

THE "GENDER GAP" RECONSIDERED:
MANUSCRIPTS AND READERS IN LATE-MEDIEVAL ENGLAND¹

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ABSTRACT

A study of the late-medieval owners and readers of texts originally addressed to female audiences raises a multitude of questions about the relationships between text and readers and, in particular, the influence of gender on reading. The patterns of manuscript ownership, in particular, reveal a "gap" between the intended audience and the actual readers of these texts. Ownership inscriptions suggest that texts which were originally addressed to female audiences rapidly found their way into the hands of a wide range of readers, which included both men and women and ranged from secluded anchoresses to laypersons who were very much involved in the social and political climate of their day. The wide variations in readership show that medieval women were not relegated to the marginal wastelands in their devotional reading; nor were their reading habits and materials substantially different from many men, particularly laymen. This is not to say that a "gender gap" did not exist – rather, that the gendered attitudes and patterns of literacy are more complex than has previously been recognized.

With the renewed interest in writings by and for medieval women in the past two decades has come a recognition of the role of women readers in the development of vernacular prose. New research into women's manuscript ownership and literary patronage in England has begun to challenge many of the assumptions previously held about women's literacy in the late Middle Ages. For example, in the past it has been commonly assumed that medieval women were, on the whole, illiterate. Those who could read, primarily nuns, were generally assumed to be literate in the vernacular only, especially by the end of the Middle

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Ages. The proliferation of devotional texts in the vernacular addressed to female religious audiences in the 14th and 15th centuries seems to support this assumption; it suggests that women could not read Latin, and therefore created a demand for religious texts in English. The addresses in such texts certainly reflect the assumption on the part of their male authors that their *intended* audience consists of women religious, untutored in Latin but in need of instruction nonetheless. However, when the readership of these texts is taken into account (the *actual* rather than the intended audience), the distinctions between male and female and, indeed, religious and lay readers begin to break down. The evidence suggests that, while the audience for these texts may well have been, in the first instance, women religious, in very short order these texts were owned and read by both women and men, lay and religious. While it is true that many English lay women in the late Middle Ages could not read, and that those who could were often literate only in vernacular, the same is true of most lay men. Amongst women religious, it seems that, while Latin literacy was indeed on the decline, it had not, by any means, disappeared, and if women religious were reading more vernacular texts than their male counterparts, it is far from being true that male clerical readers confined themselves strictly to Latin. This begs the question of whether the great divide in literacy is truly a gendered one. In the early stages of vernacular writing, it is clear that the primary divide was between lay and religious; those who followed the religious life (both male and female) were more likely to be literate than layfolk. While this continued to be true for Latin literacy, the evidence suggests that lay literacy in the vernacular rose rapidly towards the end of the middle ages. Further, when one considers the evidence of manuscript ownership, the division between male and female readers (both lay and religious) becomes much less clear than has been assumed.

In order to explore this question, I want to attempt to reconstruct a picture of women's reading and book ownership in 14th to 16th century England, focusing in particular on the legacy of *Ancrene wisse* and its influence on two centuries of readers and authors, through a study of texts which descend from it.² Like

² *Ancrene wisse* was expanded on and incorporated into a number of later texts from the mid 13th century until well into the 15th century, including *Be wohunge of ure Lauerd* (mid 13th century), *A talkyng of the love of God* (14th century, via *Wohunge*), the *Vernon Manuscript's Life of Adam and Eve*, *Be Holy Boke Gratia Dei* (14th century), *The chastising of God's children* (late 14th century), *Disce mori* and the related *Ignorancia sacerdotum* (mid 15th century, via *Chastising*), *The pore caitiff* (late 14th century), *The treatise of the five senses* (15th century), *The tretyse of loue* (late 15th century), an anonymous 15th century "Sins tract" identified and edited by Diekstra (1990, 1998), and a passion meditation in BL Harley 1740, edited by Marx (1994). Many of these texts, like *Ancrene wisse*, were extremely popular and often survive in multiple manuscripts (over thirty, in the case of *The pore caitiff*). Some, including *The pore caitiff*, *The chastising of God's children*, and *The tretyse of loue*, were among the earliest texts printed by Wynkyn de Worde in the fifteenth century. The wide appeal of such texts is indicated by their use, not only by "professional religious," but also as guides

Ancrene wisse, many of these texts were addressed to women religious, at least in the first instance. Many, however, have been adapted for more general audiences which included men and laypersons. While my main focus is on women readers and owners of these texts, it is important to put these readers in a context of general literacy and book ownership, and information about male readers and owners is crucial in supplying such a context. In this paper, then, I want to address questions of what the (admittedly fragmentary) evidence which survives can tell us about who read these texts and how they were used and adapted to suit the needs of varied audiences, and what this might suggest, in particular, about the women readers to whom *Ancrene wisse* and its descendants were so often addressed.

In many cases, there is a great deal of internal evidence available in the texts themselves which makes it possible to identify their intended audience. For example, addresses (such as "dear sister"), the alteration of such addresses, or other details within the texts themselves give indications of the audience for which the work was composed or adapted. Such indications should not be taken as restrictive – the original intended audience has a great influence upon both the form and content of these texts, yet the intended audience and the actual audience did not always coincide. Even texts such as *Ancrene wisse*, which was directed in the first instance to a very specific audience of three enclosed sisters, contain indications of the author's awareness that the text would reach a wider audience. *Ancrene wisse* and its descendants reached a broad audience which included men and women, religious and lay.

The determination of the actual readership of texts is more complicated, and depends heavily on evidence of manuscript ownership and transmission, such as names inscribed in the manuscripts and bequests of specific books in wills. Due to the partial nature of the evidence, such a study is necessarily limited and incomplete,³ and information about individual readers is not always easy to find. The information which does survive is often scattered, and must be painstakingly gathered. In identifying the gender of readers, I have relied on several different kinds of evidence: both internal (the texts themselves and the combinations in which they are found) and external (such as marginalia, names and

for pious laypersons, a type of text that was increasingly in demand in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries (Gillespie 1989). In this paper, I will not be looking at well-known manuscripts, such as *Vernon*, *Simeon*, *Thornton*, and *Harley 1706*, which have received attention elsewhere. Rather, I wish to focus on manuscripts which have been less widely studied, but which nevertheless have much to teach us about medieval literacy and reading habits.

