love appeals to the laity by writing *The Mirror* “in english ... to þe profite of symple & deuoute soules” (13), he plays up Scriptural omissions to render vernacular Bible translations less enticing to his readers.

Love does not stop there, however; he also intimates that Scripture contains superfluous material that is not necessary for the kind of devotion he advocates: “Forþermore leuyng many wordes of þe gospel, & takyng þat semeþ most notable to oure edificacion” (128). Love’s efforts to direct his readers’ attention away from English translations of Scripture neatly dovetails with Arundel’s endeavour to restrict the translation of Scripture into the vernacular. As I indicate in Chapter 1, Arundel’s seventh constitution criminalises the translation of Scripture into English or any other language, and it also criminalises the reading of vernacular Scripture (Arundel 192). The 1409 legislation allows for such translations to circulate if they are approved by the correct authorities, and the memorandum that accompanies Love’s *Mirror* shows that it required precisely such authorisation because it contains translations of Scripture. It is thus highly appropriate that *The Mirror* should surface within a year of the publication of Arundel’s *Constitutions* and be promoted by Love as an alternative to English translations of Scripture.

Throughout his Gospel meditations, Love directs the course his readers’ meditation should take. In addition, throughout the narrative, he shows his readers how they ought to read his book. In particular, he employs in-text signs that signal his simpler readers to pay particular attention to those sections of his work that he judges to be especially didactic. A. I. Doyle affirms, for example, that “Nicholas Love adapted his original, and ... his English and Latin interjections envisage a varied readership of

members of religious orders, solitaries, lay-people and clergy” (169). As Karnes suggests, “[w]hile the *Meditationes* was written to a Poor Clare, and so a member of an enclosed religious community, the *Mirror* redirects the text away from the ‘religious woman’ to ‘symple creatures’ (385). Love’s directives to trained readers consist of marginal Latin notations,<sup>86</sup> such as “Nota pro reclusis & religiosis” (36). Love’s signal to lay readers consists of his use of variations of the phrases “take hede” (23) and “beholde” (165): “[n]owe take gode hede and vndurstand” (Love 28), “[b]eholde now & take hede” (Love 32). In addition to flagging those sections of his work that are of the most instructional value to his lay readers, Love also limits the profound doctrinal material to which they have access. As Zeeman [Salter] asserts, “Love cuts down material” (118). Love himself acknowledges that he cuts portions of the *Meditationes* because the excluded material seems to him to be of little benefit to the untrained reader. In one instance, he asserts

Bot for als miche as hit were longe werke & perauenture tediose boþe to þe rederes & hereres hereof, if alle þe processe of þe blessed life of Jesu shold be wryten in englishe so fully by meditaciones as it is zit hidereto, aftur þe processe of þe boke before nemed of Bonauenture in latyne; þefore here aftur many chapitres & longe processe þat seme[þ] litel edificacion inne, as to þe maner of symple folk þat þis boke is specialy writen to, shal be laft vnto it drawe to þe passion.... (Love 75-76)

Love cuts a significant amount of material from his source. Whereas the *Meditationes* consists of 108 chapters, Love’s *Mirror* contains only 63 (Karnes 385).

As Karnes has shown, Love's changes to his source include eliminating those portions of the *Meditationes* that "explicitly and crucially lead to higher spiritual contemplation" (395), and she argues that in doing so, Love "prevent[s] the Gospel meditation from leading to nonmaterial contemplation" (Karnes 395). Love's emphasis in *The Mirror* on the material sphere is taken to the extreme when he describes the table at which Christ and the disciples sat at the Last Supper:

Bot here we shole vndurstande [also] þat þat borde was square as men supposen, made of diuerse bordes ioynet to gedir, & as men seyen þat haue seen it at Rome in þe chirch of Lateranensis, it conteneþ in euery part of þe foure square, þe space of tweyn armes lengþe & sumwhat more. So þat in euery side of þe square borde, þre disciples seten as men supposen, þouh it were streytly, & oure lord Jesus in summe Angle. So þat þei alle miht reche in to þe myddes, & ete of one dishe. (Love 145-146)

The precision of Love's description of the table is remarkable because, while it calls attention to the material concerns of Love's work, it also illustrates the degree to which Love aims to direct his simple readers' thinking about religious subjects. By laying out the measurements of the table and by meticulously spelling out the seating arrangements, Love effectively prevents his readers from imagining the Last Supper in any other way than the way in which he describes it. Returning to Love's emphasis on the material sphere, the tenderness with which the Virgin Mary cares for her newly born son is also expressed in strikingly earthly terms:

& anone she deuoutly enclinande with souereyn ioy toke him in hire armes, & swetly clippyng & kissyng, leide him in hir barme, & with fulle

pap, as she was taght of þe holi gost, weshe him alle aboute with hir swete milke, & so wrapped him in þe kerchif of her hede, & leidee him in þe crach, & anone þe Ox & þe Asse knelyng done leiden hir mouþes on þe crach, breþing at hir neses vpon þe child, as þei knewen by reson þat in þat colde tyme þe child so simply hiled hade nede to be hatte in þat manere.

(Love 38)

The depiction of the Blessed Mother here does not concentrate on Mary's role as a Christian model or as a disciple of Christ. Instead, it characterises her as an earthly mother looking after the physical needs of her newborn.

Of course, with the affective method, Love focuses on images of Christ's physical suffering from his life and Passion. Affective spirituality is a mode of piety in which "devout feeling takes the place of a more intellectual response to the Gospels" (Wogan-Browne 211). Following his description of Christ's scourging, Love urges his readers to feel compassion for Christ's suffering: "Take now gude hede by inward meditacion of alle hees peynes abidyngly, & bot þou fynde þi herte melte in to sorouful compassion, suppose fully & halde, þat þou hast to harde a stonene herte" (Love 169). This passage would seem to challenge those, like the Lollards, who disapproved of the mode of affective piety. Lollards were opposed to affective devotion, as evidenced by their criticism of the "venerating of images by 'reading' them in the manner of devotional biography" (Wogan-Browne 249), and the passage from *The Mirror* indicates that those who are unable or unwilling to engage in devout contemplation of the Saviour's physical suffering are hardhearted.

In his book chapter “Nicholas Love and the Lollards,” Ghosh identifies additional ways in which Love’s *Mirror* served as an instrument in the war on heresy. Pertinently, he traces Love’s frequent use of the words *open* and *openly*, words “which had achieved prominent currency among the Lollards” (Ghosh 2002, 159). As Ghosh remarks, “the adjective ‘open’ was habitually used by the Lollards to emphasise their direct access to divine intention informing a scriptural text which offers to its readers meanings of an unmediated clarity” (Ghosh 2002, 160). Thus, in *The General Prologue to the Wycliffite Bible*, the author of the preface offers a guide to reading Scripture: “Therefore he that hooldith charite, in vertues either in goode condiscouns, hooldith bothe that is *opyn* and that [that] is hid in Goddis wordis” (*GPWB* 93; italics mine). Ghosh persuasively argues that “Love’s unease in relation to his assumption of a traditional hermeneutic framework finds pervasive expression in his ubiquitous use of the word ‘open’” (160). It seems to me that there is also a practical reason for Love’s appropriation of terminology commonly associated with Wyclif’s followers. Consider the following passage:

Bot here perantere sume men þenken aftur þe fals opinyon of lollardes þat shrift of mouþe is not nedeful, bot þat it sufficeþ onely in herte to be shriuen to god, as [þis woman Maudleyn] was, for þe gospel telleþ not þat she spake any worde by mouþe, and 3it was hir sinne fully forziuen as it is seide, & as it semeþ þis is a gret euidence for þat opinion.

Bot hereto is an answeere resonable þatoure lorde Jesus to whome she made hir confession in herte was þer in bodily presence verrey god & man, to whom by vertue of þe godhede was also opune þe þouht of hert, as is to man þe spech of mouþe, as ofte siþes þe processe of þe gospel

[sheweþ], & specialy here opunly, boþe of the woman & also of þe pharise þouht. (Love 90-91)

In this passage, Love attacks Lollard views on silent confession, but he does so using terms favoured by Lollards, such as *opunly* and *resonable*. Ghosh also traces Love's use of the word *reason*, a word Love himself associates with Lollards in the previously cited passage from his *Treatise on the Sacrament*, and suggests that he often uses it, as is the case here, to mean "human rationality" (Ghosh 2002, 162). Love's above-quoted elucidation of John 8: 2-11 is noteworthy because it challenges the accuracy of the Lollards' Scriptural interpretation by using their own approach. Love succinctly justifies the concept of confession by mouth: "siþen we haue not here his bodily presence as Maudleyn hade, þefore in his stede vs behoueþ to shewe to þe preste by worde, þat we haue offendet him as man, as we shewen to him by repentance in herte, þat we haue offendet him as god" (Love 91). However, he justifies this doctrine of the Church by appropriating Lollard terminology and using it to argue for the reasonableness of auricular confession. Whereas Lollards maintain that "the message of the gospel must not be hidden" (Hudson 1985, 53), Love claims to reveal that message in his explanation of the Scriptural foundation for auricular confession.

Love's appropriation of Lollard methodology does not end there. In his section on auricular confession, a segment that stands out with its marginal notation "Contra lollardos nota de confessione" (Love 90), Love offers a reasoned argument as justification for confession by mouth; he presents the Lollard argument against auricular confession, and then he offers his own counterargument, complete with a reference to Scripture. In this instance, Love's approach closely resembles the Lollard method found



in the dialogues I discussed in Chapter 2. This episode is remarkable because it shows Love outdoing the Lollards using their own procedure. As Somerset observes, “[Wycliffites] tend in their own writings to prefer arguments based on biblical proofs, and often insist that their opponents ought to use such proofs if they want to produce valid arguments” (Somerset 1998, 182). Love uses a plausible argument to highlight the truth of the Church’s stance on confession. His reasoning that Christ’s presence as a man and God before Mary Magdalen negates the need for her to confess to him by mouth casts doubt on the validity of Lollard claims that there is no Scriptural justification for auricular confession.

Whereas Love employs a reasoned argument to defend the Church’s position on auricular confession, later in his section on the Trinity, he specifically urges his readers to ignore reason:

What tyme þou herest or þenkest of þe trinyte or of þe godhede or of  
gostly creatours as angeles & soules þe which þou maist not se with þi  
bodily eye in hire propre kynde, nor fele with þi bodily witte, study not to  
fer in þat matere occupy not þi wit þerwiþ als þou woldest vndurstande it,  
by kyndly reson, for it wil not be while we be in þis buystes body lyuyng  
here in erþe. And þerfore when þou herest any sich þinge in byleue þat  
passeþ þi kyndly reson, trowe soþefastly þat it is soþ as holy chirch techep  
& go no ferþer. (Love 23)

Love insists that the intricacy of the revealed truth of the Trinity cannot be grasped by way of human rationality. While he attacks Lollard doctrine with a reasoned argument, he upholds the Church’s teachings by insisting that this established theological tradition

of the Church is the legitimate basis of current doctrine. In a later analysis of heretical, Lollard doctrine concerning the Eucharist, Love indicates that, in addition to human rationality, philosophy can be a barrier to the correct understanding of doctrine based on revealed truths that belong to the established theological tradition of the Church:

And for als miche as þis doctrine of holy chirch is azeynus þe principales of philosophie þat is naturele science, þefore þe forseide maister of Lollardes reprouede it & scorneded it, & so he errede him self & made many oþere to erre touching þe byleue of þis holiest sacrament, þe which zeuen more credence to him for þe opinion of his grete clergy, þan to þe trewe doctrine of holi chirch. (Love 236-237)

With this example, Love intimates that the incorrect application of Aristotelian reason to the question of the truth or falseness of the Sacrament of the altar has caused people to erroneously dismiss the revealed truth of the Eucharist. In this way, his assessment corresponds with Arundel's eighth constitution, which the Archbishop begins by asserting that "Almighty God cannot be expressed by any philosophical terms, or otherwise invented of man" (Arundel 192).

A substantial segment of Love's aim in *The Mirror* is unquestionably to reinforce the Church's position on doctrinal issues. He writes in the vernacular for a lay audience, and he devises a strategy for meditation that overtly stresses the Church's teachings. Put simply, Love employs *The Mirror* to champion Church doctrine and to counsel his lay readers against scrutinizing articles of faith. His discussion of the Trinity, for example, also urges his readers not to hold mistaken beliefs:

Bot now beware here þat þou erre not in imaginacion of god & of þe holi

Trinite, supposyng þat þees þre persones þe fadere þe son & þe holi gost bene as þre erþly men, þat þou seest with þi bodily eye, þe which ben þre diuerse substances, ech departed fro oþere, so þat none of hem is oþer. Nay it is not so in þis gostly substance of þe holi trinyte, for þo þre persones ben on substance & on god, & 3it is þere none of þees persones oþer. (Love 23)

Love does not limit himself to a refresher on the subject of Church doctrine. He stresses the Church's teachings, but he also supplements his message with a startling supposition that those same teachings might be flawed. In his *Treatise on the Sacrament*, Love explains why his readers should believe in transubstantiation:

For þouh it were so þat it were in doute, wheþere þe teching & þe beleue þat holy chirch haþ, of þis holy sacrament were soþe or nouht, or elles also sette case þat it were not soþe, 3it þe sikere part were to byleue as holy chirch techen with a buxom drede. For in þat, we leuyn oure kyndely reson, & bene obeshant to god & holi chirch as him self biddeþ vs, & also we withdrawe not in oure beleue of þe miht of god, nor of his loue & souereyn godenes to vs, bot raþer maken it more; if it so were þat it were not soþe as we beleuen, & þat were litel perile or raþere none but mede to vs in alle partes for oure gude wille to god & holy chirch. (Love 226)

This passage suggests that even if believers have faith in a faulty assumption, they remain united in their good will towards God and the Church. The key idea here is one about community. I have already argued Love fashions his text to serve as an alternative to English translations of Scripture by making the English Bible appear less alluring to his

readers. I have also pointed to the ways in which he challenges Lollard beliefs by adopting their strategies of argumentation in order to undercut their claims or bolster his own. Love also diminishes the appeal of the Lollard movement by appealing to his readers' sense of community. Thus, he contends that Lollards renounce belief in the Sacrament precisely because they are estranged from the community of "alle trewe loueres & wirchiperes of þis holi sacrament" (Love 152).

In a passage flagged with the marginal notation "Contra lollardos," Love advances two arguments relating to transubstantiation when he censures those who

... falsly byleuen & seyene þat þe holy sacrament of þe autere is in his kynde brede or wyne as it was before þe consecracion, bycause þat it semeþ so to alle hir bodily felyng, as in siht, tast & touching, þe which bene more reprobable as in þat part þan Judas, for þei seene not Jesus bodily byside þat sacrament as he dide, and þerfore it is lihtere to hem fort byleue, & more to hir dampnacion if þei byleue not as god himself & holi church haþ tauht, namely siþen þat trewe teching of þis blessed sacrament, haþ be halden stedfastly so many hundreþ zere, & of so many holi men, Martires, confessours & oþer trewe cristien men þe which in to hir last dayes stoden without doute in þis feiþ & diedene þerinne. (Love 151)

First, Lollards do not believe in transubstantiation because they do not experience the truth of the Sacrament; second, those who believe in the Sacrament share a historic belief in an established theological tradition of the Church and, therefore, belong to a group of "trewe cristien men." Thus, Love asserts that those who accept the Church's teachings

on this matter belong to a religious community and share a common history. He explains why Lollards cannot concede the truth of the Sacrament:

Bot here lawheþ þe lollarde & scorneþ holi chirche in allegance of seche myracles, haldyng hem bot as maggetales & feyned illusiones, & bycause þat he tasteþ not þe swetnes of þis precious sacrament nor feleþ þe gracious wirching þerof in himself; þerfore he leueþ not þat any opere doþ. (Love 152)

The Lollard, Love argues, is unable to feel the preciousness of the Eucharist or to receive the grace<sup>87</sup> it confers because he has reduced the miracle to a fiction. Moreover, Love affirms, “oure lorde Jesus appereþ in þat blessedde sacrament to strenþyng of byleue or to confort of his chosen derlynges” (153). The corollary of this claim is that Lollards are not God’s “chosen derlynges,” and, consequently, they are not invited to receive grace. Love proceeds to describe what it means to receive the sacrament as a true believer:

Bot he þat feleþ þat gracious zifte before seide, haþ none straunge bodily siht of any likenes opere þan þe sacrament in trewe byleue. Bot in his soule lihtenede þorh speciale grace, he seeþ inwardly with souereyn ioy þat blessedde body of Jesu riht as he heenge on þe crosse, withoute any deceyte.

And þerwith also in þe body he feleþ sensiblye þe bodily presence of oure lorde Jesus in manere as it is seide before, with so grete ioy & likyng þat þere can no tonge telle it fully, nor herte vndurstande it, bot onely he þat feleþ it. (Love 153)

Here, Love intimates that loyal members of the Church have a more profound understanding of God than the Lollards. True believers can feel and understand the grace conferred by the Eucharist because they experience it, and because they experience it, they are ‘God’s darlings’ and, therefore, members of an elite community. Importantly, in his representation of the experience of receiving grace, Love remarks “þat þere can no tonge telle it fully.” Even members of the community cannot elucidate the niceties of the experience. In this way, he challenges the Lollard view that the miracle of the Sacrament can be disputed with the kind of logical syllogism that emerged in a fifteenth-century heresy trial in the Diocese of Norwich in which the heretic under examination recanted the following opinion: “No priest has power to make God’s body in the sacrament of the altar, but God made all priests, and no priest has power to make God, for God was made long time ere the priests were made” (qtd. in Aston 1984, 61).

Love offers an especially notable explanation of the Eucharist towards the very end of *The Mirror*. It deserves comment because of the ways in which it is reminiscent of Langland’s explanation of the Trinity in *Piers Plowman*. Love explains the mystery of the Host in the following manner:

It is also a grete merueile þat so grete a body of oure lorde Jesu is fully & holely comprehendet in so litel a quantite of þe hooste, & þerwiþ also if þat hoste be departede in to many smale partes, it is als fully in euery part, as it was in alle þe hole.

Hereto also is a maner of likenes þat we seene in kynde. Howe þe ymage of a mannus grete face, & of a grete body is seene in a litel

Mirroure, & if it be broken & departede, zit in euery parte it semeþ alle þe hole ymage, & not in partye after þe partes of þe glasse so broken.

(Love 227)

Just as the entire body of a man can be contained in a tiny mirror and also in the even tinier pieces of shattered mirror, so the body of Christ is contained in the Host. Even when the host is divided, as in the Sacrament of the altar, the individual pieces still contain the whole of the body of Christ. In the C-text of *Piers Plowman*, Passus XIX, lines 111-130, Langland produces an elucidation of the Trinity that similarly employs a recognisable detail from everyday life to clarify the meaning of a mystery of the Church. Because Langland slightly revised the B version of the episode (B XVII. 136-160), I cite the C version of the example:

And yf Kynde Wit carpe hereazen or eny kyne thouhtes,  
Or eretikes with argumentis, thien hoend thow hem shewe.

‘For God þat al bygan in bigynnyng of the worlde

Ferde furste as a fuste, and zut is, as Y leue —

*Mundum pugillo continens* —

As with a fuste with a fynger yfolde togyderes,

Til hym likede and luste to vnlose that fynger

And profered hit forth as with the paume to what place it sholde.

The paume is the pethe of the hand and profereth forth the fyngeres,

To ministre and to make þat myhte of hand knoweth;

And bitokeneth trewly, telle hoso liketh,

The Holy Goest of heuene: he is as the paume.

The fynGRES þat fre ben to folde and to cluche  
Bitokneth soethly the Sone, þat sente was til erthe,  
Touchedede and tastede at techyng of the paume  
Seynte Marie, a mayden, and mankynde lauhte:  
*Nautus ex Maria virgine.*

‘The Fader is thenne as þe fuste, with fynger and with paume  
To huyde and to holde as Holy Writ telleth:

*Omnia traham ad me ipsum;*

And þat the fynger gropeth, he grypeth, bote yf hit greue þe paume.  
Thus are they all hote oen, as hit an hand were,  
A fuste with a fynger and a fol paume. (C XIX. 111-130)

Like much of Love’s *Mirror*, this passage from *Piers Plowman* proffers an explanation of the Trinity that also serves to confute heretics who would challenge the doctrine of the Trinity with “argumentis.” Like the example from Love, this elucidation of the Trinity uses the familiar to clarify the mysterious. Thus, the poem suggests, the Trinity is like a fist: the fist represents God the Father, the palm represents the Holy Spirit, and the fingers represent the Son of God. Love’s example of the Host as a Mirror, like Langland’s explanation of the Trinity, furnishes a simple model by which lay readers may come to accept mysteries of the Church.

In addition to those episodes in which Love clarifies orthodox teachings or openly challenges heterodox ones, he also works to unite his lay readers in enmity against Lollards. He makes a number of references to the Lollards, such as on those occasions when he challenges Lollard views on auricular confession and the Sacrament of the altar.



Throughout, he often refers to them as “fals lollardes” (152) and “heritykes” (225). In his final attack on the Lollards, however, Love employs against Lollards a designation typically used by them to describe the Church’s authorities with whom they find fault: “we haue seene in oure dayes, howe þe disciples of Anticrist þat bene clepede Lollardes, haue made mich dissension & diuision in holy chirch” (236). Although the view that heretics worship the antichrist is standard invective since Augustine, Love’s deployment of the term against Lollards in a work tailored to lay readers is meaningful. Lollard opinions circulated widely, both orally and in writing, so no doubt many of Love’s readers would have been familiar with Lollard criticisms of the Church, her clergymen, and especially the bishop of Rome. Several Lollard propagandistic tracts of the late fourteenth century identify the pope as the antichrist. A Lollard tract on the duties of priests suggests that priests are the followers of the antichrist: “for þei seyn openly þat þer is no þing leffel among cristene men wiþ-ouen leue of þe bischop of rome, þouz he be anticrist ful of symonye & heresie” (“Of Prelates” 89). The English version of Wyclif’s *De officio pastoralis* contrasts Christ’s poverty with the pope’s wealth and concludes “& so siþ þat anticrist is he þat is azenus crist, it semyþ bi his feyned lif þat he is opyn anticrist” (*De officio* 457). Similarly the Lollard tract “De Papa” affirms that “þe pope is anticrist heere in erþe ... for he is azenus crist boþe in lif & in lore” (462). Love’s appropriation of Lollard invective, coupled with his assertion that these heretics threaten to disunite the Church community, serves as counter-propaganda. Just as the Lollards strengthen support for their ideals by characterising the pope as the antichrist in their tracts, so Love emboldens Church members to oppose the Lollard offensive that jeopardises the unity of the Church by characterising Lollards as the disciples of

antichrist. Significantly, *The Mirror's* first critical comments about Lollards concern the ways in which they criticise the clergy. The passage is flagged with the marginal comment "Contra Lollardos" (25):

...do þat he oure lord Jesus biddeþ by his ministres, & be buxum to hes vikeres, þat bene in holy chirch þi souereyns, not only gude & wele lyuyng, bot also schrewes & yuel lyuyng, & so lerne of Jesu to be meke in herte & buxom & þen shalt þou be of his blessed peple. (Love 25)

Love advises his lay readers to be obedient to priests, be they righteous or unrighteous, for in doing so, laypersons properly belong to the blessed people of Christ.

Love's *Mirror* was an important tool in the Church's war on heresy. It not only received Arundel's approval for its circulation; it also reinforces the chief aims of Arundel's *Constitutions*. Love supplants vernacular Scripture and insists that an understanding of the revealed truths of the Church cannot be heightened by reliance on Aristotelian reason. *The Mirror* offers readers an orthodox alternative to English Scriptural translations that champions rather than challenges Church teachings and traditions. While Love's project was designed to eradicate the Lollard heresy, it failed in one important aspect. Love's text, like earlier efforts to stamp out heresy, is not wholly effective. *The Mirror's* ineffectiveness is rooted in the way it attempts to curb religious thinking by lay people: while the program of meditation it sets out openly discourages consideration about doctrinal matters, it inadvertently removes obstacles to certain kinds of theological speculation. For the orthodox reader, *The Mirror* clears the way for devout contemplation that is grounded in that reader's own act of discerning rather than on the Church's teachings. While Love's text does not encourage the lay reader to embroider

Scripture, it does invite him to embroider Love's mediated version of the Gospels, and this requires the untrained reader to make interpretive judgements.

As part of his project to supplant vernacular Scripture and to defend the established theological truths of the Church, Love invites his readers to imagine extra-Scriptural scenes of their own devising as long as these scenes are not error affirming but in keeping with reason and the teachings of the Church. As I have already indicated, in Love's meditation on the angels ministering to Christ after his forty days' fast,<sup>88</sup> he affirms that we may "ymagine by reson and ordeyne þis worþi fest as vs likeþ" (72). Nevertheless, he reminds us that our devout contemplation must be imagined "not by error affermyng bot deuoutly ymaginyng & supposyng, & þat aftur þe comune kynde of þe manhode" (72). In an effort to ensure clarity of meaning, Love carefully guides his readers to focus on the doctrine of the Church. However, the parameters he sets out for orthodox devout contemplation do not establish precisely what he means by "error affermyng" or what it means to "ymagine by reson." It is clear that Love means for his readers to focus on Christ's humanity only, but other than that limiting factor, he allows them to rely on their own discretion. In assuming that his practice could be held to demonstrate what he means, he assumes that all his readers will understand his text in the same way. As we observed in Chapter 2, at least one Lollard writer makes a similar assumption when he argues that lay access to vernacular Scripture will bring about a "onehed of wit" (*De officio* 429). As the result of the mistaken assumption that all lay readers will discern his meaning in the same way, Love opens the door to misinterpretation and for orthodox contemplators to push the bounds of orthodoxy. Simply stated, Love's orthodox reader will imagine Christ's feast not as the Church

teaches it, but as it pleases him to imagine it. He may try to remain within the bounds of orthodoxy, as Love encourages him to do, but Love's injunction to imagine Christ's meal "as vs likeþ" tempts the reader to replace the Church's standards with those he ascribes to the Church. Love's *Mirror* indicates, then, that even an orthodox work tailored to simple readers has the potential to be misinterpreted. As I will argue in chapter 6, Margery Kempe's *Book* is, among many things, a reader's response to Love's *Mirror*, and one of the things her book shows us is precisely the ways in which Love's work could be misread and to what effect.

## Chapter 6:

### A Sympyl Creatur and Hir Boke: *The Book of Margery Kempe* as a Record of an Orthodox (Mis)Reading of Nicholas Love's *The Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ*

As I argued in Chapter 5, Nicholas Love's *The Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ* (henceforth *The Mirror*) served as an orthodox approach to furnishing lay readers with religious instruction. *The Mirror* advocates orthodox devotional practices and its translations of Scripture are heavily glossed so as to ensure that simple readers interpret the material correctly. However, Love's failure to fully define precisely what it means to devoutly imagine scenes from Christ's life by "reson ... not by error affermyng" opens the door to lay misinterpretation and creates the potential for laypeople to engage in a devotional practice that is flawed (Love 72). Whatever else it does, Margery Kempe's *Book* represents a lay reader's response to Love's programme of lay meditation. Love tailors his work towards "symple creatures" (10), and Margery identifies herself as one such "sympyl creatur" (*BMK* 221: 10). Margery produces her *Book* in the 1430s, but it provides an account of events occurring in, but not limited to, the period following the promulgation of the *Constitutions* in 1409.<sup>89</sup> In many key instances, Margery's claims to orthodoxy parallel Love's elucidations of orthodox doctrinal positions. In addition, her meditative practice can be shown to be based on Love's procedure. Finally, Margery's emphasis on her own singularity and exemplarity represents a misreading of Love's narrative. While Love's *Mirror* was never a target of Arundel's efforts to curb lay misreadings of profound theological material in English, it nevertheless serves as an example of a perfectly orthodox text that was misinterpreted by laypeople. Even when furnished with an orthodox text, like Love's *Mirror*, that makes every effort to spell out

theological views, the untrained lay reader, as Margery's *Book* shows, remains liable to misread the vernacular theological material before her.

*The Book of Margery Kempe* is indebted to Love's project in both its method and its subject matter, and it illuminates the continuing problem of the lay misinterpretation of texts that concerned important doctrinal questions and were geared towards simple readers. Carol M. Meale importantly observes that "[c]ritical discussions of Margery's text almost invariably cite the example of Love's *Mirror* ... [, but] critics evade the question of dependency" (Meale 45 n. 86). Catherine S. Akel argues that "Margery's devotional exercises closely follow the exhortations of the *Meditationes*" (7), and she affirms that "[f]or Margery, Love's *Myrrour* was ... a source of inspiration for her contemplation and visions" (Akel 7). In like manner, Ji-Soo Kang maintains that "Margery's Passion visions owe much to the tradition of the *Meditationes*" (59). Naoë Kukita Yoshikawa similarly argues that "Margery is most influenced by the Franciscans' imaginative meditation, elaborated in the *Meditationes* and transmitted to Margery through Nicholas Love's translation, the *Mirror*" (2002, 117). Highlighting the connection between Love's *Mirror* and Margery's *Book*, Meale reminds us that "[t]he well-known fact that the sole extant copy of Margery's *Book* was, in the fifteenth century, in the possession of the Carthusians of Mount Grace, and annotated there, bears repetition" (Meale 45 n. 86). Pertinently, Nicholas Love was the Prior of the Carthusian House of Mount Grace during the first quarter of the fifteenth century.

Because of Margery's indebtedness to Love's *Mirror*, it is necessary to comment on the question of Margery's literacy. Much has been made of Margery's supposed illiteracy and the degree to which her apparent inability to read supports her in her efforts

to show herself to be orthodox and to champion orthodox doctrinal views. Staley notes, for example, that “[i]n a world where owning or reading a Bible, particularly a copy of the Bible in the vernacular, could be construed as an act of religious and political dissent, Margery’s remark that her knowledge of Scripture was mediated through a priest locates her in the bosom of Holy Church” (Staley 32-33). In addition to reading her Scripture, the priest reads her “many a good boke of hy contemplacyon” (*BMK* 143: 25-26), such as “Seynt Brydys boke, Hyltons boke, Bone-ventur, Stimulus Amoris, Incendium Amoris, & swech oper” (*BMK* 143: 27-29). Alysia Kolentzis comments on the significance of the various texts with which Margery is familiar and which she mentions specifically by name: “Kempe’s naming of these texts serves both to validate her spiritual knowledge and to refer to a specific canon with which she aligns herself” (Kolentzis 229). Moreover, while Margery’s reference to “Bone-ventur” is unclear,<sup>90</sup> it may refer to Love’s *Mirror*, itself a translation and adaptation of the pseudo-Bonaventuran *Meditationes vitae Christi* that Love attributes to the “þe deuoute man & worthy clerke *Bonauentre*” (Love 10).

Notwithstanding Margery’s orthodox familiarity with Scripture, her knowledge of the Bible draws negative attention to her during her examination for heresy at York. The clerks all but call her a Lollard when they assert “her wot we wel þat sche hath a deuyll wyth-inne hir, for sche spekyth of þe Gospel” (*BMK* 126: 14-15). It is clearly helpful to Margery to be able to truthfully say in her *Book* that a priest has been reading her Scripture. Despite Margery’s insistence that she has learned Scripture “in sermownys & be comownyng wyth clerkys” (*BMK* 29: 31-32), the *Book* contains some evidence that Margery was not illiterate. When Margery is struck by a falling stone and beam during a

mass at Saint Margaret's Church, she makes plain that she is holding "hir boke in hir hand" as she prays for grace and mercy (*BMK* 21: 23-24). In addition, in the penultimate chapter of Book One, the figure of God Himself notes Margery's ability to read: "& zet am I not displeyd with þe, for, dowtyr, I haue oftyn seyde on-to þe þat wheþyr þu preyist with þi mowth er thynkist wyth thyn hert, wheþyr þu redist er herist redyng, I wil be plesyd wyth þe" (*BMK* 218: 4-8). By playing down her literacy and playing up her reliance on male authorities in the Church to mediate religious books for her, Margery emphasises the degree to which her beliefs are founded on the Church's instruction.

Despite her *Book's* engagement with Love's orthodox conception of devout imagination, several critics have suggested that Margery and her *Book* are more closely aligned with Lollardy. Lynn Staley argues, for example, that "there are times when Margery resembles a Protestant more than she does a medieval Catholic" (Staley 10). Mary Morse observes that it is Kempe's manner of living that invites such a view: "Kempe's ability to live her spiritual life without a monastic enclosure encourages critics to pay more attention to *BMK* as a text of female transgression than as a text of spiritual instruction" (Morse 25). The citizens who inhabit Margery's world certainly find her to be transgressive. She is regularly criticised, taunted, and threatened. One woman goes so far as to tell Margery she will happily provide the bundle of sticks with which to burn the supposed heretic at Smithfield: "I wold þu wer in Smythfeld, & I wold beryn a fagot to bren þe wyth; it is pety þat þow leuyt" (*BMK* 36: 14-16). There is no doubt that Margery is a transgressive figure. Although she insists she is not preaching—"I come in no pulpytt. I vse but comownycacyon & good wordys" (*BMK* 126: 19-20)—she speaks of God in ways that make her vulnerable to accusations that she is preaching. In addition,



Margery travels extensively without her husband. Nevertheless, her *Book* gives no indication that she is either a Lollard or sympathetic to Lollard teachings. On the contrary, she openly challenges Lollard doctrine, and her practice of orthodoxy aligns her *Book* with Nicholas Love's project.

Examples of Margery's orthodoxy pervade her text, and most critics concede that she is orthodox. Nevertheless, it is worth highlighting a few instances in which her orthodoxy closely intersects with Love's clarifications of orthodox doctrinal positions. I begin with the question of auricular confession, since it is with her experience of this doctrine that Margery herself begins her *Book*. Just after a difficult pregnancy and labour (c1394), Margery calls for her confessor in order to confess a sin that she has been keeping to herself:

And þan sche sent for hyr gostly fadyr, for sche had a thyng in conscyens  
whech sche had neuyr schewyd be-forn þat tyme in alle hyr lyfe. For sche  
was euyr lettyd be hyr enmy, þe Deuel, euyr-mor seyng to hyr whyl sche  
was in good heele hir nedyd no confessyon but don penawns be hir-self a-  
loone, & all schuld be for3ouyn, for God is merciful j-now. And þerfor  
þis creatur oftyr-tymes dede greet penawns in fastyng bred & watyr &  
oþer dedys of almes wyth devowt preyers, saf sche wold not schewyn it in  
confessyon. And, whan sche was any tym seke or dysesynd, þe Deuyl seyde  
in her mende þat sche schuld be dampnyd, for sche was not schreuynd of  
þat defawt. Wherfor, aftyr þat hir chyld was born, sche, not trostyng hir  
lyfe, sent for hir gostly fadyr, as j-seyd be-forn, in ful wyl to be schreuynd  
of alle hir lyfe-tym as ner as sche cowde. &, whan sche cam to þe poynt

for to seyn þat þing which sche had so long conselyd, hir confessowr was a lytyl to hastye & gan scharply to vndyrnemyn hir er þan sche had fully seyde hir entent, & so sche wold no mor seyn for nowt he mygth do. And a-noon, for drede sche had of dampnacyon on þe to syde & hys scharp repreuyng on þat oþer syde, þis creatur went owt of hir mende & was wondyrlye vexid & labowryd wyth spyritys half 3er viij wekys & odde days. (*BMK* 6: 32-33, 7: 1-23)

Robert Stanton notes that “[g]iven [the Church’s] clear doctrine on secret sin (not to mention the fear of being branded a Lollard for not believing in the necessity of confession), the mental violence Margery experiences is not altogether surprising” (174). Margery’s characterisation of the sin she does not fully confess as one that has motivated her to do private and self-determined penance indicates that Margery feels great shame as a result of the sin. The fact that she does not name the sin, coupled with the fact that she freely admits in the chapter that follows that she failed to abandon the sin of pride at certain points in her life, strongly suggests that the sin Margery is unable to confess to the priest at her bedside is a sexual sin. Throughout her *Book*, Margery evinces a concern about her own sexual purity, and her interest with this matter begins with this episode. As we will see in what follows, Margery is here aligning herself with Mary Magdalen generally and the Mary Magdalen of Love’s *Mirror* more particularly. In her book, Margery underscores the fact that the mental anguish caused by her failure to fully confess continues and that she experiences moments in which the devil encourages her to forsake Christianity. After this psychic disturbance has persisted for some time, Christ “aperyd to hys creatur which had forsakyn hym in lyknesse of a man” (*BMK* 8: 14-15).

This episode is striking because of the ways in which it corresponds to Love's illustration of the doctrine of auricular confession and Mary Magdalen's association with this Church teaching.

In an effort to elucidate for lay readers the reasons for auricular confession, Love cites the example of Mary Madgalen from Luke 7: 37-50. Love argues that because Mary Magdalen had the living Jesus before her, she confessed to him in her heart and not from her mouth. Because we do not have the living Jesus to confess to as both a man and God, Love argues, we must confess to his earthly representative, a priest:

Bot here perantere sume men þenken aftur þe fals opinyon of lollardes þat shrift of mouþe is not nedeful, bot þat it sufficeþ onely in herte to be shriuen to god, as [þis woman Maudleyñ] was, for þe gospel telleþ not þat she spake any worde by mouþe, and 3it was hir sinne fully forziuen as it is seide, & as it semeþ þis is a gret euidence for þat opinion.

Bot hereto is an answe're resonable þat oure lorde Jesus to whome she made hir confession in herte was þer in bodily presence verrey god & man, to whom by vertue of þe godhede was also opune þe þouht of hert, as is to man þe spech of mouþe, as ofte siþes þe processe of þe gospel [sheweþ], & specialy here opunly, boþe of the woman & also of þe pharise þouht. (Love 90-91)

The Mary Magdalen of Love's account resembles Margery in her mental anguish because she is so tormented by her sins that "she felle done to þe gronde prostrate at hees fete, & with grete inwarde sorowe & shame for hir synnes spake in herte to him" (Love 88). Correspondingly, Margery's mental anguish is answered by Christ who appears to her as

a man. Christ's appearance here further parallels the priest's visit described earlier in Margery's account. The priest was called to hear Margery's confession because, after the birth of her child, she "dyspered of hyr lyfe" (*BMK* 6: 31). Thus, Margery intimates that the priest attends her bedside because she is so ill. In like manner, when Christ appears to her during her mental disturbance, he sits "up-on hir beddys syde" (*BMK* 8: 17-18). Whereas "her confessowr was a lytyl to hastye & gan scharply to vndyrnemyn hir er þan sche had fully seyde hir entent" (*BMK* 7: 16-18), Christ appears to her and allows her the time necessary to behold him fully:

And a-noon, as he had seyde þes wordys, sche saw veryly how þe eyr  
openyd as bryght as ony levyn, & he stey up in-to þe eyr, not rygth hastily  
& qwykly, but fayr & esly þat sche mygth wel be-holdyn hym in þe eyr tyl  
it was closyd a-geyn. And a-noon þe creature was stablyd in hir wittys &  
in hir reson as wel as euyr sche was be-forn.... (*BMK* 8: 21-27)

Margery's recovery in this episode would seem to support the view that, like Love's Mary Magdalen, she has confessed in heart to Christ. The language used to describe Christ's appearance to Margery duplicates that used to describe the priest's visit and suggests that Christ is acting as her confessor, as he did for Mary Magdalen. After Jesus forgives Mary Magdalen, according to Love, "with how gret ioy þa[n] she went away" (Love 90). In like manner, after Christ's departure, Margery's mental anguish is lifted.