³ For some of the difficulties involved in such a study, see Harris (1989) and Boffey (1996).

ownership inscriptions, coats of arms).⁴ Even such fragmentary evidence, however, yields a great deal of information.

These texts raise a multitude of questions about the relationships between text and readers and, in particular, the influence of gender on reading. The patterns of manuscript ownership, in particular, reveal a “gap” between the intended audience and the actual readers of these texts. Since the texts that I have been studying are primarily addressed to devout female readers, one might expect to find a high degree of female ownership, and indeed, women did own and read these texts. However, the readers and owners of these texts were by no means exclusively, or even predominantly, women. Ownership inscriptions suggest that texts which were originally addressed to female audiences rapidly found their way into the hands of a wide range of readers, which included both men and women and ranged from secluded anchoresses to laypersons who were very much involved in the social and political climate of their day. Nevertheless, the female ownership of these manuscripts is indeed high, suggesting a level of literacy that is wider than we have often assumed. Even a quick glance at the numbers, for example, suggests immediately that simple assumptions about women’s literacy in the fourteenth to sixteenth centuries are risky. Out of 237 manuscripts that I have listed for this project, I have been able to identify the gender of readers or owners for 136, or just over half. Of those manuscripts for which I have been able to identify owners, or the gender of the original recipients, 107 were owned by (or copied for) men, and 60 by women. Of these, 36 were owned by both men and women at various times, and 14 were passed down through families.⁵

It must be considered, of course, that these texts occur in manuscripts which contain a wide variety of other material, addressed to both male and female audiences. Nevertheless, it is interesting that, overall, the rate of female ownership of these texts, written specifically for a female audience, comes in at about half the rate of male ownership. These numbers suggest two things to me. When considering the manuscripts as a whole, it is astonishing that so many were owned by women, even given that some of the texts contained in these manuscripts are addressed specifically to female readers. This suggests that women

⁴ In re-constructing the evidence below, I am greatly indebted to the work of other scholars. In particular, the work of Dr. A. I. Doyle has been invaluable, both in providing detailed information about the manuscripts and in suggesting avenues for further research. Recent work on women’s literacy and book ownership has also been crucial in collecting information about specific texts and manuscripts, as the citations throughout this article will attest.

⁵ I should note here that I have not been able to see a number of the manuscripts, so I would anticipate that the actual numbers would be even higher. The material presented here is intended to be representative, not exhaustive.

read far more widely than has often been assumed. When considering the manuscripts as evidence about the actual audience of texts addressed to women, however, it is also surprising to note that these texts were read by twice as many men as women. The evidence which survives, then, suggests that issues of gender and literacy in medieval England were more complex than has previously been assumed.

1. Internal evidence: The texts and their arrangement

In some cases, internal evidence suggests that a particular manuscript was originally intended for a specific audience of male or female readers. Sometimes, a clue can be found in just one text in a collection. For example, Bristol Public Libraries MS 6 contains a form of confession for a woman, suggesting that it was copied for a female audience (Tavers 1992; Ker 1977: 203). But such evidence is somewhat tenuous, and can be misleading, as will be seen below.

In other cases, however, the texts and their arrangements provide more compelling evidence of their original recipients, even in the complete absence of any other evidence of ownership. For example, CUL Hh i 11 bears no evidence whatsoever of any actual owners or readers. Here, however, the evidence for an intended audience of female readers is based on indications found throughout the manuscript. CUL Hh i 11 is a collection of devotional material containing, among other things, extracts from Nicholas Love’s *Mirror of the blessed life of Jesus Christ*, Hilton’s *Qui habitat and bonum est*, two versions of the Middle English translations of Flete’s *De remediis*, and extracts from the Middle English *Stimulus amoris* (*The pricknyng of love*), and Suso’s *Horologium sapientiae*, similar to other manuscripts owned by any number of devout people, religious or lay, male or female. On the basis of its language and contents, however, Doyle has suggested that CUL Hh i 11 was written by, and possibly in, an East Anglian contemplative nunnery. CUL Hh i 11 is a smallish volume, about 8 x 5", copied in 14 different hands, at different times. Yet, it appears to be not a composite volume, but the work of one community, according to Doyle, “almost certainly” a nunnery, such as Carrow or Thetford (Benedictine), Campsey (Augustinean), Bruisyard or Denny (Franciscan). Various internal references, such as a reference to “your” clothing in a sermon on the assumption of the Virgin Mary, suggest a nunnery dedicated to the Virgin Mary, such as Carrow, Campsey or Bruisyard. The ordering and selection of texts suggests to Doyle that this manuscript was compiled at the direction of a spiritual director of the nunnery “for his communication to them or their own use” (Doyle 1954: 96).

In this context, the contents of this manuscript can tell us other things as well. In several cases, when the hand changes, it is at the beginning of a quire, which might suggest several scribes copying material at the same time to be gathered together on completion. Yet, this is not always so – in some cases the

hand changes in the middle of a gathering, and even in the middle of a folio, suggesting that pieces were added as they became available for copying. It is possible that the manuscript was even copied by the nuns themselves for their own use – there is no evidence either way. Another significant feature of Hh i 11 is the mixture of Latin and English texts, which suggests that the nuns could read Latin. This supports David Bell's (1995: Chapter 3) contention that one should be wary of the easy assumption that nuns were generally illiterate in Latin and that, therefore, manuscripts containing Latin texts must have been intended for clerical audiences.

Another example of a manuscript which seems to have been copied for a female audience is Cosin V. iii. 24 (mid-15th century). Doyle suggests that this manuscript was probably written for an East Anglian nunnery, like CUL Hh i 11, parts of which were copied by the same scribe as Cosin V. iii. 24.⁶ Indeed, based on the contents, it can be confidently asserted that Cosin V. iii. 24 was clearly intended for a female audience. It contains three texts, all addressed to female religious: *The doctrine of the heart*, a "lettre of relygyous gouernaunce sent to a relygyous woman", and *The tree and twelve fruits of the Holy Ghost*. The texts are clearly arranged in such a way as to guide the reader(s) from an introductory level through to a more complex understanding of their religious life, in order to prepare them for more contemplative reading. Indeed, the "letter of religious governance" (which appears as a kind of condensation or prologue to *The tree and twelve fruits*) specifically counsels its readers that they should move on to more contemplative reading such as the *Stimulus amoris* (translated into English as *The prickynge of love*) and other passion meditations, to be read on holy days and, specifically, at the canonical hours (folio 90).⁷ This manuscript, then, gives us an insight not only into the kinds of reading that nuns or recluses might be given, but also the ways in which that reading was intended to contribute to their growth in the spiritual life.