Numerous times throughout her *Book*, Margery shows herself to be conforming to Church doctrine concerning the Sacrament of the altar. During a mass, Margery witnesses the Host appear as though it were a dove:

On a day as þis creatur was heryng hir Messe, a zong man and a good prest heldyng up þe Sacrament in hys handys ouyr hys hed, þe Sacrament schok & flekeryd to & fro as a dowe flekeryth wyth hir wengys. & whan, he held up þe chalys wyth þe precyows Sacrament, þe chalys mevyd to & fro as it xuld a fallyn owt of hys handys. Whan þe Sacre was don, þis creatur had gret merueyle of þe steryng & mevyng of þe blyssed Sacrament, desyryng to se mor Sacreys & lokyng yf it wold don so a-zen. Pan seyð owyr Lord Ihesu Crist to þe creatur, “Þow xalt no mor sen it in þis maner, þerfor thank God þat þow hast seyn....”

(*BMK* 47: 15-26)

That Margery witnesses the Host come to life like a dove, and therefore a manifestation of the Holy Ghost,<sup>91</sup> clearly emphasises her orthodoxy. However, the vision also parallels Love’s illustration of the notion that “oure lorde sumtyme shewep opunly merueiles & miracles of þis blessedde sacrament to confort hem þat bene in trewe byleue & to kyndle hir hertes in to þe more feruent loue of god” (Love 228). Love suggests that Christ sometimes openly shows miracles of the Blessed Sacrament to true believing Christians.

In order to support his claim that Christ occasionally reveals miracles of the Sacrament of the altar to true believers, Love mentions the vision of Edward the Confessor and Leofric, Earl of Mercia:

In þat worþi monasterye of seynt Petur þat is clepede Westminstre, & at þe autere dedifiede þere, in þe wirchipe of þe holy trinite, as þe forseide holy kynge Edwarde herde messe on a day, with þe worþi Erle

clepede leveriche, þe which with his noble wife Godziue þe contesse was fondere of many worþi houses of Religion, what tyme it came to þe consecracion & goddus body in forme of brede was halde vp to þe peple siht bytwix þe preestes handes after þe vse of holy chirch, he þat is fairest in shappe before alle mennus sonnes oure lorde Jesus criste apperede bodily in þat hoste to boþe hir sihtes, lifynge vp his riht hande & makyng a crosse towarde þe kynges blessinge. And þan þe kyng with lowtyng of his hede, honouryng þe presence of goddus maieste, mekely with all þe body dide reuerence to so worþi a blessinge. (Love 228)

Like Margery, King Edward and Leofric witness the consecrated Host appear in a miraculous form. For Edward and the Earl, the Host appears in the form of Christ. Love also provides the example of a clerk who witnesses a marvel as the Sacramental bread is consecrated:

And as to oure purpose what tyme it was come to þe sacringe as þe bishope helde vp goddus body in forme of brede, þere aperede to þe siht of þe forseide clerke, bytwix þe preestes holy handes our lord god Jesus bodily in likenes of a passyng faire litel childe. Of þe which siht, he þat sawh it inwardly compuncte as no wondre was, & hyely stirede in to feruent deuocion, contynuede alle þe tyme of þat messe in swete teres & deuout praieres, til it came to þat place, where þe hooste sholde be lift vp aboue þe chalice, & be departede in þe. At þe which tyme he sawh eft in þe self liknes þe forseide Jesu goddus son of heuen, offringe him self in sacrifice to þe fadre for mannus hele & sauacion. (Love 230)

To the clerk, the Host appears first as the Christ child and later as the man Christ, offering himself in sacrifice to God the Father. In both the visions of Edward and the Earl, and in the vision of the clerk, the marvels they witness confirm Christ's divinity. In the first vision Love describes, Christ blesses King Edward, confirming Edward the Confessor's holiness and highlighting Christ's divinity as the one who confers holiness. In the same vein, the clerk's vision emphasises first the divinity of the Christ child and then the sacredness of Christ's sacrifice for mankind. Margery's vision of the Sacrament flickering as a dove works in precisely the same way, as it recalls the descent of the Spirit of God as a dove on a newly baptised Christ. In the Biblical narrative, the voice of God then confirms Christ's divinity by calling him His beloved son. Margery's vision of the Host moving as dove, then, confirms the truth of the doctrine of transubstantiation by imbuing it with the Holy Ghost.

Arguably the most compelling example of Margery's firm belief in the Church's doctrine of transubstantiation occurs when she is questioned at the Church of All Saints in Leicester (c1417) concerning her beliefs about the Sacrament of the altar. Margery's response is especially meaningful:

Serys, I beleue in þe Sacrament of þe Awter on þis wyse, þat what man hath takyn ordyr of presthode, be he neuyr so vicyows a man in hys leuyng, 3yf he sey dewly þo wordys ouyr þe bred þat owr Lord Ihesu Criste seyde whan he mad hys Mawnde a-mong hys disciplys þer he sat at þe soper, I be-leue þat it is hys very flesch & hys blood & no material bred ne neuyr may be vnseyd be it onys seyde.

(*BMK* 115: 10-18).

Margery's assertion of her belief in the doctrine of transubstantiation is noteworthy because, as Staley remarks, "[t]he very terms Margery uses to exonerate herself from the charges of heresy reveal Kempe's awareness of the Wycliffite argument about the meaning of the sacrament" (Staley 150). In addition, because Margery insists on the validity of actions performed by a bad priest, she also exhibits knowledge of Arundel's *Constitutions*. Margery's awareness of Lollard teachings concerning the Sacrament may be the result of the proliferation of Lollard writings, but it is also likely that Margery heard Lollard preaching. As Marta Cobb notes, "[William] Sawtre, the first Lollard burned in 1401, was not only from Lynn, but was a priest at [Margery's] parish church before being charged with heresy" (63). Nevertheless, it remains a possibility that Margery's knowledge of Love's *Mirror* explains her understanding of Lollard opinions on the subject, for, in an effort to confute Lollards, Love spells out the Lollard position for his lay readers and then proceeds to demonstrate the error of this way of thinking:

þe which feiþ is þis in short wordes, þat þe sacrament of þe autere dewly made by vertue of cristes wordes is verrey goddus body in forme of brede, & his verrey blode in forme of wyne, & þouh þat forme of brede & wyne seme as to alle þe bodily wittes of man brede & wyne in his kynde as it was before, neuerles it is not so in soþenesse, bot onely goddus flesh & blode in substance, so þat þe accidentes of brede & wyne wondurfully & myraclesly azeynus mannus reson, & þe comune ordre of kynde bene þere in þat holi sacrament without hir kyndely subiecte, & verrey cristies body þat suffrede deþ vpon þe crosse is þere in þat sacrament bodily vnder þe forme & liknes of brede, & his verrey blode vndur likenes of wyne



substancially & holely, without any feynng or deceit, & not onely in  
figure as þe fals heritike seiþ. (Love 150-152)

In their accounts of transubstantiation, Margery and Love both indicate that the Blessed Sacrament is rooted in Christ's consecration of the bread and wine at the Last Supper, and they both affirm that, after consecration, the Host only appears to remain bread when it is actually the body of Christ. While it is impossible to determine whether or not Margery's familiarity with the Lollard argument against transubstantiation comes from her knowledge of Love's text, it seems likely that this is the case, especially given the degree to which her *Book* borrows from Love's *Mirror*.

The account of Margery's contemplation of Christ's Passion is heavily indebted to the Friday sequence of Love's *Mirror*. Love opens his section on the Passion by establishing the necessary perspective from which to contemplate Christ's suffering: "AT þe biggynyng þou þat desireste to haue sorouful compassion þorh feruent inwarde affection of þe peynful passion of Jesu, þou most in þi mynde depart in manere for þe tyme þe miht of þe godhede fro þe kyndely infirmite of þe manhede..." (Love 159). Love goes on to suggest that Jesus "suspendet in al his passione þe vse [of] þe miht of þe godhede fro þe infirmite of þe manhede, nomore takyng of [þat miht] for þe tyme þen hap anoþer tendere & delicate man" (Love 159). Similarly, in her *Book*, Margery describes the suffering Christ as a fragile man:

Sche had so very contemplacyon in þe sygth of hir s[owle] as yf Crist had hangyn befor hir bodily eye in hys manhode. &, whan thorw dispensacyon of þe hy mercy of owyr Souereyn Savyowr Crist Ihesu it was grawntyd þis creatur to beholdyn so verily hys precyows tendyr body,

alto-rent & toryn wyth scorgys, mor ful of wowndys þan euyr was  
duffehows of holys, hangyng vp-on þe cros wyth þe corown of thorn up-  
on hys heuyd, hys blysfyl handys, hys tendyr fete nayled to þe hard tre, þe  
reuerys of blood flowyng owt plentevowsly of euery membre, þe gresly &  
grevows wownde in hys precyows syde schedyng owt blood & watyr for  
hir lofe & hir saluacyon.... (*BMK* 70: 5-17)

Margery's description of the crucified Christ here also recalls Love's assertion that the devotee should "behol[d] alle þat shale be done azeynus þi lorde Jesu" (174). More specifically, Love invites the devotee to imagine the blood that runs from Christ's body, and he uses terms that closely resemble Margery's terminology: "Pan renne out of his blessed body þee stremes of þat holiest blode, on alle sides abundantly from þo grete wondes" (Love 175). Love's "stremes of þat holiest blode" parallels Margery's "reuerys of blood flowyng."

Love's Friday sequence also indicates that a truly devout contemplation of the Passion will lead to new feelings and will excite the emotions: "For to him þat wolde serche þe passion of oure lorde with alle his herte & alle his inwarde affeccione, þere shuld come many deuout felynges & stirynges þat he neuer supposede before" (Love 160). In like manner, Margery insists that her contemplation of the Passion directly results in her inclination to weep: "And þis was þe fyrst cry þat euyr sche cryed in any contemplacyon" (*BMK* 68: 23-24). According to Love one of the necessary conditions for devout contemplation of the Passion is for the devotee to "mak[e] him self as present in alle þat befelle aboute þat passion & crucifixione" (Love 160). Consequently, Margery recalls that she "wept & sobbyd so plentevowsly as þow sche had seyn owyr

Lord wyth hir bodyly ey sufferyng hys Passyon at þat tyme” (*BMK* 68: 8-18). Finally, Margery’s claim that she witnesses the mourning of Our Lady, Saint John, and Mary Magdalene, among others, closely parallels the final paragraph of Love’s treatment of Christ’s crucifixion:

Beforn hir face sche herd and saw in hir gostly sygh þe mornynge of owyr Lady, of Sen Iohn & Mary Mawdelyn, and many oþer þat louyd owyr Lord. & sche had so gret compassyon & so gret peyn to se owyr Lordys peyn þat sche myt not kepe hir-self fro kryng & roryng þow sche xuld a be ded þerfor. (*BMK* 68: 17-23)

þanne was with oure lady Jone & Maudeleyn þe belouede disciplesse & oþere of his frendes by þe crosse of oure lord Jesu, þe which alle maden grete sorowe & wepten & miht not be confortede in no manere of her belouede maister, bot euer was her sorow renvede with his sorowe, aþere in reþroues or in dedes, as it foloweþ aftere. (Love 176)

Margery’s inconsolableness duplicates that of Mary, John, Mary Magdalen and others in Love’s meditation on the crucifixion.

Margery’s indebtedness to Love’s *Mirror* is not limited to her use of Love’s direction in the contemplated scenes she describes. Staley has called Margery’s *Book* a record of “Margery’s growing ability to assert authority over her self and to trust the strength of her private experience of the nature of the divine” (3). It is precisely the authority that Margery claims for herself that ties her devotional practice to Love’s *Mirror*, for Love encourages his readers to contemplate imagined scenes that are based

on their own discretion without setting sufficiently explicit boundaries. It is also the authority that she claims for herself that causes her contemporaries to suspect her of Lollardy. She is not a Lollard, but rather transgressive because of the ways in which she has misread Love's *Mirror*, and, thus, a product of orthodox efforts to combat the Lollard heresy. Church authorities sign off on her orthodoxy because she is technically orthodox, but her reliance on her own discretion places her outside accepted orthodox practice.

Time and time again, Margery is identified by members of the public as either a heretic or someone who stands out as an oddity. Early in her *Book*, Margery claims an authoritative knowledge of heaven that angers her companions: "For, wher sche was in ony cumpanye, sche wold sey oftyen-tyme, 'It is ful mery in Hevyn.' & þei þat knew hir gouernawnce be-for-tyme & now herd hir spekyn so mech of þe blysse of Heuyn seyde vn-to hir, 'Why speke 3e so of þe myrth þat is in Heuyn; 3e know it not & and 3e haue not be þer no mor þan we...'" (*BMK* 11: 26-32). An episode in Hessle<sup>92</sup> (c1417) also points to the ways in which Margery acts according to her own judgement as she carves out a religious life for herself. When Margery is brought into Hessle as a suspected heretic, women come running out of their houses with their spindles. A short time later, a man tells Margery to "forsake þis lyfe þat þu hast, & go spynne & carde as oþer women don" (*BMK* 129: 35-36). The actions of the women brandishing their spinning tools, coupled with the man's advice that Margery occupy herself with activities suited to women, indicate that Margery draws negative attention because she violates contemporary codes of female behaviour, but she is also being criticised for independent theological speculation. Accordingly, the women brandishing spinning tools call her a "fals heretyk" (*BMK* 129: 31).

Hoccleve's 1415 "Address to Sir John Oldcastle" contains a passage that dovetails neatly with Margery's predicament in Hesse:

Some wommen eeke, thogh hir wit be thynne,  
Wele argumentes make in holy writ!  
Lewde calates! sittith down and spynne,  
And kakele of sumwhat elles, for your wit  
Is al to feeble to despute of it!  
To Clerkes grete/ apparteneth þat aart  
The knowleche of þat, god hath fro yow shit;  
Stynte and leue of/ for right sclendre is your paart. (145-152)

As in Margery's case, the women who engage in the discussion of theological matters are criticised for violating female codes of behaviour and for meddling with a domain that properly belongs to the clergy. Importantly, Love discourages this sort of female transgression when he asserts that women ought to follow the example of Mary and engage in solitary prayer and keep silent:

Here þan maizt þou take ensauple of Marie, first to loue solitary  
praiere & departyng fro men þat þou mowe be worþi angeles presence, &  
forþermore, lore of wisdom to here or þou speke, & fort kepe silence &  
loue litil spech, for þat is a ful gret & profitable vertue" (Love 24-25).

Rather than follow Love's advice to pray solitarily outside of the company of people and to keep silent, Margery tells two yeomen who have arrested her "good talys" (*BMK* 130 7-8).

A salient example of Margery's reliance on her own discretion over that of the Church's representatives occurs when she asks her confessor to allow her to abstain from meat and wine:

Thys creatur had etyn no flesch ne drunkyn no wyn iiij zere er sche went owt of Ynglond. And now as hyr gostly fadyr chargyd hir be vertu of obediens þat sche xulde bothyn etyn flesch & drynkyn wyn, & so sche dede a lytyl whyle. Sythen sche preyd hir confessowr he wolde heldyn hir excused þow sche ete no flesch, and suffred hir to do as sche wold for a tyme as hym lykyd. And sone aftyr thorw meuyng of summe of her cumpany hyr confessowr was dysplesyd for sche ete no flesch, & so was mech of alle þe cumpany. (*BMK* 61: 8-18)

Margery blames her confessor's change of heart here on the influence of the company; however, it is clear from her own account that her confessor enjoins her to resume the consumption of meat and wine as a sign of obedience to God and to the Church. That she obeys his instruction for "a lytyl whyle" characterises her obedience as somewhat less than wholehearted. Consequently, she asks her confessor to put up with her doing as she wishes for a space of time that pleases him. As her sentence structure makes clear, however, the confessor's wishes are secondary to her own. This is precisely the danger that I pointed to in Chapter 5 when I noted that Love's failure to delimit the bounds of orthodox contemplation entices his readers to replace the Church's standards with their own. Margery's request that she be allowed to replace her confessor's judgement with her own is an unwanted consequence of Love's project.

Margery's reliance on her own discretion is most emphatically reflected in her request to receive the mantle and the ring. As Mary C. Erler argues, Margery's efforts on this front demonstrate that "[s]he was here requesting two things: to make a public vow of chastity, in a recognized fashion, and to be visually differentiated from other such women" (Erler 79). Before Margery seeks the mantle and the ring (c1413-1414) from Philip Repingdon, Bishop of Lincoln, she herself observes, as Erler notes, that Christ's instruction that she be clothed in white is unparalleled:

“And, dowtyr, I sey to þe I wyl þat þu were clothys of whyte & no oþer colour, for þu xal ben arayd aftyr my wyl.”

“A, der Lord, yf I go arayd on oþer maner þan oþer chast women don, I drede þat þe pepyl wyl slaw[n]dyr me.” (*BMK* 32: 16-20)

Margery's desire to receive the mantle and the ring as a married woman is not entirely unusual, as Repingdon's willingness to consider the request demonstrates (Erler 78). However, Repingdon's eventual rejection of her request indicates that there is something unusual about the nature of Margery's application. Consequently, although Repingdon is willing to consider her request because Margery's husband, John, consents to it, the Bishop ultimately rejects her application because his counsel advises him against granting her “so synguler a clothyng” (*BMK* 35: 11). In keeping with Repingdon's reservations, Erler affirms that “[c]ontemporary sources ... indicate that dark clothing would have been read by Margery's society as signalling the vow of chastity, taken usually by a wife or a widow” (79). In addition, as Erler asserts, many nuns “initially appear clothed in white, previous to donning the habit (which was generally not white)” (Erler 79), and “women wore white at the marriage ceremony” (Erler 79). Accordingly,

Margery's request to be clothed in white is extraordinary because she is asking to be "a woman vowed to chastity, but wearing the garments of symbolic virginity" (Erler 79).

Pertinently, Margery's decision to adopt white clothing against the advice of the Bishop corresponds with Love's indication to the faithful that they may rely on their own discretion as they imagine extra-biblical scenes of their own devising. Love's *Mirror* receives Archbishop Arundel's approval in 1410, and the period in which Margery first perceives Christ's command that she wear white clothes occurs in 1411 (Erler 81). While she is in Rome, the German priest instructs Margery as a sign of her obedience to his authority to exchange her white clothes for black ones:

Than þe good man, þe Duche preste þat sche was schrevyn on-to, thorw þe steryng of þe Englysch preste wech was hir enmye askyd hir yf sche wolde be obedient vn-to hym er not. And sche seyde, "3a, syr." "Wyl ze don þan as I schal byd 3ow don?" "Wyth ryth good wyl, sire." "I charge 3ow þan þat ze leue 3owr white clothys, and weryth a-geyn 3owr blak clothys." & sche ded hys comawndment. (*BMK*: 84: 32-38, 85: 1)

Although Margery insists that she feels "þat sche plesyd God wyth hir obediens" (85: 1-2), her response to the English priest's pleasure at her change of dress reflects the degree to which she privileges her judgement over that of Church authorities:

Sythen, as sche went on pylgrimage, it happyd hir to metyn wyth þe prest þat was hir enmye, & he enjoyid gretly þat sche was put fro hir wille & seyde vn-to hir, "I am glad þat ze gon in blak clothyng as ze wer wont to do." And sche seyde a-zen to hym, "Ser, owyr Lord wer not displesyd thow I weryd whyte clothys, for he wyl þat I do so." Than þe preste seyde



to hir a-3en, “Now wote I wel þat þu hast a deuyl wyth-inne þe, for I her hym spekyn in þe to me.” (*BMK* 85: 5-13)

Margery’s view that the English priest is pleased that “sche was put fro hir wille” is meaningful, for a short time later, Christ commands Margery to return to the German priest and ask him to give her leave to wear white clothes once more. Importantly, she tells Wenslawe that it is “þe wyl of owr Lord” that she wear white clothing (*BMK* 92: 3). At Margery’s insistence, he is unable to say no (*BMK* 92: 3). As Erler asserts, Margery’s “exploratory efforts at shaping her spirituality, though marked initially by doubt and compromise, in the end moved beyond *rapprochement* with clerical authority (Repingdon [... and] the English priest in Rome) to accept only the authority of her visions and her own understanding of them” (Erler 81). By accepting the authority of her visions over the judgement of Church authorities, Margery shows that she is acting out the inadvertent consequences of Love’s project. In short, she is replacing the standards of the Church with her own.

When Nicholas Love attempts to justify the Church’s teaching concerning the Sacrament of the Altar, he reminds his readers that they are members of an elite religious community with a shared history and customs, and he insists that a belief in the Eucharist marks believers as Christ’s “chosen derlynges” (Love 153). Margery Kempe’s characterisation of herself as Christ’s “derworthy dowtyr” is a natural consequence of her acquaintance with Love’s *Mirror* (*BMK* 17: 9). The first instance in which she is described by this moniker occurs when Christ instructs her to give up the eating of flesh and consume the Eucharist in its place:

Also, my derworthy dowtyr, þu must forsake þat þow louyst best in þis world, & þat is etyng of flesch. And in-stede of þat flesch þow schalt etyn my flesch & my blod, þat is þe very body of Crist in þe Sacrament of þe Awter. (*BMK* 17: 9-13)

While Love's assertion that believers in the Eucharist are God's "chosen derlynges" is meant to unite Christians, Margery's taking up of likeminded terminology indicates that she characterises herself as someone who stands out among Christians. Accordingly, in a moment when Margery laments the loss of her virginity, Christ sets her apart as a "synguler louer" (*BMK* 52: 24-25):

Dowtyr, whan þu art in Heuyn, þu xalt mown askyn what þu wylt, & I xal grawnte þe al þi desyr. I haue telde þe be-for-tyme þat þu art a synguler louer, & þerfor þu xalt haue a synguler loue in Heuyn, a synguler reward, & a synguler worshep. &, for-as-mech as þu art a mayden in þi sowle, I xal take þe be þe on hand in Hevyn & my Modyr be þe oþer hand, & so xalt þu dawnsyn in Hevyn wyth oþer holy maydens & virgynes, for I may clepyn þe dere a-bowte & myn owyn derworthy derlyng.

(*BMK* 52: 22-31)

Margery's sense, as God's "derworthy derlyng," that God will give her everything she desires is not merely represented by her as something that awaits her in the heavenly realm. As Margery indicates later in her *Book*, God tells her many times that she may have whatever she asks of Him: "Many tymes, whan þis creatur xulde makyn hir preyerys, owr Lord seyde vn-to hir, 'Dowtyr, aske what þu wylt, & þu schalt haue it'" (*BMK* 141: 5-7). Margery's characterisation of herself as God's "derworthy derlyng" is

remarkable because it places her outside the bounds of accepted orthodox practice.

Accordingly, instead of casting herself as one among many “chosen derlynges,” as Love recommends, Margery characterises herself as God’s “synguler louer.”

Margery’s emphasis on her own singularity demonstrates that she is going beyond the normal or permitted limits of Christian conduct. In her *Book*, Margery recounts a striking instance in which her companions on pilgrimage, recognising that Margery attracts attention to herself by her sense of singularity, determine to humble her:

& so sche dede, & went forth wyth hem tyl sche cam at Constawns wyth gret disese & gret turbyl, for þei dedyn hir mech shame & mech reprefe as þei wente[n] in dyuers placys. They cuttyd hir gown so schort þat it come but lytil be-nethyn hir kne & dedyn hir don on a whyte canwas in maner of a sekkyn gelle,<sup>93</sup> for sche xuld ben holdyn a fool & þe pepyl xuld not makyn of hir ne han hir in reputacyon. Þei madyn hir to syttyn at þe tabelys end be-nethyn alle oþer þat sche durst ful euyl spekyn a word.

(*BMK* 62: 11-20)

Suitably, in order to humble Margery, her companions shorten her gown, thus cutting her down to size. To press home the point that Margery’s sense of singularity is immoderate, they also make her sit at the table’s end, beneath all the others.

An especially noteworthy example of Margery’s affirmation that she is singular occurs when God calls her to lead others to Him, and He asserts that He has ordained her to be a mirror amongst the people: “Neuyr-þe-lesse, dowtyr, I haue ordeynd þe to be a merowr amongys hem for to han gret sorwe þat þei xulde takyn exampil by þe for to haue sum litil sorwe in her hertys for her synnys þat þei myth þerthorw be sauyd...” (*BMK*

186: 11-16). This is a particularly meaningful moment in the *Book* because of Margery's indebtedness to Love's *Mirror*. Margery's sense that she is a mirror to the people indicates that she views herself as a person who embodies a characteristic deserving of imitation. With this claim, Margery recalls Love's comments about why he chooses to write about Christ's life:

And so for als miche as in þis boke bene contynede diuerse ymaginacions of cristes life, þe which life fro þe bygynnyng in to þe endyng euer blessedede & withoute synne, passyng alle þe lifes of alle oþer seyntes, as for a singulere prerogatif, may worþily be clepede þe blessedede life of Jesu crist, þe which also because it may not be fully discriuede as þe lifes of oþer seyntes, bot in a maner of liknes as þe ymage of mans face is shewed in þe mirroure; þefore as for a pertynent name to þis boke, it may skilfully be cleped, þe *Mirroure of þe blessed life of Jesu criste*. (Love 11)

According to Love, the life of Christ is like the reflection of a man's face in the mirror because Christ's life cannot be described completely. As I suggested in Chapter 5, Love points to the ways in which details of Christ's life are absent from the Gospels.

Nevertheless, he also indicates that he writes about Christ's life because it surpasses that of any of the saints, and, throughout the *Mirror*, he flags those features of Christ's life that might be taken as examples by his readers.

In the section in which he describes Pilate's sentencing of Jesus to death, for instance, Love urges his readers, lay and lettered, to attend to Christ's example of patience:

Wherefore nowe take hede diligently to him, & haue wondre of þat grete  
profonde mekenes of him, & in als miche as þou may conforme þe to  
folowe him by pacience & mekenes & suffryng of wronges for his loue.  
(Love 171)

Love's "nowe take hede" is a signal to the lay reader to heed Christ's example, and the marginal notation "Nota de paciencia imitanda" directs his learned readers to do so (Love 171). In his treatment of Christ's sermon on the Mount, Love similarly signals both simple and trained readers to attend to Christ's example. He flags the section with "Nota de paupertate" and urges his lay readers to pay special attention to the example of Jesus (Love 82):

Wherefore at þis tyme we shole specially note, þat oure lord began þis  
sermone first at pouerte, doyng vs to vndurstonde, þat pouerte is þe first  
grounde of alle gostly exercise. For he þat is ouerleide & charget with  
temporel gudes & worldly riches may not frely & swiftly folowe crist, þat  
is þe mirroure & ensauple of pouerte.... (Love 82)

With this cue, Love emphasises that Christ is the example Christians ought to follow. However, Margery turns this notion on its head when she indicates that Christ ordained her to be a mirror amongst the people. In doing so, she appropriates Christ's singularity.

Margery's appropriation of the exemplariness Love attributes to Christ is further addressed by the figure of God during one of her dalliances with the Lord: "þow wer a chosyn sowle wyth-owt begynny[n]g in my syghte and a peler of Holy Cherch" (*BMK* 29: 21-23). Margery's sense that she is "wyth-owt begynny[n]g" aligns her with Christ because, as one of the three persons of the Trinity, he is without beginning. Margery's

self-characterisations also overlap with hagiography.<sup>94</sup> By way of her contemplative conversations with God, Margery characterises herself as more than simply an exemplar for her community; she also suggests that she is a distinguished supporter of the Church. In addition, Margery's vision of the Host flickering like a dove bears witness to her holiness in the same way as Love's account of Edward the Confessor's vision of the Host as the man Christ blessing him confirms Edward's holiness. In her *Book*, Margery stresses repeatedly that her holiness sets her apart from her peers. In the Holy Land, Margery's fellowship asks the Pope's emissary to command her to eat meat and to stop weeping, but the company also asks "þat sche xulde not speke so mech of holynes" (*BMK* 63: 37, 64: 1). Margery's holiness is here amplified by the fellowship's remarkable lack of piety. Thus, Staley observes that "[t]he very company or fellowship that goes to worship in the lands of Jesus' ministry describes itself as bound together by mealtime rituals that exclude any talk of Jesus" (Staley 53). Later, when this same fellowship chastises her for referring to a Scriptural text, Margery meaningfully underscores her estrangement from the group: "forsøþe I may no lengar hold 3ow comenawnt, for I must nedys speke of my Lord Ihesu Crist þow al þis world had forbodyn it me" (*BMK* 66: 8-10).

In addition to suggesting that her holiness distinguishes her from her peers, Margery indicates that her holiness sets her apart from other saints. Margery characterises herself, like many saints depicted in saint's life narratives, as being willing to suffer for God's love:

Than thys creatur þowt it was ful mery to be reprevyd for Goddys lofe; it was to hir gret solas & cownfort whan sche was chedyn & fletyn for þe

lofe of Ihesu for repreuyng of synne, for spekyng of vertu, for comownyng in Scriptur whch sche lernyd in sermownys & be comownyng wyth clerkys. Sche ymagyned in hir-self what deth sche mygth deyn for Crystys sake. Hyr þow[t] sche wold a be slayn for Goddys lofe, but dred for þe poynt of deth, & þerfor sche ymagyned hyr-self þe most soft deth, as hir thowt, for dred of inpacyens, þat was to be bowndyn hyr hed & hir fet to a stokke & hir hed to be smet of wyth a scharp ex for Goddys lofe.

(*BMK* 29: 27-32, 30: 1-6)

Margery casts herself as more than an exemplar of holiness, but as a Christian martyr willing to suffer death for her religious beliefs. Despite the fact that she can only imagine such a death to be a “soft deth,” she envisions the voice of God telling her that her imagined deaths will be rewarded in heaven as if she had been actually martyred: “I thank þe, dowtyr, þat þow woldyst [suffer deth] for my lofe, for, as oftyr as þow thynkyst so, þow schalt haue þe same mede in Heuyn as þow þu suffredyst þe same deth” (*BMK* 30: 7-10). Whereas the martyred saint receives his heavenly reward for the expression of love for God that his martyrdom represents, Margery indicates that her holiness entitles her to the reward without consummating the expression of love. The problem here is that saints achieve their exalted place in heaven and their holiness after death by formal recognition of the Church. In contrast, Margery insists that she is already holy with an exalted place in heaven. In this way, she again aligns herself with the Christ of Love’s *Mirror*. Just as Love asserts that Christ’s life surpasses that of all the saints, so Margery intimates that she is exceptionally holy. Accordingly, when Margery experiences her

vision of the Host as a dove, Christ maintains that he never presented such a marvel to St. Bridget of Sweden: “My dowtyr, Bryde, say me neuyr in þis wyse” (*BMK* 47: 26-27).

While Margery appropriates the characteristics Love ascribes to Christ in *The Mirror*, Margery also employs his method with the writing of her *Book*. Notably, in Book Two, she explains the potential lack of accuracy regarding the names of places in her *Book*: “Yf þe namys of þe placys be not ryth wretyn, late no man merueylyn, for sche stodyid mor a-bowte contemplacyon þan þe namys of þe placys...” (*BMK* 233: 8-10). In a similar fashion, as I argued in Chapter 5, Love indicates that it is acceptable for those engaged in devout contemplation to imagine Christ saying or doing things that are not found in Scripture as long as they are not “azeyns þe byleue or gude maneres” (Love 11). Love likewise notes that there are two diverging views concerning Christ’s crucifixion. He importantly maintains that “wheper so it be in one maner or in oþere, soþe it is þatoure lorde Jesus was nailede harde vpon þe crosse, hande & foote...” (Love 175). Love plays down the importance of accuracy in favour of an act of devout contemplation that is produced by “reson . . ., not by errour affermyng bot [by] deuoutly ymaginyng and supposyng” (Love 72). Margery, employing Love’s method, suggests that the value of her *Book* is derived from the accounts of her many acts of devout contemplation and not from any documented facts about the where and the when of things. Thus, she asserts “[t]hys boke is not wretyn in ordyr, euery thyng aftyr oþer as it wer don, but lych as þe mater cam to þe creatur in mend whan it schuld be wretyn, for it was so long er it was wretyn þat sche had for-getyn þe tyme & þe ordyr whan thyngys befellyn” (*BMK* 5: 12-16).



Margery's indebtedness to Love's *Mirror* is a reflection of her acquaintance with his writing. By characterising herself as a "sympyl creatur" (221: 10), Margery recalls Love's use of the term (10) and, therefore, identifies herself as a figure of the untrained lay reader. Her *Book* indicates both the ways in which she read and misread Love's narrative, and, consequently, illustrates the fact that orthodox works tailored towards untrained lay readers could still be misinterpreted despite stringent efforts on the part of orthodox writers to avoid lay misreadings of their vernacular theological writings.

Margery's *Book*, discovered in a private library in 1934, does not appear to have circulated in the period<sup>95</sup> beyond the walls of the Carthusian House of Mount Grace that held the only known copy of her work in the late fifteenth century (Yoshikawa 2007, 19). The manuscript of Margery's *Book* was annotated by four monks at Mount Grace, and, as I mentioned in Chapter 1, Parsons has speculated that the monks were preparing the text for a lay readership,<sup>96</sup> but its broad circulation did not occur. The fact that the red ink annotator censored Margery's text, coupled with the lack of evidence that Margery's *Book* was received by contemporary lay readers, supports the view that Margery's misreadings of Love's *Mirror* fly in the face of orthodoxy. The significance of Margery's text, therefore, lies more in the ways in which it reflects her interaction with the vernacular theological writing she read rather than how her *Book* was received by contemporary readers. Although Margery evinces a knowledge of a variety of theological works in English, her *Book* is heavily dependent on her knowledge of and engagement with Love's *Mirror*. Just as Margery functions as a representative of the simple reader, so her *Book* serves as an example of lay misreadings of vernacular theological writing that persisted in the aftermath of Arundel's 1409 *Constitutions*.

The dearth of evidence concerning the *Book's* medieval circulation makes it difficult to gauge the degree to which the *Book* indicates the failure of the *Constitutions*. It is clear from her *Book* that Margery was profoundly aware of the *Constitutions*. Although she can read, she insists that her knowledge of Scripture comes from priests. As we have seen, the seventh constitution prohibits the reading of unauthorised English Scriptural translations as well as the unauthorised translation of any verse of the Scriptures (Arundel 192). Nevertheless, Margery's *Book* contains English translations of verses of Scripture accompanied by her own Biblical exposition. For example, during her interview with the Archbishop of York, Margery quotes Luke 11: 27-28 and argues that these verses of the Gospel give her leave to speak of God:

“And also þe Gospel makyth mencyon þat, whan þe woman had herd our Lord prechyd, sche cam be-forn hym wyth a lowde voys & seyde, ‘Blyssed be þe wombe þat þe bar & þe tetys þat 3af þe sowkyn.’ Þan our Lord seyde a-3en to hir, ‘Forsope so ar þei blissed þat heryn þe word of God and kepyn it.’ And, þerfor, sir, me thynkyth þat the Gospel 3euyth me leue to spekyn of God.” (126: 6-13)

The *Book's* red-ink annotator takes exception to Margery's translation of the Latin Vulgate's “ubera quae suxisti” with her own “þe tetys þat 3af þe sowkyn.” He inserts a caret before “tetys” and writes “pappys” in red in the outer margin (Meech 126 n. 1). Coincidentally, the *Wycliffite Bible* renders the verse as “the tetis that thou hast soken.” Whether Margery's use of the term *tetys* instead of *pappys* indicates that she was familiar with the *Wycliffite Bible* remains to be proved. What is clear is that Margery's inclusion of Scriptural translations in her *Book* contravenes the *Constitutions*, and the red-ink

annotator's emendation of her Biblical translation reflects his objection to her choice of words.

## Chapter 7: Conclusion

### The Lantern Goes Dark: The Lollard *Lanterne of Lyst* and Bishop Reginald Pecock's Orthodox Vernacular Theology as Casualties of the Campaign Against the Lay (Mis)Reading of Profound Theological Material in English

As we have seen, the tailoring of doctrinal writing to untrained readers in English did not prevent lay misreadings of this sort of vernacular theological writing. In response to the Church's ongoing restriction of the promulgation of heterodox opinions, both heterodox and orthodox writers continued to produce works that covered profound theological material and that dealt with important doctrinal matters, but they did so with increasing efforts to ensure clarity of meaning for simple readers who lacked clerical training. The Church responded by further restricting such writings, and they did so with a very heavy hand.<sup>97</sup> Two post-*Constitutions* writers speak to both the endeavours of vernacular theological writers to insist on clarity for lay readers and the increasing efforts of Church authorities to take severe measures against such writing. *The Lanterne of Lyst* (c1409-1415),<sup>98</sup> a Lollard treatise, specifically makes mention of Arundel's *Constitutions*, and it represents a comprehensive anatomisation of what its anonymous author judges to be the offences of the Catholic Church and its representatives. On the orthodox side, we have Bishop Reginald Pecock's comprehensive vernacular theology, designed to gradually transition lay readers from a simple understanding of their Catholic faith to a more profound understanding of the Church's teachings. Whereas the *Lanterne of Lyst* ended up as the evidence against a lay reader in a heresy trial, Bishop Reginald Pecock's books were burned and he was forced to recant his opinions or face the stake. These two cases indicate that, while both heterodox and orthodox writers endeavoured to tailor vernacular theological writing about doctrinal matters to simple readers with ever

increasing efforts to ensure clearness of expression, by 1457, Church authorities regarded all such writings, whether orthodox or not, as intrinsically dangerous.

In his Prologue, the author of *The Lanterne of Lyst* indicates what he sees to be the function of his writing:

...in þis tyme of hidouse derknes somme seeken þe lanterne of lyst of þe whiche spekiþ þe prophete. Ps. cxviii. ‘Lucerna pedibus meis verbum tuum.’ Þat is to say, Lord þi word is a lanterne to my feet. For as fer as þe lyst of þis lanterne schineþ, so fer derkness of synne & cloudis of þe fendis temptaciouns vanischen away & moun not abide. And algatis whanne þe lanterne lystneþ into þe hert, it purgeþ & clensip from corrupcioun; it swagip & heeliþ goostli soris.<sup>99</sup> (4: 10-17)

With this metaphor, the writer of *The Lanterne of Lyst* indicates that the Word serves as a moral lantern to the people, and his inclusion here—and throughout his work—of Scripture in Latin followed by his English translation intimates that his writing is precisely such a lantern.