Similarly, Holkham misc. 41 contains texts written for a woman religious, possibly an anchoress. A small book (about 4 x 6"), easily held in the hand, this manuscript was clearly intended for private devotion. It is a lovely manuscript, with gold initials and marginal scrollwork opening each of the two texts which it contains, suggesting that it was commissioned (either for personal use or as a gift) by someone with the means to afford more than the basic utilitarian manuscripts that contain many of the anchoritic texts of the Katherine group, for example. Pollard (1997: 43) suggests that it may have been made as a presentation

⁶ This information is contained in a draft of a catalogue of manuscripts in the Durham University Library currently being prepared by Dr. Doyle. I thank Dr. Doyle for providing me with a copy of the draft description of Cosin V. iii. 24 and for permission to cite it.

⁷ See Ross (1997) for the importance of canonical hours in passion meditation.

copy by a religious for a patron. It contains only two texts, *The festis and the passion of oure lord Ihesu Crist* (found only in this manuscript), and a Middle English version of Flete's *De remediis*, here identified as *Consolacio anime*. A brief lyric ("Syke and sorowe depely") is appended to the first of these. Flete's treatise, addressed to a female audience, opens with the same metaphor as *The chastising of God's children* (also addressed to a female audience), the metaphor of God as a mother who chastises his children (drawn from *Ancrene wisse*, addressed to an audience of anchoresses). But it is the first text, *The festis and passioun*, which offers the most interesting clues as to the original owner(s) of this manuscript. The text is clearly written by a woman, for another woman. It contains a series of 53 prayers, moving through Christ's life, passion, and death, and applying each of these to the spiritual life of the reader. As Pollard (1987) has shown, the text has clear contemplative elements. But subtle clues within the text suggest that the prayer cycle may have had an anchoritic provenance. For example, the text contains prayers for leaders of the church and solitaries (specifying anchorites, hermits and recluses), but not for any other religious or lay persons. The text itself moves through the events of Christ's life, applying each to the spiritual life of the reader. The author (and reader) identifies herself with all those who have, like Mary, forsaken the world for Christ's sake, remembering that "we have þe betir partye þat nevere schal be benomyn us" (*The festis and passioun*: 38). The imagery of the text also draws upon language and imagery familiar from other anchoritic works (including *Ancrene wisse*, *The Wooing Group*, and *A talkynge of the love of God*), such as the imagery of wombs and tombs applied to the enclosed body and heart. Pollard (1997) suggests that the text is the product of an enclosed order, probably Bridgettine, and proposes Joanna North, abbess of Syon from 1421-1433, as a possible author. Whoever its author was, the text is clearly directed by its female author to a female reader, binding them together with frequent references to both author and reader as women, with shared experiences, shared weaknesses, shared needs and shared devotions, creating a sense of community in reclusion and offering a unique glimpse into how women religious perceived themselves and each other. If Pollard is correct in his speculation that this particular copy was made by a religious for a (secular?) patron, the manuscript may also reveal much about lay piety in the 15th century. It is possible, for example, that this manuscript was copied for a reader like Joan Holand or Joanna Newmarche (see below), widows who retired into religious seclusion after their husbands' deaths.⁸

Another manuscript which can be assigned to a female audience (and likely to an anchoress) on the basis of its contents is Rawlinson C 285 (early 15th cen-

⁸ For these and other examples of such devout widows, see Eler (1994, 1995a, 1995b); Meale (1997); Labarge (1997); and Hicks (1987, 1999).

ture). This manuscript, written in three hands but clearly intended to be one book, is a collection of devotional material, containing both English and Latin texts. The ordering of the material seems to be deliberate: the manuscript is “framed” by Hilton’s *Scale*, with Book I opening the manuscript and the more contemplative Book II closing it. *Scale I* is followed by an extract from the *Pricke of conscience* concerning the day of judgement, and material from Bonaventure, Bernard and Rolle concerning meditation on the passion. Rolle’s *Form of living* follows, and then we find a number of short items with practical advice on the devout life, including material on sin, meditations, basic catechetical material on the Ten Commandments and the acts of charity, material on the virtues and vices, and sayings of saints (specifically the desert fathers and mothers). After more Latin sentences, the manuscript concludes with *Scale II*.

What makes Rawlinson C 285 an extremely important manuscript is the internal evidence in the texts themselves which gives clear indications that the manuscript was copied for a woman reader, and almost certainly an anchoress. The first indication of this is that the address at the end of Rolle’s *Form* has been altered from “Lo, Margaret” to “Lo, Cecil” (or Cecily). As we will see below, the address is often changed to make it more generic (for example Bodl. Digby 18 lacks the address to Margaret, but has no other indication of readership), but this is the only example I have found where the address is altered to make it more specific. Much of the material in the manuscript is of a nature to suggest a female religious reader, rather than a laywoman. However, other material suggests that “Cecily” was not only a religious, but reclused. Material from St. John the Hermit and a focus in the sayings of the saints on the Desert Fathers suggests an enclosed life, and the inclusion of Desert Mothers and other female saints (such as St. Sinclética and St. Agatha) reinforces the evidence that this manuscript was copied specifically for an enclosed female reader. As well, on folio 59b, a section on dealing with visitors from *Scale* (Book I, Chapter 83) is included as a separate item, entitled “How ane ankares sal hal hir to tham that comes to hir”. Together, these texts provide compelling evidence that Rawlinson C 285 was composed for an anchoress named Cecily in the early-15th century, likely by her confessor or spiritual advisor. Indeed, the section which is most clearly addressed to Cecily (containing both the *Form* and the advice to an anchoress about visitors) was copied by a scribe named Johannes who is particularly insistent on noting his role in writing the texts. An obituary for Johannes Marshall contained in the fragment of an early flyleaf provides a possible clue as to this scribe’s identity.

Rawlinson C 285 is an important manuscript in that it gives us a glimpse into not only the kind of reading considered appropriate for an anchoress, but also into the activities and roles of an anchoress in the early-15th century. The manuscript combines advice on daily living from two standard “rules” (Rolle’s *Form*

and Hilton’s *Scale*) with practical instruction (on good works, the Ten Commandments, acts of charity and devotion, and dealing with visitors), devout meditation (on the judgement, on vices and virtues, on the name of Jesus, and on the passion), and role models (the saints).⁹ The inclusion of some Latin material indicates that the anchoress for whom this text was copied could read at least some Latin, although given the vast majority of English texts, she was clearly more comfortable in the vernacular. It appears to be intended as a book that would provide for every aspect of the anchoress’s life, including instructions for the devout life, her prayers and meditations, her day-to-day activities, and her interaction with the outside world. Thus, while “Cecily” remains unidentified, we are given an unusually complete glimpse into both her devotions and her daily life.

Just as internal evidence can suggest a female audience, it can also provide evidence of male readers. For example, Cambridge Magdalene College Pepys 2125 contains *The chastising of God’s children*, meditations on the Passion, a treatise on the active and contemplative life using the examples of Mary and Martha, and various other vernacular devotional texts. While the presence of *Chastising* and the use of Mary and Martha as exemplars of the active and contemplative life might at first suggest a female readership, the scribe or his immediate exemplar often omits “and women” in the text, and twice the word “sister” is erased and replaced by “friend”. This suggests that the manuscript has been adapted for a male religious reader (Bazire and Colledge 1957: 40). Indeed, as Doyle (1954: 129) points out, an item from John the Hermit of Warwick suggests a male reclused reader.

Similarly, Laud Misc. 104 contains the *Pater Noster of Richard Ermyte*, a text originally addressed to a female reader. However, based on other contents, such as the *Speculum Christiani*, Doyle (1954: 91) concludes that the manuscript probably belonged to a parish priest, chaplain or confessor. Worcester Cathedral Library F 172 also combines texts originally addressed to female audience (such as Hilton’s *Scale* and the Middle English version of Flete’s *De remediis*) with other texts that suggest that it was originally made “for a priest who combined contemplative and pastoral interests” (Doyle 1954: 270), although as seen above, the simple fact that it combines Latin and English texts is not enough evidence on which to base any firm conclusion.

2. Internal evidence combined with external evidence: Intended vs. actual readers

In some cases, annotations in the manuscripts support the internal evidence. For example, Royal 18 A x, a collection of vernacular devotional texts, contains

⁹ Indeed, the arrangement of texts in this manuscript illustrates Ross’s point that affective devotion and meditation on the passion is intended to elicit a response of active piety and charity (Ross 1997).

among other things a confessional formula for a woman, and a Middle English version of Flete's *De remediis* addressed to a "dere sister". The inclusion of material addressed to or modified for a woman reader does not necessarily provide conclusive evidence of readership, especially in a larger miscellany such as this one, as will be seen below. However, the strong suggestion of an original audience of women readers is confirmed in the case of Royal 18 A x by the another text in this manuscript, the *History of the Three Kings of Cologne*, which has been altered so that the opening initials of chapters i-xxxii spell out the names Margareta Moningtwon and Mawde Stranlea (Gilson and Warner 1921: 266). This suggests that this manuscript was copied for these two ladies, and that the material therein was altered specifically for them. Boffey (2000: 45) points out that the same acrostic is found in BL Cotton Vespasian E xvi and suggests that Margareta Moningtoun might plausibly be identified with "Margaret Monyngtoun", a mid-15th century abbess of the Franciscan convent at Aldgate, London.¹⁰ This would connect the manuscript with a much wider circle of readers associated with Aldgate, including women such as John Shirley's sister-in-law Beatrice (Boffey 1996).

Similarly, Colledge and Bazire (1957: 40) suggest that the exemplar for Cambridge Trinity B 14 19 was altered in such a way as to suggest that it was intended for a female audience, and indeed, it seems that this manuscript was owned by an unidentified woman named "Elizabeth", whose name is written in a lovely script on folio 163 (although it is impossible to tell if she was the original owner). Again, in Cambridge, Trinity College O 1 29, the name Margaret is omitted in the address at the end of Rolle's *Form* and on folio 188v we find the name of "Dns. Johannes Levell", probably a member of the secular clergy (Aarts 1967; Mooney 1995: 74-75). Similarly, in Harley 1022, Margaret's name is omitted, and male names occur in the margins. Doyle (1954: 191) suggests that this manuscript was made for male religious readers as it contains expository treatises for the clergy.

In other cases, however, internal evidence can be misleading, suggesting that it must be very strong before it can be relied upon. For example, Harley 2387 is a beautiful manuscript whose only contents is a version of Hilton's *Scale* which opens "[g]ostly broper in Ihesu Crist" rather than the original "ghostly sister", suggesting a deliberate alteration for a male audience. Doyle (1954: 264) suggests that Harley 2387 may originally have been Carthusian. Yet this manuscript, which has lovely illuminated initials and dates from the 15th century, belonged to Margery Pensax, an anchoress at St. Botolph's, Bishopgate (recorded in 1399 and 1413) (Bell 1995: 190). Given Margery Pensax's dates, the manu-

¹⁰See also Boffey (1996).

script must have been in her possession soon after it was copied. She bequeathed the manuscript to Syon Abbey (Bell 1995: 190).

Another manuscript which suggests caution in assigning ownership on the basis of contents alone is Rylands Eng. 85, a volume of practical religious texts. A passage on modesty in women, extracted from an English version of the *Somme le roi* and added on the front flyleaf, would seem to suggest a female owner. Other pious scribbling on the endleaves reveals a concern with virginity on the part of at least one reader. Yet, the only evidence of owners is an inscription reading "[i]ste liber postat John dode" and the name "Mary knyztley" on the flyleaves, indicating that the manuscript passed through the hands of both male and female readers. It is impossible to tell who added the passage on women's modesty, and whether it was added as a piece of advice for a female reader, or a warning for male readers.

Sidney Sussex 74 contains a number of sermons (some with clear Lollard associations, *The Pater Noster of Richard Ermyte*), a treatise on the Ten Commandments, and a treatise on the Ave Maria addressed to a gentlewoman (James 1895 [vol. 12]: 52-53; Tavers 1992). Here, the internal evidence would suggest a female audience, as two of the texts are specifically addressed to women. Yet the sermons (but not the treatises) have been annotated in both Latin and English, suggesting that at least one owner was more interested in the sermon material. Doyle (1954: 91) suggests that this may have been a parish priest's book, and certainly the annotations would support this. The material addressed to female readers is also, of course, appropriate for the use of a parish priest in instructing his parishioners about the Pater Noster, Ten Commandments and Ave Maria. The fact that some of this material is addressed to female readers does not preclude it from being applicable to all readers (or listeners), and the address to a female audience does not seem to have been considered a barrier by male readers, just as the address to a "ghostly brother" does not seem to have been a barrier for Margery Pensax or for the nuns to whom she bequeathed her copy of Hilton.