*The Lanterne of Lyst* is about clarity in its use of this metaphor and in its structure. The author’s writing is designed to anatomise the antichrist for the lay reader, and it is divided into sections that itemise the properties of the subject under discussion. He provides, for example, an anatomy of the antichrist and his six conditions, and then he proceeds to describe the antichrist in particular with his three parts. Later, he sets out the five assaults of the antichrist, and then the four reasons against the adornment of churches. He distinguishes between what he judges to be the three different kinds of churches, and then he lays out the four ways in which the Church is subject to the Word.

He lists the five things that belong to the office of the priesthood, and he outlines the good and evil that are coming to the material Church. He also identifies the properties of the fiend's church, and sets out the six arrows of the soul. Lest the lay reader be prone to misinterpretation, the author of *The Lanterne of Ligt* spells out what he means. Although he employs the metaphor of the lantern of light at the beginning of his treatise and occasionally uses figurative language and even extended metaphor,<sup>100</sup> the author does not exploit fiction to communicate his message, as did the Lollard dialogue authors I discussed in Chapter 2. Indeed, his detailed anatomy of the wrongs of the Church and its representatives suggests that he fears that too much unnecessary embellishment might corrupt his meaning. In addition, he is quite clear about the fact that he is writing for untrained readers; in his prefatory remarks to his anatomisation of the six sins against the Holy Ghost, he writes that he provides this elucidation “for þe more lernyng of smale vndirstondars” (*LL* 7: 8).

Bishop Reginald Pecock's (c1392-1459) writings share with *The Lanterne of Ligt* an interest in spelling things out for the lay reader. Pecock's writing departs from the anonymous Lollard work, however, because it is overtly orthodox. Pecock was not a Lollard but a Catholic bishop and an ardent opponent of Lollardy. Nevertheless, as David Carlson notes, Pecock's “efforts to combat the lollard menace ... failed and brought him to ruin” (Carlson 25). William Cabell Greet asserts that Pecock aimed “[t]o present in English a system of Christianity which by its popular appeal, its consistency and its authority would blot out Lollardy” (Greet xiv). Kirsty Campbell indicates that Pecock's principal goals in his writing were “to find an effective method of combating heresy and fortifying orthodoxy” (Campbell 72). She further observes that “[i]n Pecock's

view, one of the most important duties of the clergy is the spiritual education of the laity” (Campbell 51). Thus, Pecock “made it his task to expand mechanisms for the transmission of theology to the laity by writing books of religious instruction and by devising innovative plans for lay education” (Campbell 50). Pecock’s plans for lay education aim “to take [readers] from the basics to a higher level of understanding, training their minds at the same time as he passes on religious knowledge” (Campbell 53). With an eye to reinforcing orthodoxy, Pecock endeavours “to ensure that the laity will understand rather than memorize doctrine, prayers, articles of belief, and rules for Christian behavior” (Campbell 60). In addition to strengthening orthodoxy, “Pecock’s corpus of educational materials provides a kind of institutional response, or official antidote to Lollardy...” (Campbell 70).

Pecock’s condemnation and the burning of his books are unusual not only because “[he] was the first bishop of the English church ever to be formally convicted of heresy” (Brockwell, Jr. 136), but because his work openly challenges Lollard principles and overtly upholds the Church’s teachings. In the first part of *The Repressor of Over Much Blaming of the Clergy* (c1449),<sup>101</sup> Pecock significantly identifies as an error in belief the opinion “that what euer Cristen man or womman be meke in spirit and willi[ng] forto vndirstonde treuli and dewli Holi Scripture, schal without fail and defaut fynde the trewe vndirstonding of Holi Scripture in what euer place he or sche schal rede and studie” (*Repressor* 1: 6). In like manner, as early as the Prologue to *The Repressor*, Pecock urges his readers not to chastise the clergy of Holy Church:

manie ... vndirnyme and blame openli and scherpli bothe in speche and in writing the clergie of Goddis hool chirche in erthe and forto bere an hond

upon the seid clergie that he is gilty in summe gouernauncis as in defautis, whiche gouernauncis tho blamers kunnen not schewe, teche, and proue to be defautis and synnes; and han therebi maad ful miche indignacioun, disturblance, cisme, and othere yuelis, forto rise and be contynued in manie persoones bi long tyme of manye zeeris: therfore to ech such vngroundid and vnredy and ouer hasti vndirnymer and blamer y seie the bifore rehercid wordis of Seint Poul: *Vndirnyme thou, biseche thou, and blame thou, in al pacience and doctrine.... (Repressor 1: 2-3)*

Later, Pecock highlights the humanity of clergymen as he addresses the opinion that priests do wrong: “For, thouz thei ben prelatis in the chirche, thei ben men and not pure aungels, and therefore thei ben suche, and muste needis be suche, that han the natural temptatyue wrecchidnessis whiche other men han” (*Repressor 1: 105*).

Despite Pecock’s efforts to defend the Church and to combat the Lollard heresy, he was harshly punished for his attempts to do so by way of vernacular theology. In his own words, *The Repressor* represents his efforts to justify, among other things, the use of images in churches, the practice of pilgrimage, and the role of saints. He asserts that his justification will take the form “of this present book in the comoun peplis langage pleinli and openli and schortli” (*Repressor 1: 4*). As a result of his vernacular theology, Pecock was forced to abjure or face execution. Pecock’s contemporary, Thomas Gascoigne, sheds light (c1457-1458) on the reasons for Pecock’s condemnation: “Pecok ... scripsit tales profundas materias in Anglicis, quæ magis aptæ erant lædere legentes et audientes quam illis proficere” (Gascoigne 213).<sup>102</sup> Pecock, Gascoigne asserts, wrote about such profound matters in English that they were more likely to hurt than to profit those who



read or heard them. In other words, despite Pecock's efforts to promulgate orthodox doctrine, lay readers could not be trusted to read and understand the profound material correctly. In Chapter 5, I argued that Nicholas Love appropriates Lollard terminology and methodology in order to undercut Lollard positions. One of the complaints against Pecock is that he takes this approach to the extreme. Whereas Love blames the Lollard's lack of belief in the Eucharist on his dependence on the "naturele reson of man" (Love 236), Pecock argues that "most of what Scripture teaches is true not because it appears in holy writ, but because it is evident to 'the doom of resoun,' or the 'moral lawe of kinde'" (Lahey 2005, 235). Accordingly, in Pecock's attempt to minimise the attractiveness of vernacular Scripture, he describes the ways in which theological truth is grounded in the judgement of natural reason:

...but so it is, that al the leernyng and knowing, which Holi Scripture zeueth vpon eny bifore seid gouernaunce, deede, or trouthe of Goddis moral lawe, mai be had bi doom of natural resoun; zhe, thouz Holi Writt had not spoke ther of, or thouz he schulde neuere fro hens forthward speke ther of, as anoon aftir schal be proued; and ouer it al the forther kunnyng which Holi Writt zeueth not upon eny seid gouernaunce or deede or treuthe of Goddis lawe and seruice, and is necessarie to be had vpon the same gouernaunce, trouthe, or vertu, mai be had bi labour in doom of natural resoun, as anoon aftir schal be proued. Wherefore doom of natural resoun, (which is clepid "moral lawe of kinde" in the book *Of iust apprising Holi Scripture*.) and not Holi Scripture, is the ground of alle the seid gouernauncis, deedis, vertues, and trouthis. (*Repressor* 1: 12-13)

Whereas Love appropriates Lollard terminology but often uses it, as in his use of “reson,” to mean something quite different from the Lollards, Pecoock argues that the truth of the Christian religion, the doctrine of the Catholic faith, is grounded in Aristotelian reason.

Pecoock’s emphasis on Aristotelian reason is highly unusual because, in an effort to demonstrate that laypeople are in possession of syllogistic powers, he illustrates in *The Folewer to the Donet* (c1453-1454) the ways in which beasts may be shown to possess a capacity to reason in this way:

...it is comounli holde of summe philesofris þat no beest may in his wittes make discurse, þat is to seie, a cowplyng togidere of two treuþis to him bifore knowen, forto conclude in foorm of argument þe iij<sup>e</sup> treuþ, and þerbi þe same iij<sup>e</sup> treuþ be knowen first of þe same beest. Neuerþeles, y se not as 3it eny inconuenyence which wole lette forto holde þat beestis mowe and kunnen forme proposicions, argue and proue and gete knowyng to hem bi argument of verri silogisme and of induccioun about þo þingis whiche þei mowe bi her outward and inward wittis perceyue; þou3 þei not so parfijtli as a man may and kanne argue about the same þingis and about many mo, rist as oon beest kanne not bi half be so sli3 and wili and so wel argue as sum oþir beest kanne. (*Folewer* 36)

Despite the scepticism of some philosophers, Pecoock affirms, beasts can and do form propositions, and argue and prove conclusions by way of syllogisms. Pecoock goes on to argue that, just as beasts are in possession of syllogistic capabilities, laypeople too possess these powers:

And ... in lijk maner as þese silogismes ben formyd in þe seid hound, so ben oþire silogismes formyd in þe same hound, and in oþire beestis ful ofte, þouz it be not mych of men considerid, and þouz þilke silogismes be maad hastili and quycli, as þei ben oft made swiftli and quycli in men, þouz þei be not lettrid and not enformyd in craftial logik, but endewid oonli with natural and vsual logik, which neuerþeles is þe same with craftial logik, so þat y take þis name ‘craftial’ here largeli for al þat is founden and formyd expresseli bi mannys witt and businesse.

*(Folewer 37)*

The unlettered layperson, Pecoock maintains, is in possession of syllogistic capabilities despite his lack of formal training.<sup>103</sup> The layman may not be “enformyd in craftial logik,” but he is imbued with natural reason.

Although Pecoock uses Aristotelian reason rather than Love’s sense of “human rationality” in his defence of Church doctrine, the points of intersection between Love’s project and Pecoock’s programme of lay religious instruction are manifold. Both writers write in the vernacular for a lay audience. Love devises a strategy for meditation that overtly stresses the Church’s teachings, and Pecoock devises a programme for lay religious instruction that champions orthodoxy. Both writers insist that Scripture must be mediated for lay readers. Love produces translations of Gospel stories and then glosses them heavily with the comments of Church doctors. As far as Pecoock is concerned, he argues that disorder is the most likely consequence of universal lay access to an English Bible:

But the lay parti wolen not attende and truste to her owne wittis, and wolen lene to textis of the Bible oonli, y dare weel seie so many dyuerse opinions schulden rise in lay mennys wittis bi occasioun of textis in Holy Scripture aboute mennys moral conuersacioun, that al the world schulde be cumbrid therwith, and men schulden accorde to gidere in keping her seruice to God, as doggis doon in a market, whanne ech of hem terith otheris coot. (*Repressor* 1: 85-86)

Not only can lay readers not be trusted to read the Bible correctly, Pecoock affirms, but they will develop a great number of divergent misinterpretations of Scripture.

Love's *Mirror* and Pecoock's vernacular theology share a number of things in common, but one of the significant differences between them is that Love's text is sanctioned by the Archbishop of Canterbury, and Pecoock's work is condemned by the Church. Early in *The Reule of Crysten Religioun* (c1443), Pecoock asserts that he is willing to remove portions of his writings that do not meet with the Church's approval:

And if eny such it happe me to write or offre or purpose or holde, defende or fauoure, bi eny vnavisidnesse, hastynes or ignoraunce, eer þan y may se þe treuþe, or bi eny oþer maner, y schal be redy it to leeve, forsaake, and retrete mekely and deuoutly at þe assignementis of myn ordynaries fadris of þe chirche after þat þei han take sufficient avisyng þerupon; 3he and it þe same y now as for þanne, forsake and leeve. (*Reule* 29)

While Pecoock offers to censor his work if it does not meet with the Church's approval, he also reveals that his work has already been circulated without his consent:

‘Þe donet of cristen religioun’ and ‘þe book of cristen religioun’ and oþire suche of doctrine and of officying whiche, bifore þe deuyce and setting of þis present book, ben runne abrood and copied azens my wil and myn entent, as y haue openli prechid at poulis, and þat bi vncurtisie and vndiscrecioun of freendis, into whos singuler sizt y lousid þo writingis to go, and forto not haue go ferþir into tyme þei were bettir examyned of me and approvid of my lordis and fadris of þe churche, y wole to be as noon of myn; but in as moche as in me is, y wole þei be rendred vp azen, and bettir formes of þe same be to hem deliuered, whanne dewe deliuerance þerof schal be made. (*Donet*<sup>104</sup> 6-7)

Because of the indiscretion of friends, Pecoock asserts, portions of his vernacular theology have circulated without his permission and, more importantly, without their having been examined by Church authorities and approved for circulation. Pecoock indicates that once he has revised his works and they represent “bettir formes” he will surrender them to be examined.

The other ways in which Pecoock’s project differs from Love’s offer some insight into the reasons for Pecoock’s condemnation.<sup>105</sup> For instance, Love prepares a theological text for lay consumption that is based on entirely orthodox pseudo-Bonaventuran meditations, and the meditative practice he elucidates is in line with the accepted practice of affective piety. Love employs Church doctors to support his points, and he defends Church doctrine, but asks his readers to believe as the Church teaches and to go no farther in their thinking about such matters as the Trinity and transubstantiation. By contrast, whereas Love and the Church seek to enforce conformity of belief, Pecoock aims

to increase his readers' knowledge of God and God's law. In the Prologue of *The Reule*, Pecock lists the four necessary conditions for man's good living, and he indicates that knowledge is the first of the four conditions: "Pese iiij þi[n]gis ben knowing, louyng, good werkis aftir hem worching an[d] grace" (*Reule* 1). Later in the Prologue, Pecock asserts that it is man's knowledge of God that allows him to fulfill two of the four necessary conditions for good living. Knowledge of God allows man to love well and to enact good works. In addition, for Pecock, knowledge of God consists of the knowledge of God's nature, His benefits, His punishments, and His law. Because of the Church's increasingly aggressive endeavours to enforce conformity of belief and to suppress lay access to expositions of profound doctrinal matters, Pecock is in dangerous territory when he insists on the importance of lay knowledge of God's law.

Pecock further pushes the bounds of orthodoxy when he insists that the Scriptural exegesis of respected Church doctors is subject to correction because new truths are discovered by way of reason and because "oon þing which is schewid to oo man is hid to an oþer" (*Reule* 464). Pecock not only indicates that Church doctors can and do err, he demonstrates a lack of dependence on their exposition. Taylor observes, for example, that "Pecock's method of composition, which involves extensive self-reference and self-paraphrase but relatively few references to other authorities or to Scripture, provides concrete illustration of [a] dangerous independence" (2001, 150-151). In the same vein, Pecock asserts that it is his *Reule* that will bring lay readers to a sufficient knowledge of God:

And so if þis book ... be weel ouer studied and seen and cleerly  
comprehendid, and taken of hem þat haue capacite, y woot þat therin schal

be found to hem rist sufficient and rist cleere knowing of god ..., for  
goostly edificacioun, þoru3 alle þe ... maters afore rehercid, and ful  
profitable craft to gete ... love, and drede to god, compunccioun, sorewe  
and schame for oure synnes. (*Reule* 464)

Unlike Love, then, who supports the Church's project to suppress lay speculation about weighty doctrinal questions, Pecock affirms that a knowledge of doctrinal matters is a necessary condition for good living. Moreover, he claims that his writing is the means by which lay readers can achieve this knowledge. Thus, as I have already indicated, Gascoigne observes that Pecock got into trouble when he wrote profound material in English that was likely to harm the lay readers to whom he directed his work.

Despite his errors, Pecock apparently believed that the ideas expounded in his writings remained within the bounds of orthodoxy. John Whethamstede (c1392-1465), Abbot of St. Albans, composed a detailed account of Pecock's 1457 trial and abjuration in an abbatial register. In his introduction to Pecock's *Repressor*, Babington prints this account of Pecock's troubling abjuration; throughout, Pecock's continuing obedience to Holy Church is apparent:

I am in a strait betwixt two, and I hesitate in despair as to what I shall choose. If I defend my opinions and positions, I must be burned to death: if I do not, I shall be a byeword and a reproach. Yet it is better to incur the taunts of the people, than to forsake the law of faith and to depart after death into a hell-fire and the place of torment. I choose, therefore, to make an abjuration, and intend for the future so to live that no suspicion shall arise against me all the days of my life. (qtd. in Babington xlvi)

The day after Pecock's abjuration at Lambeth, he gave a public recantation at Paul's Cross. In it, he indicates that his written works raised the alarm because they showed him to "have holden, feeled, and taught otherwise than the Holy Roman and Universal Church teacheth, preacheth, and observeth" (qtd. in Babington xlvi). Unlike the anonymous writer of *The Lanterne of Lize* who evinces a keen awareness of the consequences of violating the *Constitutions*, Campbell suggests that "it is not entirely clear that someone like Pecock would have felt that these ecclesiastical decrees would have applied to someone like him" (Campbell 70). In her discussion of Pecock's *The Reule of Crysten Religioun*, Campbell asserts that "[f]rom what Pecock says about his willingness to censor parts of the *Reule* that do not receive institutional approval, it appears that Pecock thought that his teachings ... were perfectly legitimate" (Campbell 71). Notwithstanding his efforts to eradicate Lollardy and champion orthodox teachings, Pecock was condemned as a heretic in 1457 and, as Stephen Lahey remarks, "given the choice of recantation or the stake" (Lahey 2005, 235). At the time of his abjuration, Pecock's books were burnt. As Churchill Babington records,<sup>106</sup> "Pecock, with his own hands, delivered three folios and eleven quartos of his own composition to the executioner, who took and threw them into the flames" (Babington xlix). Charles W. Brockwell, Jr., maintains that "Bishop Reginald Pecock made the greatest effort of any fifteenth-century churchman to convince the heretics to return to orthodoxy" and that the "tragic irony of [Pecock's] life is that this man, who tried harder than anyone else to bring the Lollards back into the peace of the church, was himself forced to abjure and to assist in the burning of his books before the crowd at Paul's Cross" (Brockwell, Jr. 135, 136).



The author of *The Lanterne of Lizt* importantly characterises the environment of suspicion, censorship, and punishment that was occasioned by Arundel's *Constitutions*: "Anticrist enqueriþ sechiþ & herkneþ where he mai fynde ony man or womman. þat writiþ, rediþ, lerneþ, or studieþ Goddis lawe in her modir tung to lede her lijf aftir þe plesing wille of God, and soone he caccheþ hem in hise sensuris, & aftir smytiþ as he mai moost greuousli hirten hem" (18: 20-32). Later, the author of *The Lanterne of Lizt* returns to this subject to again emphasise the restrictive atmosphere in which he is writing:

...þe fende in his membris settiþ wacche & bisie spie where þat he may fynde ony peple þat wole rede priue or apert Goddis lawe in englische þat is oure modir tunge; anoon he schal be sumned to come aforne hise iuggis to answeere what is seide to him & bring his book wiþ him and eiþir he must forsake his book & reding of englische & algatis he schal forswere to speke of holi writ. Þei sein lyue as þi fadir dide & þat is ynow for þee or ellis þou schalt to prisoun as if þou were an heretike & suffre peynes many & strong & ful lickli þe deef but þou wilt revoke þi worde.

(100: 1-16)

*The Lanterne of Lizt* indicates that its author is acutely aware of the dangers of writing in English about theological matters. His remark that Church authorities "sein lyue as þi fadir dide & þat is ynow for þee" has an analogue in the section of Hoccleve's "Address to Sir John Oldcastle" that I discussed in Chapter 2. Hoccleve similarly tells Oldcastle that "[o]ure fadres olde & modres lyued wel,/And taghte hir children/as hem self taght were/Of holy chirch" (153-155). The decision to break with the past and read Scripture

or profound theological material in English, *The Lanterne of Lizz* maintains, is what will land the untrained lay reader in prison.