That the "gendering" of a text through its address, imagery or contents was not considered a barrier to the text's usefulness to readers of both sexes is confirmed by other manuscripts containing texts originally addressed to female readers which were owned by men, such as Cambridge Trinity College O 7 47, which has instructions for a female novice appended to Hilton's *Scale* (Mooney 1995: 129), but was owned by one John Alman in the 15th or 16th century. Similarly, CUL Add. 6686, which contains Hilton's *Scale* with its unaltered address to a "ghostly sister", has an inscription "Dan Adam Reyd Here (?)", which indicates monastic ownership (Doyle 1954: 122). Cambridge Magdalene College Pepys 2051 (containing *Chastising, The treatise of love*, which the translator tells us was undertaken for a female patron, and the only known copy of 1506

edition of Love's *Mirror*) has one woman's name and a number of men's names written in the margins, including "Robert spencer lederseller of london aremit of the chappell of sant katheryn at charing cross" (McKitterick and Beadle 1992).

3. External evidence: Marginalia and ownership inscriptions

Although the internal evidence of texts and their arrangement in the manuscripts can at times yield a great deal of important information about readers and owners, it must, therefore, be treated with caution. Ownership inscriptions and names written in the margins of manuscripts provide clearer evidence of manuscript ownership and transmission. In some cases, the original owners can be identified, but often names in margins simply indicate readers who have possessed the manuscript at isolated points in its history. Many of the owners whose names appear in the margins or flyleaves of their manuscripts cannot be identified, but they do yield information about the gender of readers and owners, adding to our understanding of women's literacy in the late middle ages, and its context in the general literacy of the period.

It is, of course, necessary to exercise caution. Some names are clearly pen trials, and provide little or no information about actual readers or owners. Yet, even pen trials can be interesting at times. One manuscript that illustrates both the need for extreme caution in leaping to quick conclusions, and the interesting stories that marginalia can suggest is Gonville and Caius MS. 669. The catalogue to the Gonville and Caius Library indicates that Gonville and Caius MS. 669 contains the monogram of John Shirley on the front flyleaf, and that there also occurs "at the end, badly written, Mestrys Clapam and Joy Clapam [and] Steven Swales is my name·euery man doth call me the sam, followed by a string of Christian names" (James 1912: 666-667). At first glance, this would indicate that the manuscript passed through several hands, both male and female and (of particular interest to the study of women's literacy), was owned by a Mistress Clapham and (her daughter?) Joy Clapham. Upon examination of the manuscript itself, however, it is apparent that the phrase "Mestrys Clapam and Joy Clapam" is a pen trial, written several times on the end flyleaf, and again on pages 212-213. Indeed, based on other faded marginal scribbles, this appears to be the practise opening of a letter, possibly a valentine. On page 170 the name "Joye clapum" appears along with the name "John buune" or "boune" a name that occurs elsewhere in the manuscript. Were these the pen trials of a young man who wished to court Joy Clapham (and stay on her mother's good side)? Or are they meaningless scribbles? We will never know.

In other cases, however, texts contain clear assertions of ownership. Some are notations of the "[i]ste liber constat" variety, others are simply names written in the margins of texts. While some owners can be positively identified, in most cases, the names written in the margins of manuscripts cannot be identified, but

nevertheless tell us something about the kind of readers these works attracted: whether the readers or owners were men or women and, in some cases, lay or religious, noble or "middle class". For example, the extensive male readership of texts originally addressed to female readers can be seen in the marginalia of many manuscripts, such as CUL Ff v 45 (a vernacular devotional miscellany containing such texts as Rolle's *Form*, *The poor caitiff*, *The mirror of sinners*, and *The craft of dying*), which was owned by one "John Whyte" (of uncertain date). Bodley 423, a 15th-century collection of vernacular devotional works including *Form*, may have been commissioned by Sir Thomas Tuddenham (ex. 1464).¹¹ It was owned in the 16th century by two Londoners, "Alan Kyes pewterer of London" and "Robert Cuttyng master governor" (Doyle 1954: 104; Madan and Craster, entry 2322). Liverpool University Ryl. F 4 10 (*Scale and Chastising*) was owned in the 16th century by a Thomas Berker (Ker 1983: 310), and John Rylands Library Ms. Eng. 87 (*Pore caitiff*) was owned by various male readers in the sixteenth century including a Thomas Dod (Ker 1983: 411). Cambridge Trinity College B 15 17 (*Piers Plowman*, Rolle's *Form*, and a short poem on the love of Christ) contains various men's names, as does Cambridge Trinity College B 14 53, a small manuscript containing *The pore caitiff*, and probably meant for private devotions, and BL Egerton 826 (various devout texts, including *A book to a mother*), BL Harley 4011 (part of Love's *Mirror* among other things), Lambeth Palace 853 (*Form*), Bodley 3 (*Pore caitiff*), and Ashmole 41 (*Chastising*).

Many of these texts were owned by both male and female readers. Cambridge Magdalene College Pepys 2498 (*Ancrene wisse*) was owned by Stephen Batman, as was Cambridge Trinity College B 14 19 (*Chastising*, and various meditations on the passion), which also has the name "Elizabeth" written twice in a lovely script on folio 163 (the endleaf of the first book in this composite manuscript). Cambridge St. John's College G 28 (*Poor caitiff*) was owned by a Johannes Graunge, whose inscription of ownership appears on the flyleaf, but many other names, both male and female, are found in the margins of this manuscript, suggesting that it passed through a number of hands. Bodl. Douce 288 (*Pore caitiff*, with a unique Latin rubric) was owned in the late-15th or early-16th century by "Elsabeth kyng in abcherch p. dwellyng in a lane as ye torne to scherbure" and "Wyllm. Reye et Johannam couper in parochia de horley in

¹¹The book, a collection of devotional works, also contains John Capgrave, *The solace of pilgrimes*. Watson suggests that "The work must have been completed between 1447 and 1452 and was probably written up by Capgrave on his return from a pilgrimage to Rome in 1451. The MS is a holograph, and is probably a fair copy for presentation to Sir Thomas Tuddenham, who is referred to early in the texts as 'my special mayster'; if this is so, Tuddenham's execution in 1461 provides a *terminus post quem non*, which is otherwise provided by Capgrave's death in 1464. The book would be written at the Augustinian friary of King's Lynn, of which Capgrave was a member" (Watson 1969: 16).