Pertinently, *The Lanterne of Lizz* achieved prominence in a heresy trial in 1415. John Claydon's ownership of *The Lanterne of Lizz* was the chief piece of evidence against him during his trial before Archbishop Chichele in 1415. Susan Cavanaugh's study of books privately owned in England contains one reference to *The Lanterne of Lizz* and indicates that it was owned by Claydon and used as evidence against him.<sup>107</sup> In an interview with Steven Douglas Halasey, Hudson comments on the text's significance when she notes that "[t]he details [of John Claydon's trial] which are given in Chichele's register about the book the *Lantern of Light* correspond in almost every particular with the book we've still got of that title" (6-7). As James M. Dean remarks, "*The Lanterne of Light* appears independently in documents of inquisition against a London currier named John Claydon, who was summoned before Henry Chichele, archbishop of Canterbury, on charges of heresy on 17 August 1415" (Dean). Claydon was charged with possessing an English book "bound in red leather, of parchment, written in a good English hand, called the *Lanterne of Lizz*" (Swinburn viii). The currier was unable to read, but had the book copied by John Grime, and Claydon's servants "testified to having heard a book called the *Lanterne of Lizz* read aloud to Claydon" (Swinburn viii). Before passing judgement on Claydon, Chichele entreated "four friars to examine the book, and they drew up a list of fifteen errors..." (Dean). Claydon was condemned and burned as a heretic on September 10<sup>th</sup>, 1415, at Smithfield. There are some key similarities between his examination by Chichele and that of John Aston by Courteney thirty-three years earlier.<sup>108</sup> As Hudson observes, Claydon's "investigation and condemnation proceeded in

irregular fashion ... [because,] [a]fter some preliminary questioning, Claydon was asked whether he agreed with the opinions set out in the book *Lanterne of Ligt* that had been found in his possession” (Hudson 1988, 211). This irregularity in procedure once again finds an English archbishop to be in contravention of the requirements of *ordo juris*. Stated simply, Claydon should not have been asked about his private beliefs about the truth or falseness of the opinions advanced in *The Lanterne of Ligt*. The requirements of *ordo juris* limited Chichele’s questions about Claydon’s erroneous opinions to evidence that he had written, taught, or preached about these ideas. Despite this violation of procedure, Claydon was condemned and burned. Fittingly, the environment of suspicion, censorship, and punishment *The Lanterne of Ligt* author describes is substantiated by Claydon’s examination and condemnation.

The heavy-handedness with which ecclesiastical authorities pursued Claydon was not limited to a violation of the requirements of *ordo juris*. The four friars tasked with identifying the errors contained in *The Lanterne of Ligt* indicated that one of the work’s supposed errors was that it denied the doctrine of transubstantiation. As Watson asserts, this charge represents “a chimera, which links the text’s teaching with a central tenet of Wyclif’s thought only by forcing its meaning” (2003, 117-118). In reality, *The Lanterne of Ligt* “endorses no specific eucharistic theology” (Watson 2003, 118). Watson’s observation is significant because it suggests that Church authorities were highly motivated to develop a case against *The Lanterne of Ligt*. There were already sufficient grounds for the Church to suppress the text. Somerset points out, for example, that “[r]ather than being drawn from the Wycliffite Bible or other earlier translations, all the [Scriptural] translations in [*The Lanterne of Ligt*] seem to be the author’s own, purpose-

built for the occasion” (2003, 87). Because *The Lanterne of Lize* is written so soon after the promulgation of the 1409 *Constitutions*, Somerset argues that this work makes use of “in-your-face Latin quotation and translation” (2003, 87). In other words, despite the exaggerated claims about the nature of the errors in the book, *The Lanterne of Lize* did represent a contravention of Arundel’s seventh constitution. Nevertheless, the friars’ unfounded claim that the book contains a denial of the doctrine of transubstantiation indicates that the book was targeted with a degree of rigour that was greater than required. That the work is extant in only two manuscript copies suggests that ecclesiastical suppression of the book was highly effective.

Ecclesiastical authorities demonstrated a similar enthusiasm in their prosecution of Pecock. The heresies for which he was found guilty include his claim that the Catholic Church is capable of erring in matters of faith and his suggestion that it is not necessary for salvation to believe that Christ descended into hell (James 137-138). However, as James observes, several of the six heresies Pecock abjured cannot be shown to be unequivocally articulated in his extant writings (138). These heresies include the suggestion that a belief in the Holy Spirit is not necessary for salvation and that it is not necessary for salvation to believe in the communion of saints or in the Catholic Church or the ordinances of the Church’s general council (James 137-138). Paul Hardwick argues that “there is scant evidence extant with which to support many of the charges to which [Pecock] confessed” (114). In like manner, Hardwick maintains that “the most puzzling aspect of the case is not Pecock’s abjuration, but the severity with which the case was pursued” (114). The list of errors Pecock was accused of disseminating, as with the list of errors attributed to *The Lanterne of Lize*, contained some element of truth. Taylor

argues, for example, that “although the council may have exaggerated or misrepresented Pecock’s position on some matters, the charges brought against him were not entirely trumped up” (2001, 149). That the council felt the need to overstate Pecock’s errors, then, testifies to the zeal with which the Bishop’s prosecution was undertaken, and the ecclesiastical suppression of Pecock’s writings that followed his abjuration was nearly complete. Only *The Donet*, *The Folewer to the Donet*, *The Reule of Crysten Religioun*, *The Repressor of Over Much Blaming of the Clergy*, *The Poor Man’s Mirror*, and *The Book of Feith* survive in single-manuscript copies. Some of Pecock’s works, like the *Afore Crier*, are lost entirely.

Sarah Beckwith has noted that “the mechanisms for the transmission of ‘theology’ were expanding, and conventionally theological questions, or questions hitherto restricted to a clerical milieu, were being disseminated beyond the clergy in the vernacular, and hence understood and received in different ways” (qtd. in Campbell 48). Pecock’s programme of education for lay instruction was a casualty of the war on heresy because, as Gascoigne intimates, it too had the potential to be received in subversive ways. The forced abjuration of a Catholic bishop and opponent of Lollardy establishes the lengths to which the Church was willing to go to deny laypeople access to vernacular theological writing that dealt with important doctrinal questions and, therefore, incited unwanted theological speculation. In an effort to ensure clarity of meaning vernacular theological writers of the late fourteenth century and early fifteenth century pared down embellishment that might interfere with interpretation by untrained readers. *The Lanterne of List* and Pecock’s vernacular theology indicate that, as writers transitioned into the period following the *Constitutions*, they endeavoured even more rigorously to

spell things out for their lay readers. *The Lanterne of Lize*, for example, provides an anatomisation of the antichrist and includes a detailed explanation of each item under discussion. Unlike earlier Lollard works, such as Lollard dialogues or Thorpe's *Testimony*, *The Lanterne of Lize* does not exploit the framework of a fictional dialogue or foreground the generic conventions of recognisable literary works in its elucidation of its subject matter. In a similar vein, Pecoock's comprehensive vernacular theology seeks to take the beginner student of Christianity from the basics of religious instruction to a more advanced level of understanding, and it accomplishes this aim painstakingly and by degrees. The lay reader would begin with *The Donet*, for example, before proceeding first to *The Reule of Crysten Religioun* and then on to *The Folewer to the Donet* (Folewer 14). In an effort to limit lay access to this increasingly explicit vernacular theological material and to curb lay misreadings, the Church clamped down even further.

As Nicholas Watson has shown, vernacular theological writing does not disappear in the fifteenth century, but religious writing of the period "consists of translations from Latin, Anglo-French, or Continental vernacular texts or else compilations from earlier English material that deal cautiously with a narrow range of topics" (Watson 1995, 832-833). Watson also adds that much of the writing of this period comprises hagiographic works (833). As a general rule, hagiographic works do not concern themselves with weighty doctrinal questions, but do serve as "examples for ... ethical and devotional practices" (Sanok ix). In addition to his didactic romances, John Lydgate writes saints' lives, and indicates, as he does in his *Lyfe of Seynt Margarete*, that hagiographic works are suitable for lay moral instruction:

At the reverence of Seynt Margarete

My purpos is hir lyfe to compile;  
Though I have no rethorikes swete  
Nor colour noon t' enbelisshe with my style  
Yet dar I seyn, it happeth so somen while,  
Under writyng rude of apparence  
Mater is hid of grete intellygence.

Ful ofte falleth, in this chestys blake  
Golde and perlys and stones of grete prys  
Ben ylooke and into warde ytake;  
And by sentence and the prudent avys  
Of philosoffres, that holden were so wys,  
A royal ruby in whiche ther is no lak  
May closed ben in a ful pore sak. (1-14)

Lydgate suggests that although his writing is plain and lacking in refinement and rhetorical embellishment, it nevertheless contains matter that he characterises as great knowledge. In this way, his life of St. Margaret is like a royal ruby in a humble sack. Lydgate also promotes orthodox devotional practice when he ends the poem by urging those who might be disconsolate to pray for intercession to “Seynte Margarete, gemme of chastité” (522) because doing so will ease their suffering: “Of ful trust, knelyng on your kne,/Pray this mayde in trouble and alle dissesse/Yow to releve and to do yow ese” (530-532).

In addition to being encouraged to read secular fiction, as I suggested in Chapter 2, lay readers in the fifteenth century were being encouraged to read safer vernacular theological writing, such as saints' lives. The clampdown on English religious writing that concerns itself with weighty doctrinal questions, therefore, eventually succeeded in censoring writers and readers. As I indicated in Chapter 1, even annotators and translators of challenging works like *The Book of Margery Kempe* or *The Orchard of Syon* were shaping these texts in ways that limit or remove the potential for lay misreadings and that reflect their own discomfiture with potentially subversive theological opinions. Arundel's 1409 *Constitutions* did not amount to the final nail in the coffin of vernacular theological writing, but it did initiate an even greater urgency among religious writers to ensure clarity of meaning. This insistence on clearness of expression prompted Church authorities to adopt a zero-tolerance approach to readers and writers, whether orthodox or not, reading and writing theological works in English that concerned themselves with important doctrinal issues. One of the chief consequences of this zero-tolerance approach was the cultural privileging of didactic, but safe, secular fiction and conservative religious writing.



## Appendix: Notes

<sup>1</sup> Although Lollard beliefs are not always entirely consistent with Wycliffite theology, I follow here the common critical practice of conflating *Lollardy* and *Wycliffism*. As Hudson indicates, Lollards inherited many of Wyclif's ideas (1988, 62), but they often simplified or modified his academic arguments for a popular audience (Hudson 1988, 283). For example, Wyclif's position on the Eucharist was that Christ was spiritually present in the Host after consecration (Hudson 1988, 282). While Wyclif maintained that the elements of bread and wine were materially unchanged by the consecration (Hudson 1988, 282), his position nevertheless insists on reverence for the Sacrament. By contrast, the 1438 burning of a London gardener for Lollardy illustrates the extremes to which followers of the popular movement might take Wyclif's ideas. The gardener was condemned because "he ... took the host from his mouth, and then 'hiide it in a clowte [*piece of cloth*] and wold haue brent it'" (Hudson 1988, 290). This charge against the gardener indicates that, like Wyclif, he denied that the whole substance of the bread was changed into the body of Christ after consecration, but it also shows that he did not share Wyclif's view that Christ is spiritually present in the consecrated Host.

<sup>2</sup> St. Paul employs the nourishment simile in 1 Corinthians 3: 1-2 (see the epigraph to Chapter 1) and Hebrews 5: 12-14: "For whanne ye ouyten to be maistris for tyme, eftsoone ye neden that ye be tauyt, whiche ben the lettris of the bigynnyng of Goddis wordis. And ye ben maad thilke, to whiche is nede of mylk, and not sad mete./For ech that is parcenere of mylk, is with out part of the word of riytwisnesse, for he is a litil child./But of perfit men is sad mete, of hem that for custom han wittis exercisid to discrecioun of good and of yuel" (*The Wycliffite Bible*).

<sup>3</sup> Orme defines public secular schools in the following manner: "By 'public' we mean that they were not confined to any particular class of persons but were open to all who could afford to attend them, and by 'secular' that their masters and pupils were secular priests or clerks, and later on laymen too, rather than members of religious orders" (Orme 1973, 60).

<sup>4</sup> In this context, *reading* signifies the ability to identify Latin words on the page.

<sup>5</sup> Chaucer's assertion that the Prioress learned French "[a]fter the scole of Stratford atte Bowe" indicates that the Prioress is a nun at the Priory of St. Leonard Stratford-at-Bowe, a house of Benedictine nuns (*GP* 125).

<sup>6</sup> In contrast to this Wycliffite sermon, the *Wycliffite Bible* renders the term *fabularentur* as *talkiden*: "And it was don, the while thei talkiden, and souyten bi hem silf, Jhesus hym silf neiyede, and wente with hem" (*Wycliffite Bible*, Luke 24: 15).

<sup>7</sup> Kelly Parsons indicates that the only known copy of the *The Book of Margery Kempe* to have come down to us from the Middle Ages—London, British Library MS Additional 61823—was owned by the Carthusians at Mount Grace Priory in Yorkshire and was extensively annotated there. The red ink annotator, writing in a late fifteenth- or early sixteenth-century hand, was the most prolific of the text’s annotators (Parsons 143).

<sup>8</sup> Mary Dove indicates that the prohibition of Scriptural translations in the vernacular remained in place until 1529 (Dove 1).

<sup>9</sup> Arundel’s seventh constitution criminalises the translation of Scripture into English or any other language. It also criminalises the reading of vernacular Scripture: “Item, It is a dangerous thing, as witnesseth blessed St. Jerome, to translate the text of holy Scripture 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 oftentimes in this he erred: we therefore decree and ordain, than no man, hereafter, by his own authority translate any text of the Scripture into English or any other tongue, by way of a book, libel, or treatise; and that no man read any such 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, or, if the case so require, by the council provincial. He that shall do contrary to this, shall likewise be punished as a favourer of error and heresy” (Arundel 192). The seventh constitution’s indication that a Scriptural translation might be allowed if approved “by the ordinary of the place” is not a loophole, but rather evidence of how strictly the Church intended to enforce the legislation. The term *ordinary* refers to the person who has immediate jurisdiction in ecclesiastical cases, such as an archbishop, bishop, or bishop’s deputy. Those persons with such jurisdiction were also tasked with licensing preachers, and as many tract writers and the Lollard priest William Thorpe attest such approval was next to impossible for a Lollard to obtain: “And I seide to þe Archebischof, ‘Ser, as touchinge 3oure letter and þe lettres of oþere bischopis, whiche 3e seien we schulden haue to wnesse þat we weren able for to preche, we knowen wel, ser, þat neiþer 3e ne ony oþer bischop of þis lond wol graunte to vs ony suche lettre of licence, but we schulden oblischen vs to 3ou and to oþer bischopis bi vnleeful oopis, for to not passe þe bondis or termes which 3e, ser, and oþer bischopis wolen lymyten to vs” (Thorpe 46: 751-757). Cf. the Wycliffite treatise “Of Prelates,” p. 105. According to Paul J. Patterson, “only a small, privileged circle of aristocratic spiritual readers, with familial and personal ties to religious houses of the period, especially Syon and the Charterhouses of London and Sheen, were able to commission and read vernacular texts without worry of penalty” (4). Also, as John Arnold shows in his analysis of *The Book of Margery Kempe*, Bishop Philip Repingsdon’s “admission that he had been ‘advised’ not to approve formally Margery’s dress reminds us that the policing of religious orthodoxy happened not simply according to the whims and wishes of individual bishops, but via a legislative framework ... and a professional class of ecclesiastical officials” (Arnold 80).

<sup>10</sup> The 1401 statute, *De haeretico comburendo*, specifically targets Lollards because they instruct and inform people orally and in writing of teachings contrary to those of the Catholic faith and, thus, might incite people to rebel against the Church's authority. Consequently, the 1401 legislation commanded that no one teach or write anything contrary to the Catholic faith. The enactment of *De haeretico comburendo* is not an event in isolation. As I describe in Chapter 3, John Wyclif, the originator of the Lollard heresy, was examined in 1377 and 1378, and many of his ideas were condemned as errors or heresies at the Blackfriars Council in 1382. The 1401 legislation is another in a series of efforts on the part of the Church's authorities to stamp out Lollardy. That the legislation calls for the burning of relapsed heretics indicates that the Church's endeavours to eradicate the Lollard heresy are increasing in harshness.

<sup>11</sup> Somerset's assertion that Sawtry was executed before the enactment of *De haeretico comburendo* is disputed by Alastair Minnis. He indicates that Sawtry was burned after the enactment of the statute (Minnis 2009, 120).

<sup>12</sup> Maureen Jurkowski indicates that the anti-Lollard statute of 1406 mandated the arrest of anyone who preached publicly or in Lollard schools against the Catholic faith and/or the sacraments of the Church (283). Furthermore, anyone arrested for these acts was either to be imprisoned or released under secure bonds until the following session of parliament. At that time, the detainee would be brought before parliament and receive the judgement of the king and Lords (Jurkowski 287).

<sup>13</sup> Arundel does not specify precisely what he means by others, but his constitution as a whole indicates that his target is broad and extends to all theological writing in the vernacular. Consequently, Arundel commands "that no book or treatise made by John Wickliff, or others whomsoever, about that time, or since, or hereafter to be made, be from henceforth read in schools, halls, hospitals, or other places whatsoever, within our province of Canterbury aforesaid, except the same be first examined by the university of Oxford or Cambridge"(Arundel 192).

<sup>14</sup> For a fuller discussion of Aston's questioning at the Blackfriars Council, see Chapter 3.

<sup>15</sup> *The Testimony of William Thorpe* is the focus of Chapter 4.

<sup>16</sup> It should be noted that none of these works circulated widely in the period. Manuscript evidence suggests that Julian of Norwich's Long Text of *A Revelation of Love* (1393-c1415) did not circulate broadly in the Middle Ages (Wogan-Browne 233). The complete Long Text survives only in three seventeenth-century manuscripts, and excerpts from the Long Text are contained in a Westminster cathedral treasury manuscript dated c1500 (Wogan-Browne 233). *The Orchard of Syon* (c1420-1440) survives in three fifteenth-century manuscripts, a 1519 printed version by Wynkyn de Worde, and a number of sets of extracts; portions of the work were standard reading for aristocratic lay women and nuns (Wogan-Browne 235). *The Book of Margery Kempe* (1430s) survives in a single manuscript that was once owned by the Carthusian house of Mount Grace in Yorkshire. There is no other evidence of the complete book's circulation in the Middle Ages (Wogan-Browne 85). Wynkyn de Worde printed excerpts from *The Book of Margery Kempe* in 1501.

<sup>17</sup> While Hoccleve and Lydgate may be employing a trope of modesty, they may also be, as Watson suggests, underscoring their respect for Chaucer as a great writer who is worthy of imitation (Watson 1995, 823).

<sup>18</sup> I have retained the spelling of this excerpt of the Wynkyn de Worde printing of *De proprietatibus rerum* except where I have expanded abbreviations. I have also modernised the punctuation.

<sup>19</sup> While some medieval people held miracles such as this to be true, many did not. In particular, a number of John Wyclif's followers openly disapproved of post-biblical saints because they are, according to Wyclif, "a dubious lot, many of whom have been canonized unjustifiably and many of whose legends purvey fiction and questionable morality" (Hudson 1988, 302). During Thomas Garenters's 1428 examination before Archbishop Henry Chichele, the alleged heretic made plain his objection to saints' lives: "the legendes and lyves of saintes, I helde hem nought and the miracles wryten of hem I helde untrewre" (qtd. in Hudson 1988, 303).