Com. De Surre" (Doyle 1954: 51). Hunterian Library 520 (English vernacular texts, including Flete's *De remediis* and *Pore caitiff*) was owned by a Margaret Godwyn and Henry Cobham. BL Add 19901 (Love's *Mirror*) has both male and female names in the margins, as do BL Arundel 112 (Love's *Mirror*), BL Cotton Titus C xix (a collection of vernacular prayers and meditations), BL Harley 1288 (Latin and English texts, including *Chastising*), and BL Royal 17 B xvii (miscellaneous vernacular devotional texts, including some of Rolle's lyrics). The fact that many of these manuscripts contain texts originally addressed to female audiences, yet were owned or read by both male and female readers, suggests once again that these texts were considered suitable for all types of readers, and that a gendered address or text was not a barrier to male readers. Again, this suggests that medieval readers were flexible in their response to gendered material.

In some cases owners can be identified. For example, Rawlinson A 389 (Rolle's *Form, Ego dormio, and Commandment*) was owned by Johannis Reedhill and M. Thomas Rynold, two cannons of Lichfield in the late-15th century (Doyle 1954: 143-147). CUL Ii iv 9, a collection of vernacular devotional pieces (including Rolle's *Form*, a version of Love's *Mirror*, meditations for the celebration of the mass, a charter of Christ, and the *Abbey of the Holy Ghost*) was copied in the mid-15th century by two or three scribes (one of whom identifies himself as "Ambroos"), apparently working together. A note on flyleaf dated 1920 states that a fragment of a document relating to Norwich and Sedgeford (c.1300) was removed from beneath the bookplate, suggesting an East Anglian provenance, which is confirmed by the East Anglian features of one of the scribal hands. An unidentifiable coat of arms in the first initial suggests that the manuscript was commissioned or paid for by a lay reader (Doyle 1954: 57). On folio 195v, in what Doyle identifies as "one of the main hands of the book, (at any rate contemporary, xv med/ex.)" is written: "This is the boke of Sir Will Traw (?) I(n?) Witnesse where-for I thomas barayle(?) havng knowlage there off have putt to myn signe.T.b". Doyle suggests that these names, like that of John Cuttyng of Worsted which is written on the same folio in a 16th-century hand, are Norfolk names (Doyle 1954: 57). Finally, again on the same folio, is written twice "this is the boke for Ser Robert Hawe". Doyle identifies a Robert Hawe as the rector of Thetford in 1473-81, and suggests that "secular priests, perhaps serving in some non-parochial capacity, might have collected this volume for communal use, mainly – as in the nunnery or a hospital" (Doyle 1954: 57).

In a number of manuscripts there are very aggressive assertions of ownership. Some readers, such as William Catson, who, in 1489, owned CUL Ff vi 55 (also owned by Nicholas Hicke) and Edward Neal, who owned CUL Mm v 15 (which also passed through the hands of various other male owners) wrote their names over and over in the margins of their books. In one instance, Rawlinson C 882, the female owner curses whoever might take her book, in both her name

and Christ's. This manuscript contains two 15th-century assertions of ownership at the end, one stating simply "Iste liber constat domine Margarete Erley cum magno gaudio et honore". Beneath this is the aggressive "Iste liber constat Domine agnete (?) he hoo thys boke steleth schall have cryst cursse and myne" (Doyle 1954: 20). Margaret and Agnette, either nuns or gentlewoman, have not been identified.

Other readers clearly identified themselves as owners and asked for various responses from those who found their books, ranging from the simple request to return the book, to requests for prayers for its former owner. For example, in Trinity College B 15 16, a copy of Love's *Mirror* which belonged to John Langridge, (a priest, and the parson of Barkham, Berks.) is written "pray for the good helthe of John langrig' pryest, and for the sovllys of nicholis langrig' Roger and Robertt sonnys of y^e said nocholys" (folio 134), following the obit of Nicholas Landgridge (1514) (folio 133b) (James 1900: 479). Harley 2254 is also inscribed with requests for prayers for two of its owners, Joan Newmarch and Elizabeth Rede (Harley 2254 will be discussed further below).

Among the more interesting manuscripts are those which were passed down through families and which often became family treasures. BL Stowe 38 is a lovely copy of *The pore caitiff*, about 6 x 10, with some illuminated initials, dating from the 15th century. On an endleaf is an English version of the part of Rolle's *Oleum effusum* which is omitted from the partial translation in *The pore caitiff* (Doyle 1954: 19), and throughout the manuscript are marginalia (including many pointing hands) which suggest that this book was read with careful attention. Other notations suggest a curate's or churchwarden's activities (Doyle 1954: 19). On folio 159b is written in a 15th century professional hand "Iste libere constat Isabelle Beke", and in a more cursive script "Denis Beke owith þis boke". Doyle notes that Beke seems to have been a Kentish name (Doyle 1954: 19). CCCC 142, a striking 15th century manuscript with beautiful initials, is another example of a book that was passed down through a family. On folio 126b, in a 15th century hand, is written "Thys ys betrys bodleys book" (identified by James as "beverleys"), and on the endleaf, in a late 15th century or early 15th century hand, "Thys Booke ys Wyllyam bodleys & Elizabethe hys wyffe". Doyle has identified a William Bodley (d. 1540), a grocer, and his wife Beatrice (d. 1558), who were buried in St Botolph's Billingsgate (Doyle 1954: 72). In his will, William Bodley "mentions his brother as 'master doctor', i.e. a cleric of some importance" (Doyle 1954: 72).

Similarly, BL Add 30031 (an early 15th century copy of Love's *Mirror*) contains inscriptions from two families, Guldeforde and Laifelde. On folio 93 is written "Iste liber [constat] agnete guldford", and on folios 81, 111b, and 112 are written the names of other members of the Guldeford family, including Henry and John. Doyle (1954: 149) identifies a Sir John Guldford of Tenterden Kent, who

mentioned a copy of "Gower" in his will (proved 1493), although he did not mention this volume. On folio 112b there are several Laifield names, including Susanna and John, and the date 1559. It is, of course, unknown how the volume passed from the Guldefordes to the Laifields, but it is possible that it was passed down through the female line, as other manuscripts discussed below will also suggest.