<sup>20</sup> In addition to the *intellectual* and *theological* senses of the term *truth*, Green characterises other primary senses of the term into two categories that he identifies as the *legal* and *ethical* senses of *truth*. Because these two categories deal with senses of *truth* that refer to pledges and honour (Green 9), and, therefore, go well beyond the scope of the present thesis, I will only refer to Green's concepts of the *intellectual* and *theological* senses of *truth*.

<sup>21</sup> For Lollard views on hagiography, see Anne Hudson, *Two Wycliffite Texts*, Introduction, and *The Premature Reformation* pp. 197, 302-303. For the Lollard Treatise concerning Miracle Plays, see Anne Hudson, *Selections from English Wycliffite Writings*, pp. 97-104.

<sup>22</sup> Spiegel's modern English translation of this passage follows: "I wish to begin the history of how the good Emperor Charlemagne went to Spain in order to conquer the land under the Saracens. Many people have heard it told and sung, but what these singers and jongleurs sing and tell is nothing but a lie. No rhymed tale is true. Everything they say is lies..." (Spiegel 55).

<sup>23</sup> Spiegel translates this passage as follows: "No one is able to recite a *chanson de geste* without lying at the place where the verse ends, to order the words and shape the rhymes" (Spiegel 61).

<sup>24</sup> Whoever wishes to read or hear the true history of the wise and gentle king Edward, who is at the present time reigning in England, ought to read this little book that I have started to make. He also ought to abandon a certain big book in rhyme that I have seen and read; in this big book, a certain contriver has put history into rhyme with great deceit and with tall tales. The beginning is all wrong and full of lies from its account of the beginning of the war that the king undertook against king Philip of France. The book contains a great many contrived speeches that are there to embellish the rhyme. The book also describes an abundance of such noble deeds about some knights and some people that they ought to seem unbelievable and so impossible. This rhymed history put together by contrivers should seem unpleasant and disagreeable to reasonable people with understanding. For, by these immeasurable words, we could very well attribute to these knights noble deeds so outrageous that their valour could be diminished because their true feats would be less believable. This would be a shame for these knights; therefore, we must speak as straightforwardly and as closely to the truth as possible (Translation mine).

<sup>25</sup> My intent is to write in prose that which I have seen and heard recorded by those who were there where I have not been. I mean to stay as close to the truth as I can, according to the memory that God has lent me. I also mean to be as brief as I can, so that I do not dress up anyone (Translation mine).

<sup>26</sup> William of Nassington composes the *Speculum Vitae* in the era of Lollardy. For more on the date of the *Speculum Vitae*, see Ralph Hanna's *Speculum Vitae: A Reading Edition*, Introduction.

<sup>27</sup> The *MED* defines *trotevale* as vain talk or idle tale-telling.

<sup>28</sup> In the appendix to her article "The Author and Damnation: Chaucer, Writing, and Penitence," Melissa Furrow provides a diplomatic transcript of extracts from the beginning of the prologue of *The Mirrur* contained in MS Harley 5085.

<sup>29</sup> I Timothy 1: 4: "neque intenderent fabulis et genealogiis interminatis quae quaestiones praestant magis quam aedificationem Dei quae est in fide" (The Vulgate).

<sup>30</sup> In his 2003 study, “Is the *Tretise of Miraclis Pleyinge* a Lollard Tract Against Devotional Drama?”, Lawrence Clopper argues that the tract is neither Lollard nor an attack on devotional drama. Nevertheless, he acknowledges that the manuscript (British Library Additional 24202) in which the tract is found is heterodox when he asserts that the manuscript contains tracts about “topics that might appeal to Lollard readers, [but] none carries a stamp that decisively indicates it is a Lollard text” (Clopper 248). Although Clopper contends that the treatise does not attack biblical plays, he maintains that the treatise’s author opposes “games that jest with the events of Christ’s life, such as the bobbing of Christ, and a play of Antichrist and Doomsday” (242). I agree with Clopper that the target of the treatise author’s attack is broad and includes both the act of jesting with the events of Christ’s life and the play of Antichrist and Doomsday, but the target of his attack also includes the Corpus Christi plays. Accordingly, the treatise’s author specifically registers his objection to “þe pley of Cristis passioun” (“Treatise” 102). Although the treatise author does not openly identify himself as a Lollard, his tendency to support his arguments with Scriptural references aligns his method with the Lollard one (“Treatise” 98, 99, 100, 101, 102, 103).

<sup>31</sup> The expression *in idil* is notable; the *MED* defines it as follows: “for nothing, to no avail, uselessly, in vain; of no use; without cause, without purpose.” The term *idil* is intimately connected to medieval arguments about eschewing idleness in favour of labour. For more about the notion that people should occupy their time with labour rather than with leisure, see *Piers Plowman* B VI. See also the medieval debate poem *Wynnere and Wastoure*.

<sup>32</sup> Hope Emily Allen (140 n. 15) and Anne Hudson (1988, 387) have both referenced an example in a Lollard text of a heterodox writer disparaging romances. See Cambridge University Library li.6.26, f. 66r-v.

<sup>33</sup> As Hudson notes, there is a “logical inconsistency in the Wycliffite position.... Wyclif exalted the canonical scriptures but denied the authority of the church, but the recognition of the former depends upon the action of the latter” (Hudson 1988, 230). Arnold prints a Lollard Tract “On the Sufficiency of Holy Scripture” that suggests this inconsistency was frequently pointed out by opponents of Lollardy: “zif þou spekist of the Bible, þanne seyen Antecristis clerkis, how provest þou þat it is holy wryt more thanne annother writen book?” (Arnold iii, 186)

<sup>34</sup> “The Rule and Testament of St. Francis” is a longer Lollard tract of the late fourteenth or early fifteenth century that contains an English translation of the rule by which Franciscans are bound and is followed by a commentary that highlights the ways in which the rule was sidestepped by members of the religious order.

<sup>35</sup> Chapter 3 of this thesis examines the effects of the Church’s anti-Lollard activities and rebel misreadings of the B-text of *Piers Plowman* on William Langland’s revisions to the poem. The vernacular theological writing under discussion in all subsequent chapters consists of prose, suggesting that the choice of prose is intimately connected to the objective of securing clarity of meaning.

<sup>36</sup> Somerset's abbreviations refer to the full titles of the four dialogues printed in her edition: *The Dialogue between Jon and Richard*, *The Dialogue between a Friar and a Secular*, *The Dialogue between a Clerk and a Knight*, and *The Dialogue between Reson and Gabbyng*.

<sup>37</sup> I am grateful to Dr. Fiona Somerset who generously provided me with a preliminary copy of her edition of *The Dialogue between Reson and Gabbyng* as she was preparing her EETS edition of *Four Wycliffite Dialogues*. All references to the dialogue are from her EETS edition.

<sup>38</sup> In her introduction to *Two Wycliffite Texts*, Hudson comments on the absence of exemplary tales in Lollard sermons: "Very rarely the English sermons have a sly, and perhaps to a contemporary audience pointed, dig at individual targets, but they use no friars' fables nor any exemplary tales to forward their message" (Hudson 1993, liv).

<sup>39</sup> This use of allegory by a Lollard is not unprecedented. As Rebecca Wilson Lundin observes, the Lollard view that to take part in the sacrament of communion is to engage in a symbolic remembrance of Christ rather than in a literal consumption of his body and blood is rooted in the Lollards' allegorical reading of Christ's assertion (Mark 14: 22-24) that the bread is his body and the wine is his blood (Lundin 138).

<sup>40</sup> In *The Dialogue between Jon and Richard*, Jon argues that a Christian should not be granted privileges as a master or doctor unless the candidate's faith is firmly grounded in Scripture or reason: "And so þer comens[ing]is schuld no man gr[aunt]e, þat þei ben founded on þe gospel, or ellis vpon reson" (JR 75-76). *The Dialogue between a Friar and a Secular* begins with the Friar's attempt to reject the claim that God's commandments are open to reasoned analysis: "Þat þe hestis of God beþ neiþir soþe ne falce. For eche hest is a resoun inparatif þat is neiþir soþe ne false..." (FS 31: 9-11). The treatment of the relationship between theological truth and reason in *The Dialogue between a Clerk and a Knight* is examined in the body of the chapter below.

<sup>41</sup> Nicholas Love's *The Blessed Life of Jesus Christ* is the text under discussion in Chapter 5 of this thesis.

<sup>42</sup> I am indebted to Durham University for providing me with a microfilm of MS Cosin V.III.6. The contents of this brief manuscript consist of the text of *The Dialogue between a Clerk and a Knight* (c1380-1399) and a seventeenth-century transcription. For a description of the manuscript, see Anne Hudson, "A Lollard Quaternion." *Lollards and their Books*. London: The Hambledon Press, 1985. 193-200.

<sup>43</sup> The term *good manners* in this context refers to conduct in its moral aspect.

<sup>44</sup> Even when Hoccleve advises Oldcastle to read Biblical texts, he counsels him to read “Iudicum, Regum, and Iosue,/ ... Iudith.../, And Machabe” (203-204). As Melissa Furrow notes, “Hoccleve implicitly concedes that Oldcastle has some training in reading because he allows that the knight may read the more historical books of the Old Testament; that he names ‘Judicum’ and ‘Regum’ rather than ‘Judges’ and ‘Kings’ underscores that any reading of the Bible would have to be undertaken from Latin rather than English texts” (Furrow 2009, 195).

<sup>45</sup> See note 32 above.

<sup>46</sup> According to current scholarly consensus, the C-text of *Piers Plowman* was written between 1385 and 1387. See Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, Nicholas Watson, Andrew Taylor, and Ruth Evans, *The Idea of the Vernacular: An Anthology of Middle English Literary Theory, 1280-1520*, University Park, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania University State Press, 1999, p. 285. See also Kathryn Kerby-Fulton, “*Piers Plowman*.” *The Cambridge History of Medieval English Literature*. Ed. David Wallace. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999, p. 513. I discuss the dating of C at greater length below.

<sup>47</sup> Lawrence Warner describes the most common forms Langland’s revisions take: “In general, Langlandian revision from B to C takes two forms: revision into new passages on the same theme, sometimes quite extensive but usually recognizable enough to enable editors like Skeat and Schmidt to present the two versions in parallel formats (as is B XV 269-308, which, it is clear, prompted C XVII 1-50), or cancellation (as with the sixty odd lines about evangelism immediately following our own XV 429-90a, which leave no trace whatsoever in C)” (Warner 121).

<sup>48</sup> Because Andrew Cole revives the argument that Langland was sympathetic to the Lollard movement, a few comments about his hypothesis are necessary. Cole has argued that Langland’s more frequent use of the term *lollare* in the C-text of *Piers Plowman* shows that Langland “goes to bat for Wycliffites by neutralizing the most widely circulated bit of polemic against them, the accusation that *they* are “lollards” – i.e. heretics” (Cole 26): see Andrew Cole, *Literature and Heresy in the Age of Chaucer*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008. For more on the arguments against this position, see Pamela Gradon, “Langland and the Ideology of Dissent.” *Proceedings of the British Academy* 66 (1980): 179-205. See also Anne Hudson, “Langland and Lollardy?” *The Yearbook of Langland Studies* 17 (2003): 93-105: Hudson asserts that her “own current thinking is that the use of *loller(e)* in both B and C is certainly not sect-specific, and that its semantic range encompasses disapproval of a form of life regarded as idle, useless for society and harmful to the individual” (Hudson 2003, 100).

<sup>49</sup> It is worth noting that the C-text is not the only version of *Piers Plowman* thought to reflect Langland’s tendency towards self-censorship. Kathryn Kerby-Fulton examines the authorial disruptions in the A-text of *Piers Plowman* and their connection to non-Wycliffite theological debates contemporaneous to A’s composition. See *Books Under Suspicion* 143-145, 339-341.



<sup>50</sup> For a review of the similarities between the C-text of *Piers Plowman* and Thomas Usk's *Testament of Love*, see E. Talbot Donaldson, *Piers Plowman: The C-text and its Poet*. Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1988. 3 n. 4. For more on the dating of Usk's *Testament of Love*, see Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, Nicholas Watson, Andrew Taylor and Ruth Evans, *The Idea of the Vernacular: An Anthology of Middle English Literary Theory, 1280-1520*. University Park, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999. 28-29.

<sup>51</sup> John M. Bowers argues that the Usk evidence is not as compelling as it once seemed "if we allow for the possibility that draft versions intermediate between B and C circulated during Langland's last years" (Bowers 12). He also observes that it is likely that "1393 is 'not far wrong' as a conjectural date for the C text" (Bowers 12). Bowers explains the effect of a later date for the C version of the poem: "The longer the period of time over which revision extended during a worsening climate of repression, the more extensive may have been the poet's reaction to the potential for official harassment" (Bowers 12-13). However, even if we accept the theory that draft versions intermediate between B and C circulated before Langland's C-text existed in the form in which we now have it, we must still accept that Langland's revisions of B were underway by the time of Usk's death. See also, Scase 1987, 456-63.

<sup>52</sup> Lundin argues that "[t]he church had ignored or gently rebuffed Wyclif" until "the publication of *De Eucharista* (the tract containing Wyclif's denial of transubstantiation) in 1379-80" (Lundin 133-134). In like manner, Hudson notes that "the slaying in th[e Peasants'] Revolt of the inactive Sudbury ... brought to the primacy an administrator prepared to act swiftly and decisively" (Hudson 2003, 101).

<sup>53</sup> Two of the six rebel letters identify Hobbe the robber as an enemy of the rebels (Justice 1994, 13, 15, 92). According to Knighton's chronicle, one rebel tried to steal silver while the rebels sacked the Savoy, but the other rebels responded by throwing him into the burning building and shouting out that they were not thieves (1994, 23).

<sup>54</sup> Justice defines *traditor* as "a traitor to king and realm" (Justice 1994, 99).

<sup>55</sup> All references to the B and C versions of *Piers Plowman* are from A. V. C. Schmidt's *Piers Plowman: A Parallel-Text Edition of the A, B, C, and Z Versions*. New York: Longman, 1995.

<sup>56</sup> Gillian Rudd describes C's *Actiua Vita* as "a much simpler figure who personifies the Active Life and is a clear statement of the opposite of Pacience" (152).

<sup>57</sup> At the conclusion of the Blackfriars Council, ten conclusions drawn from Wyclif's writings were condemned as heretical and fourteen as erroneous. The conclusions deemed heretical include views on the nature of the Eucharist after consecration, the inefficacy of sinful priests, and the fruitlessness of auricular confession. The erroneous conclusions include several claims about the lawfulness and consequences of excommunication, the claim that priests could preach without licence from the Papacy or the bishop of a diocese, and that no man in deadly sin can be a bishop or other church dignitary of high rank in the Church of God.

<sup>58</sup> Numerous critics have investigated Haukyn's role in B. Rudd sees Haukyn as "a representative of the ordinary man trying to do the best he can in the world as he finds it" (Rudd 152). Stella Maguire posits that Haukyn "represents ... what one might call 'Practical Life' (100), and later suggests that "Haukyn might well be considered to be the archetype of all those in the Field of Folk who 'pleyed ful selde' and 'swonken ful harde', whatever their particular occupation" (101). In the same vein, Godden shows that the term *Actiua Vita* "was also used ... to refer to the life of the ordinary layman, doing productive labour in the world" (Godden 1984, 139-140).

<sup>59</sup> Thomas Weiskel argues that "the essential claim of the sublime is that man can, in feeling and in speech, transcend the human" (qtd. in Evans 422).

<sup>60</sup> Hudson notes that the issue of purgatory does not appear to have been taken up by Wyclif or his early followers. She further observes that the English sermon cycle recognises the existence of purgatory, and she points out that Oldcastle's printed confession (c1530) affirmed the orthodox position on purgatory. She identifies the earliest known documentary evidence of Lollard opposition to the concept of purgatory as occurring after 1416 (Hudson 1988, 309).

<sup>61</sup> It is worth noting here that in practice a layman could baptise in cases of necessity. This practice generates a Lollard argument, as expressed by Walter Brut, that a layman could also be a recipient of oral confession: "Brut held that, since in necessity a layman might baptize, an action which remits sin, a layman holds the keys of absolution as much as a priest" (Hudson 1988, 298). As Hudson remarks, a notable opponent of Wyclif, William Woodford, OFM, (c 1330-c 1397) "admitted that in extremity a layman might, in the absence of a priest, hear confession; he denied, however, that the layman holds the power to absolve or to impose penance" (Hudson 1988, 298).

<sup>62</sup> In the late fourteenth-century Wycliffite *Dialogue Between a Friar and a Secular*, the figure of the friar succinctly spells out the generally accepted orthodox view of the fate of children who die in a state of original sin: "þe children þat dien in orygydal synne, lackynge of þe sist of God and of þe blesse of heuene is to hem no peyne, for þei haue no felynge ne knowynge of it." See Somerset, *Four Wycliffite Dialogues*, 36: 146-148.

<sup>63</sup> Alan J. Fletcher observes, for example, that “Langland’s poem accords especial respect to the social Trinity of the three estates. This concept, already venerable by his day, ... formulated society as a collaborative system of workers, fighters, and prayers” (Fletcher 346).

<sup>64</sup>For Thomas Wright’s theory of multiple authorship, see Thomas Wright, ed., *The Vision and Creed of Piers Ploughman*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Vol. 1. London, 1856. xxxiv-xxxv. For J. M. Manly’s amplification of Wright’s theory, see “*Piers Plowman* and its Sequence” in *The Cambridge History of English Literature*. Vol. 2. *The End of the Middle Ages*, ed. A. W. Ward and A. R. Waller. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1912. 1-42.

<sup>65</sup> It is reasonable to view Langland as a reformer. His poem in its various versions urges individuals to improve the society in which they live. For example, he calls on the Church to keep its representatives in check, and he urges people to make society run smoothly by fulfilling the responsibilities they have to one another (See, for example, Z VII. 23-38, A VII. 23-37, B VI. 21-36, C VIII. 19-34).

<sup>66</sup> The writ was of the sort that would have been sent to a sheriff to produce a prisoner on a designated date. The writ that establishes Thorpe’s detention was issued by Arundel on 16 June 1407, and it ordered that Thorpe be transferred into the Archbishop’s custody. The schedule appended to the writ indicates that the reasons for Thorpe’s detention are that he preached a sermon on the third Sunday after Easter in St. Chad’s Church and that his sermon covered the restricted subjects of images, pilgrimages, and withholding tithes. The schedule shows that Thorpe was arrested the day he gave the sermon and that he maintained his heretical views when he was examined by the abbot of Shrewsbury the day after his arrest. At this time, Thorpe made further heterodox remarks, and the abbot recorded these opinions and forwarded them to Arundel. Jurkowski points out that the schedule appended to the writ is “[i]n all probability ... the ‘litol rolle’ listing the errors preached by Thorpe from which Arundel read, as quoted in Thorpe’s narrative” (Jurkowski 277).

<sup>67</sup> The term *zetyng* signifies casting.