In some cases, such family-owned manuscripts passed from convents or monasteries into lay hands or vice versa. For example, on the flyleaf of Durham Cathedral Chapter Library MS A iv 22 are the names of May and John Copwhot (or Copenwhot), written in a late 16th or early 17th century hand. Since the manuscript was donated to the library by Robert Blakiston (a prebender of the Cathedral who died in 1634), an earlier rather than later date is suggested for the Copwhot ownership.¹² Cambridge Sidney Sussex B 2 14, a copy of the Wynkyn de Worde edition of *The chastising of God's children* (1493) and *The treatise of love*, belonged in the early 16th century to two nuns of Syon, Edith Morepath (flyleaf 1518, d. 1536) and Katherine Palmer (flyleaf 1539, d. 1576) (folio 3). Katherine Palmer led a group of nuns to Antwerp and then to Flanders after the suppression of the monasteries, and when Syon was restored in 1557, under Mary Tudor, she was appointed abbess. She was the owner of a number of books, one of which she gave as a gift to Anthony Bolney in 1546 (Bell 1995: 182). In the 17th century, Sidney Sussex B 2 14 found its way into the hands of a recusant family. On the title page of *Chastising*, the first text in the book, Dorothe Abington has written her name three times, in an aggressive assertion of ownership, and she has annotated *Chastising* throughout, although not the *Treatise of love*. Dorothe was the sister of Thomas Habington of Hindlip, Worcs., a recusant who was implicated in the gunpowder plot (online catalogue, www.lib.cam.ac.uk/catalogues/OPAC/union.html).

Some manuscripts provide records of the families they belonged to. For example, Bodley 13 contains three Latin documents bound in with its texts. One is a recommendation of Agnes Wyndhyll, her son John, and Robert to the prayers of the Carmelites in Scarborough by William the prior, dated Nov. 9, 1396. More interesting is a similar letter of fraternity for John Morton and his wife Juliana, recommending them to the prayers of the Austin Friars, dated at York, 1438 (folios 148-9).¹³ John Morton is identified as the scribe of the first (and

¹²My thanks to Dr. Roger Norris, the deputy librarian of the Chapter Library, for his help in finding this information.

¹³Doyle has identified several John Mortons in York: one John Morton (whose wife was Margeret) was Lord Mayor of York in 1418 and died in 1434. Another John Morton left several books in his will of 1431 to priests and one, and English book called Gower, to the Countess of Westmoreland (Joan Beaufort, Countess of Westmoreland, also owned Bodl. e mus 35, discussed below). A third was admitted to the Corpus Christi Guild in the years 1432-5 (Doyle 195: 68-70).

longest) item in the manuscript, Love's *Mirror*. Apparently he copied it for his personal use and the use of his wife.

Similarly, in the Leeds Diocesan Archives manuscript of Love's *Mirror* on the endleaf (folio 116) is written "Christofer Mustchamp was christened the 24th of Jan' 1566. diones Mustchampe wieff to Barron Mustchampe and mother to the foresaid Christopher departid her lyeffe the xvth of Jan' anno 1567". The "Barron Mustchampe" referred to here is probably Christopher Muschamp (d. 1579) who was baron of the Exchequer, 1577-1579 (Ker 1983: 17).

Some marginal notations give a glimpse into the daily lives of the manuscript owners. One example is Sidney Sussex College 37, a *Book of hours* made for Anne Duchess of Exeter, which belonged to the Church family in the 16th century. On a blank endleaf (folio 154b) is written "Edmovnd Choorche ys a good son for he ys wyllyng to lern" and, in a different hand, "Alas Edmovnd church his not a good baye (boy) for he has a sha...d frauncis church at the barne dore shynting (?) Alas". James (1895) suggests that "the first entry [was] written by the mother, who [was] teaching her son to read out of this book" and "the second [was] written either under compulsion or in a fit of penitence by the boy himself". Finally, on folio 156 is written "Thys my boke edmovnd church".

In some cases, manuscripts offer a detailed notation of family histories. Indeed, such manuscripts can give us a clearer idea of family commitments to book ownership. For example, Rawlinson C 894, a 15th century collection of vernacular religious prose, was owned by William Harlowys (16th century), and Edmunds Roberts of Willesden 1548-1672. This is another manuscript which suggests that medieval readers were flexible about "gendering" of texts. It seems to have originally been addressed to female readers, and contains the same instruction in holy living addressed to a nun (folio 91b) as is found in Royal 18 A x (discussed above). Yet, Hilton's *Mixed life* here opens "bretheryn and susteryn", reminding us that the way texts are addressed may simply reflect the exemplar, and is not conclusive evidence of either the intended or the actual audience. William Harlowys, Harlywes, or Horlow also owned Royal 17 C xviii (both 15th century), which, Doyle (1954: 217-218) notes, originally had the same contents, although he argues that while Rawlinson C 894 was originally copied for women, Royal 17 C xviii was intended for male readers.¹⁴ Doyle has identified a London family of this name, and concludes that William Harlowys was a layman, although he remains unidentified.

More interesting are the notations in Rawlinson C 894 recording the birth and obituary dates of the Roberts family of Willesden, from 1548-1672. They begin with the children of Edmund Roberts (1521-1588). Records from the same

¹⁴There are numerous names written in the margins of Royal 17 C xviii, none readily identifiable.

family are also found in Rylands Eng. 98, a handsome copy of Love's *Mirror*. These records begin with the births of the children of Thomas Roberts of Willesdon (Edmund's father), listing Dorothea (b. 1508), Anna (b. 1509), Alicia (b. 1511), all children of Anna, whose death is indicated by a cross beside her name (but without a date), and then, after a gap of a few years, Michael (b. 1519), Ed[mund]us (b. 1520), and Joh[ann]es (b. 1531), all children of Katherine, daughter of Robert Sadler. This set of records runs from 1508 to 1542, ending with the death of Thomas in 1542, suggesting that it was Thomas himself who recorded them. Two other hands have recorded similar information concerning the Willesden family and the Horde family of Ewell, suggesting that the book may have passed down in at least one instance through the female line. Thomas Roberts also owned Harley 2322, a copy of *The poor caitiff* and the Lollard defense of vernacular scriptures, and Doyle (1954: 217-218) points out that "a number of other manuscripts survive which belonged to him, Edmund, and their descendants: service-books and Latin volumes". While Thomas Roberts may have inherited or purchased some of these, Doyle (1954: 217-218) suggests that a likely source of others was the dissolution of religious houses, as he seems to have profited by it in property as well. He was steward of several houses, for which he received both stipends and compensations.