<sup>68</sup> As I mention above, Thorpe objects to some forms of artistry, so it is worth distinguishing his project from those forms of artistry to which he objects. He disapproves of the tale telling of pilgrims because he equates it with boasting and lying and, therefore, implicitly objects to it because such tale telling breaks the ninth of the Ten Commandments (*Wycliffite Bible*). That he objects to tale telling of this sort because it contravenes the Commandments is supported by Thorpe's explicit assertion that pilgrims fail to observe the Commandments (64: 1301-1303). Similarly, Thorpe objects to the crafts of carving and casting or moulding because he explicitly objects to the images such crafts produce on the grounds that they contravene the second of the Ten Commandments (57: 1095-1102; *Wycliffite Bible*). Thorpe objects to organs in churches because the music such instruments produce represents a worldly pleasure that he distinguishes from the spiritual pleasure derived from the love of pleasing God (66: 1372-1382). Although he produces a highly crafted narrative, Thorpe makes plain in his Prologue that he considers his writing to be profitable to others because it bears out the truth of God's word (25: 42-51).

<sup>69</sup> Arundel was exiled by Richard II in 1397. He was restored as the Archbishop of Canterbury by Henry IV in 1399.

<sup>70</sup> Acle is a small market town in Norfolk.

<sup>71</sup> The *MED* defines *stap* as the trace of something no longer present or intact. In this context, Hudson similarly defines *stap* as trace.

<sup>72</sup> Matthew 10: 24-25: "The disciple is not aboue the maistir ne the seruaunt aboue hys lord; it is ynowy to the disciple, that he be as his maistir, and to the seruaunt as his lord. If thei han clepid the hosebonde man Belsabub, hou myche more his houshold meyne?" (*Wycliffite Bible*).

<sup>73</sup> Because the legend of Susanna is, in modern times, apocryphal from the Protestant perspective and canonical from the Catholic point of view, its status in the Medieval Church and among Lollards requires some comment. The legend of Susanna is found in Chapter 13 of the Book of Daniel in both the Vulgate and Wycliffite Bibles. When Jerome translates the Hebrew Bible into the Latin Vulgate, he includes translations of a number of apocryphal books from Theodotion's Greek translation of the Old Testament. The legend of Susanna is one of these apocryphal books. As Solomon Zeitlin remarks, "[i]n the Codex Amiatinus ... of Jerome's own Vulgate the apocryphal books are included together with the Hebrew canon against the opinion of Jerome" (Zeitlin 225). Similarly, Catherine Brown Tkacz points out that "Jerome observes that the Church used ... Theodotion's edition for Daniel and confesses that he does not know how this came about" (Brown Tkacz 62, n. 97). Simply stated, Jerome includes the apocryphal books in his translation despite his own belief that they ought to be excluded. The Lollards do not appear to regard the story of Susanna as apocryphal. In like manner, Nicholas Love's orthodox *The Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ* characterises as apocryphal only those books not included in the Vulgate. He specifically alludes to *The Infancy Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew*, popularised by its inclusion c1260 in *The Golden Legend*. In particular, he notes that we find little written of Christ's youth in "scripture autentike" (Love 61).

<sup>74</sup> The "Sermon of Dead Men" addresses the question of Christ's apprehension about his impending death and focuses on the suffering Christ endures: "þe secoude cause I seide is for deef is so peynful. And þat semyþ wel, and may be preued by ensaumple of Crist, and by autorite, and bi reson. Oure Lorde Jesus Christ, boþe God and man, whiche knew al þing by his godhed bifore it were done, a litel tofore he wente to his passion, seying by his godhed hou peynful þat deef wes whiche he shulde in a while aftur suffur in his body, seide to [h]is Fader or disciplis þese wordis: *Tristis est anima mea usque ad mortem*. Þat is: 'Sory or heuy is my lijf to þe deef.' Siþen þen þe lijf of oure Lorde Jesus wes so peynful, þat died so wilfully and oonly for loue, hou peynful þen shal oure deef be þat dyen aþene oure wille and also for synne!" ("Sermon of Dead Men" 214-215: 257-268). "The Sermon of Dead Men" is an anonymous funeral sermon, and "[l]ike the cycle [in which it is found] as a whole, the sermon belongs to a large category of Middle English works that seem Lollard in attitude..." (Wogan-Browne 256). Shannon Gayk makes the case that the sermon cycle is affiliated with Lollardy: "Although some scholars have questioned the affiliation of the sermons with Lollardy, the collection employs a Lollard vocabulary, shares the Lollard commitment to such issues as the importance of 'trewe' preaching and lay access to the Scriptures, and draws directly on other Lollard texts" (Gayk 45).

<sup>75</sup> The term *iewise* signifies a judicial sentence.

<sup>76</sup> Since the execution of heretics was carried out by secular authorities, the speakers here are advocating murdering Thorpe in secret. As Hudson explains, “it was not within Arundel’s power to organize the burning of a heretic; this had to be done by the secular authorities. The second suggestion is one for the murder of Thorpe, on the assumption that by this date his friends would be in no position to make effective protest” (Hudson 1993, 132 n. 2201-2).

<sup>77</sup> A different sense of the term *martyrology* becomes associated with Protestant reformers in the sixteenth century. As Su Fang Ng asserts, “[s]ixteenth-century Protestant reformers, such as the martyrologist John Foxe in his *Acts and Monuments*, memorialized, among others, early translators of the English Bible—John Wyclif and William Tyndale—as Protestant saints to construct a tradition that competes with and is counterposed to Roman Catholic hagiography” (315).

<sup>78</sup> There are over fifty manuscript witnesses to the *The South English Legendary*. Bodleian Library Laud misc. 108, “a religious miscellany” (Taylor 1991, 54), is the earliest (c1280-1290) (Williams Boyarin 173). The earlier complete manuscripts include London, British Library, Harley 2277 (c1300), Cambridge, Corpus Christi College 145 (c1310-1320), and Oxford, Bodleian Library, Ashmole 43 (c1300-1330) (Treharne 411). As Elaine Treharne asserts, *The South English Legendary* “was copied throughout the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries in the south and Midlands areas of England, reflecting the importance of the cult of the saints in this period and region” (411). “The Life of St. Sebastian” is contained in MSS Laud 108, CCC 145, and Ashmole 43. “The Life of St. Christopher” is contained in all four manuscripts. Karen Anne Winstead suggests Chaucer’s adaptation of “The Life of St. Cecilia” was written in the 1370s or early 1380s. She notes that the Chaucerian version is contained in two manuscripts of *The Canterbury Tales* (49). Two fifteenth-century compilations of religious writings contain non-Chaucerian versions of “The Life of St. Cecilia” (Winstead 49). “The Life of St. Christina of Bolsena” was translated into English by William Paris, a retainer in the household of Thomas Beauchamp, earl of Warwick (Stouck 1994, 113). In 1397, Beauchamp was exiled to the Isle of Man, and William Paris accompanied him. Paris wrote his translation there after Beauchamp’s exile in 1397 but before Beauchamp was released by Henry IV in 1399 (Stouck 1997, 82). The only known extant copy of Paris’s “Life of St. Christina” is contained in MS Arundel 168 (c1460-1500) (Edwards 135-136). G. H. Gerould notes that there are three additional extant Middle English lives of St. Christina (131). “The Life of St. Christina” is contained in British Library, MS Harley 4196 (14<sup>th</sup> Century), in the Scottish Legend Collection (14<sup>th</sup> Century), and in Osborn Bokenham’s fifteenth-century collection (Strohm 10.2, 161). Stouck writes that the legend of St. Christina “belongs to a popular subgroup of hagiography dealing with virgin martyrs” (Stouck 1997, 82).

<sup>79</sup>Lollards were generally dismissive of post-biblical saints. As Hudson observes, in Wyclif's view, "post-biblical saints are ... a dubious lot, many of whom have been canonized unjustifiably and many of whose legends purvey fiction and questionable morality" (Hudson 1988, 302). Throughout his *Testimony*, Thorpe makes numerous references to saints. Thorpe's most comprehensive discussion of saints occurs in his argument against the practice of pilgrimage: "Forþi wiþ my protestacioun, I seie now as I seide in Schrouesbirie, þou3 þei þat haue siche fleischli willis traueilen soore her bodies and spenden myche moneye to sechen and visiten þe bones eiþer ymagis, as þei seien þei don, of þat seint or of þat, siche pilgrymage is neiþir preisable ne þankful to God neiþer to ony seint of God, siþ in effecte alle siche pilgrymes dispisen God and alle hise seyntis. For þe heestis of God þei wolen neiþer knowen ne kepe, neiþer þei wolen conforme hem to lyue vertuesly bi ensauple of Crist and of his seyntis" (63-64: 1296-1303). While one could argue that Thorpe's other references to saints allude to biblical ones, Thorpe's reference to the cult of saints suggests that he rejects the veneration of saints and their relics but not the saints themselves. Thus, he intimates that good Christians will follow the example of Christ and his saints. It is worth remarking that there exists some evidence of the Lollard veneration of Lollard saints. Hudson comments on this phenomenon: "[The]Lollard canonization of Richard FitzRalph is familiar; similar, though less regular and more casual, [the] exaltation of Wyclif himself.... Margery Baxter regarded William White as *magnus sanctus in celo*, as well as the greatest and most learned doctor of divine law, and prayed to him every day; she also revered John Waddon *et alios de secta legis Christii*. Richard Belward as early as 1424 considered Oldcastle 'a true catholic man', falsely condemned and put to death unreasonably. By 1429 William Emayn listed Oldcastle alongside (indeed before) Wyclif, together with William Taylor, William Sawtry, John Beuerly, and *sir James*, all of whom he thought to have been convicted and done to death as heretics, as 'holy men and thair doctrine and opinions were trewe and catholik, and therfor thay be worshipped in heuen as holy martirs'. Pecock noticed the tendency amongst Lollards to consider 'the now late brenned ... men in Ynglond to be martiris'. Richard Wyche certainly seems to have been so regarded soon after his execution in 1440..." (Hudson 1988, 171-172).

<sup>80</sup> As Strohm notes, a *kalender*, or *kalendarium*, is "a list of martyred saints honored by fixed festivals in a particular locality" (10.1, 62-63).

<sup>81</sup> Thorpe does not foreground his earlier opposition with Arundel, but it does fit the pattern of the saint's rapid involvement with hostile authority. It is the saint's engagement with this hostile authority that elicits a forceful defence of his faith, and Thorpe's adversarial encounter with Arundel produces the same result.

<sup>82</sup> It seems unlikely that Thorpe died as a result of his refusal to submit to Arundel. Thorpe was detained under the authority of the anti-Lollard statute of 1406, and, as Jurkowski observes, this statute had strictly defined limits: “The 1406 statute against Lollards . . . mandated that anyone arrested under its terms was to be imprisoned (or released under bonds of security) until the next parliament, when he (or she) would be brought before that assembly to receive the judgement of the king and Lords” (Jurkowski 287). Thorpe’s knowledge of the limitations of the 1406 statute is in question: “Whether Thorpe knew that the archbishop could only threaten and cajole him, but do little else, is not clear” (Jurkowski 294). What became of Thorpe after this examination is a mystery. The Protestant martyrologist, John Foxe, speculates that he may have been imprisoned indefinitely, escaped, or died of illness (Foxe 285). Hudson raises the possibility that he may have fled to Bohemia (Hudson 1993, liii). Jurkowski suggests that Thorpe may have died, awaiting trial in the Commons, in the outbreak of plague that swept London in the summer of 1407 (Jurkowski 288).

<sup>83</sup> 1 Herie\* ye the Lord in hise seyntis; herie ye hym in the firmament of his vertu.  
2 Herie ye hym in hise vertues; herie ye hym bi the multitude of his greetnesse.  
3 Herie ye hym in the soun of trumpe; herie ye hym in a sautre and harpe.  
4 Herie ye hym in a tympane\* and queer;\* herie ye hym in strengis and organ.  
5 Herie ye hym in cymbalis sownynge wel, herye ye hym in cymbalis of iubilacioun;  
6 ech spirit, herye the Lord. (*Wycliffite Bible*)  
\*Herie: praise; tympane: drum; queer: choir.

<sup>84</sup> In all quotations from Michael G. Sargent’s edition of *The Mirror*, I have silently substituted a comma or semicolon for the *punctus elevatus*.

<sup>85</sup> The term *gude maneres* in this context refers to conduct in its moral aspect.

<sup>86</sup> The marginal notes are authorial. See Michael G. Sargent, “The Text of this Edition.” *The Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ: A Reading Text*. Exeter, Devon: University of Exeter Press, 2004. xxv.

<sup>87</sup> According to *The Testimony of William Thorpe*, Archbishop Arundel advances a similar argument when he challenges Thorpe’s heterodox view of the practice of pilgrimage: “And þe Archebisshop scornede me and seide, ‘What ianglist þou azens mennys deuocioun? Whateuere þou and siche oþer seyen, I seie þat þe pilgrimage þat is now vsid is to hem þat done it a preparacioun and a good meene to come þe raper to grace. But I holde þee vnable to knowe þis grace, for þou enforsist þee to lette þe deuocioun of þe peple, siþ bi autorite of holi writt men mowen lefulli haue and vse siche solace as þou repreuest” (Thorpe 65: 1344-1350).

<sup>88</sup> Matthew 4: 11: “tunc reliquit eum diabolus et ecce angeli accesserunt et ministrabant ei” (The Vulgate). Mark 1: 13: “et erat in deserto quadraginta diebus et quadraginta noctibus et temptabatur a Satana eratque cum bestiis et angeli ministrabant illi” (The Vulgate).



<sup>89</sup> For example, Margery describes her meetings with Philip Repingdon, Bishop of Lincoln, and Archbishop Thomas Arundel. Both of these meetings took place between June 23, 1413, and February 19, 1414 (*BMK* 273 n.33/24-25 and 275 n.35/28-29).

<sup>90</sup> As Meale indicates, the editorial punctuation in Margery's text suggests that the reference to Bonaventure refers to a text other than the "Stimulus Amoris" that immediately follows it (45 n. 86). In his edition of *The Book of Margery Kempe*, Sanford Brown Meech argues that it "is hardly likely that two works are referred to here" and contends "that the meaning here is 'Bonaventura's *Stimulus Amoris*' (Meech 320 n. 143/28). Nevertheless, as Yoshikawa asserts, "the main source for [Margery's] narrative sequence seems to be the *Meditationes* and the Middle English *Mirror* by Nicholas Love" (2007, 82).

<sup>91</sup> John 1: 32: "et testimonium perhibuit Iohannes dicens quia vidi Spiritum descendentem quasi columbam de caelo et mansit super eum" (The Vulgate).

<sup>92</sup> Hessle is a town in Yorkshire, England.

<sup>93</sup> The term *sekkyn gelle* refers to a woman's garment made of sackcloth.

<sup>94</sup> Because I argued in Chapter 4 that Thorpe's *Testimony* is indebted to hagiography, it is necessary to distinguish Thorpe's use of the generic conventions of hagiography from the ways in which Margery's *Book* overlaps with hagiography. Thorpe emphasises those elements of his examination that overlap with the generic conventions of the *passiones* because he aims to show his readers that his steadfastness whilst under examination is legitimate and worthy of emulation. Margery's self-characterisation as a distinguished supporter of the Church similarly legitimises her religious experience. However, her appropriation of characteristics associated with Christ amounts to self-aggrandisement because she appropriates these characteristics as a way of identifying herself as a chosen soul rather than as an indicator that she is Christ-like because her behaviour is modelled on Christ's living and teaching.

<sup>95</sup> As Cobb notes, "[i]n 1501, Wynkyn de Worde printed a selection of passages from the *Book of Margery Kempe*" (58). Cobb comments on the nature of the printed passages: "the Wynkyn de Worde edition reduces *The Book of Margery Kempe* to a seven-page quarto referred to as 'a shorte treatyse of contemplacyon taught by oure Lorde Jhesu Cryste, or taken out of the boke of Margerie Kempe of Lynn.' This shortened version, by making reference to the longer work, announces its extracted nature, but these extracts provide little insight into contents of the text from whence they came" (Cobb 62).

<sup>96</sup> See Kelly Parsons, "The Red Ink Annotator of *The Book of Margery Kempe* and His Lay Audience," in *The Medieval Professional Reader at Work: Evidence from Manuscripts of Chaucer, Langland, Kempe, and Gower*, ed. Kathryn Kerby-Fulton and Maidie Hilmo (Victoria, B.C.: University of Victoria Press, 2001), pp. 143-216.

<sup>97</sup> Evidence of the Church's increasing and uncompromising approach to combatting the Lollard menace includes the declaration, at the Council of Constance in 1415, that John Wyclif was a heretic and that his books and mortal remains should be burned. In 1428, forty-four years after Wyclif's death and thirteen years after he was declared a heretic, his remains were exhumed by Church authorities and burned, and his ashes were scattered in the River Swift at Lutterworth. The destruction of Wyclif's bones carried the same doctrinal penalty as if he had been burned at the stake. With no earthly remains, Wyclif was deprived of the essential Christian doctrine of resurrection of the body.

<sup>98</sup> The date of *The Lanterne of Lyst* is generally accepted to be between 1409 and 1415 because of the text's allusions to Arundel's *Constitutions* and because of its central role in Claydon's 1415 trial.

<sup>99</sup> In all quotations from Lilian M. Swinburn's edition of *The Lanterne of Lyst*, I have silently substituted a comma or a semicolon for the *punctus elevatus*.

<sup>100</sup> Nicholas Watson comments on the stylistic features of *The Lanterne of Lyst*: "As striking as its use of Scripture is the care that has gone into the text's layout, punctuation, and especially its prose, whose seductive eloquence must have been one of the major reasons the text was examined and burned" (Watson 2003, 120). He further notes that, while the text is in prose, its structure "slightly resembles that of alliterative verse or semi-verse" (Watson 2003, 120).

<sup>101</sup> As Sarah James notes, "[d]ating the texts is difficult, as Pecock was in the habit of working on several books simultaneously and was an indefatigable corrector and reviser" (James 136). I adopt James's dating of Pecock's works throughout this chapter.

<sup>102</sup> Gascoigne's comments on Pecock's error were written after Pecock's recantation in December 1457 and before Gascoigne's death in 1458.

<sup>103</sup> Taylor points out that Pecock himself was less than a fully trained theologian: "He had his Master of Arts and Bachelor of Divinity from Oxford, but that was all; the Doctorate of Divinity he eventually received was purely honorary" (Taylor 2001, 145). Scase similarly affirms that Pecock "received from Oxford the degree of DTh about 1445, apparently being exempted from the academic requirements for the degree, according to Thomas Gascoigne, a full but very hostile source" (Scase *ODNB*).

<sup>104</sup> Pecock's *The Donet* was written c1443-1449.

<sup>105</sup> The legal process against Pecock was begun after Viscount Beaumont wrote to the king, in June 1457, to complain about Pecock's heresies against the faith. James notes that the fact that Beaumont "was a Lancastrian and very close to the queen ... indicat[es] that the interest in degrading Pecock emanated from the royal party" (James 161). Scase similarly suggests that Pecock's trial was a reassertion of royal power over clerics (*ODNB*). The Church's failure to act against Pecock until after Beaumont's letter would seem to support this view; however, both the Council of Verona (1184) and the Fourth Lateran Council (1215) required princes to take an oath to support the Church against heresy. Pecock's trial may have been politically motivated, but it was also theologically motivated. His controversial writings in the vernacular created a genuine danger for the Church, and the Council of Verona and the Fourth Lateran Council gave royal authorities the responsibility to act on it.

<sup>106</sup> The account of Pecock's confession and recantation is preserved in an abbatial register associated with Whethamstede, abbot of St. Albans from 1452 to 1465 (Carlson 25).

<sup>107</sup> There are two surviving manuscripts of *The Lanterne of Ligt*: British Library MS Harley 2324 and Harley 6613 (Watson 2003, 117 n.2). Lilian M. Swinburn's edition of *The Lanterne of Ligt* for EETS is based on Harley 2324.

<sup>108</sup> John Aston's examination and the requirements of *ordo juris* are described above in Chapter 3.

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