In many cases where owners can be identified, understandably, they are wealthy aristocratic owners or patrons, although even in these cases there is often ambiguity. For example, Bodley 480, a 14th century volume whose only contents is *The pricknyng of love*, is a beautiful manuscript with illuminated capitals. There is no indication of early owners, although the manuscript is rich enough to suggest wealthy aristocratic ownership. On folio 164, however, is written in a 16th century hand: "Wo so euer on me doth loke/ I am my w... lays boke" and "My lady Marques Dorsettes booke. Ihesus Maria". It is not clear which "Lady Marques Dorsette" is referred to here, although Coxe suggests Cicely (d. 1530) (Madan 1922: 167). No other information is given.

A manuscript with a fascinating history is CUL Add. 3042, an early 15th century collection of prayers and meditations in both Latin and English (including Rolle's *Meditations on the Passion*), copied in several hands. The blank leaves of this manuscript have been covered in writing in various hands, and in some cases, prayers and recipes have been written over other material, making it almost impossible to read. A number of names and annotations occur in the margins, including the name of Richard Wystlar (folio 136), an assertion of ownership by "hugh (?)" (folio 34), and a declaration of allegiance to Edward VI (folio 35). On folio 89, upside down in the bottom margin, is written "Jhana vnfortunata of westmerlandic Cowntes" in a very clear, neat and elaborate script. There were two Joan or Joannas who were countesses of

Westmoreland. One was Joan Beaufort, the daughter of John of Gaunt and Catherine Swynford, and wife of Ralph Neville, first Earl of Westmoreland. Hughes (1988: 91) suggests that it was this Countess of Westmoreland who owned CUL Add 3042. Joan Beaufort was an important patron of religious persons and institutions, and she also commissioned Bodl. e mus 35 (see below). It is unlikely, however, that she was, in fact, the owner of CUL Add 3042. An important clue to the identity of the Countess of Westmoreland is found on folio 70b where, again upside down in bottom margin in the same (or similar) hand, is written "Maria regina Scotterii". This clearly indicates that our "unfortunate" countess lived much later than Joan Beaufort, and indeed, the second Joanna, Countess of Westmoreland fits the picture perfectly. Joanna (or Jane) Howard was the wife of Charles Lord Neville, Earl of Westmoreland, and sister to Thomas Howard, the fourth Duke of Norfolk, both of whom were involved in the 1569 Northern Rebellion. The purpose of the rebellion was to assassinate Elizabeth and put Mary Queen of Scots on the throne, after she had been conveniently married to the Duke of Norfolk, who would then become the power behind the throne (presumably along with his brother-in-law). While both Norfolk and Westmoreland were Catholics, Joanna was a staunch Protestant, and wrote a number of letters to her husband, pleading with him not to become involved – to no avail. The plot was uncovered, Norfolk was executed, and Westmoreland was exiled, his estates attainted. After the attaindre of her husband's estates, Joanna was supported by a government pension (Sharpe 1840). Joanna was a well-educated woman, able to read Latin and Greek, and her wide reading interests are indicated not only by her ownership of CUL Add. 3042, but also by a third notation in her hand, on folio 114b (again upside down in bottom margin) where she has written "Cornelius Agrippa".

Joan Beaufort, the first Countess of Westmoreland, did own Bodl. e mus 35 (*Love's Mirror* and the *Speculum vitae*), a manuscript which illustrates the importance of another kind of evidence, coats of arms integrated into the illuminations or margins of manuscripts commissioned by noble patrons. E mus 35 is a beautiful manuscript, large (about 9 x 13), with illuminated capitals and margins. The coat of arms on the first page are no longer clear, but one can be identified as the Beaufort arms (Jambeck 1996) or Beauchamp and Neville quartered (Madan 1937: 702), which would represent Joan Beaufort's second marriage. Joan Beaufort and her second husband, Ralph Neville, were patrons of various anchorites in Durham, as well as other religious institutions (Hughes 1988: 68). She also hosted Margery Kempe at Raby in 1413, when Kempe visited the shrine of John Bridlington and William Sleightholme, one of his disciples and Joan's confessor (Hughes 1988: 100). She was a member of a lay fraternity which also included Elizabeth Beauchamp, Eleanor Hull, Margaret Duchess of

Clarence and Eleanor Cobham¹⁵ (Hughes 1988: 122-123). Joan's piety also seems to have extended to her family. A connection with the Carthusians is suggested not only by her early acquisition of Love's *Mirror*, but also through her brother, Thomas Duke of Exeter, who built 5 new cells at Mount Grace in 1417 (Hughes 1988: 73). Her daughter, Cecily Neville, was a well-known patron of devotional literature, and shared her mother's interest in the works of Hilton (Hughes 1988: 102).¹⁶

Another manuscript whose original owners can be identified on the basis of the coats of arms integrated into its illuminated margins is National Library of Scotland MS Advocates 18 17, which was commissioned by Edmund, fourth baron Grey de Ruthin (d. 1470) and his wife, Constance Holand (*Summary catalogue of the Advocates' manuscripts* 1971: #1303).¹⁷ It is a luxurious manuscript, one of only two illustrated versions of Love's *Mirror*. Grey's coat of arms appears on folio 8v, accompanying an illustration of a scribe in a monastery writing the text which precedes the Proheme. The patrons themselves appear in the bottom margin of the illustration preceding Chapter 1 on folio 12v.

In the cases above, only the original owners of the manuscripts can be identified from the coats of arms in their marginal illuminations. In other cases, however, it is possible to trace a more complete history of manuscripts, with the combined evidence of coats of arms (identifying the original owners) and marginal notations (identifying later owners). For example, BL Harley 2254 (Hilton's *Mixed life* and *The prickying of love*) has the arms of Shirley and Brewes quartered in the marginal illumination on the first page (*Catalogue of the Harleian manuscripts in the British Museum* 1808: 592; Doyle 1954: 112). These are the arms of Sir Hugh Shirley and Beatrix de Brewes, and the manuscript was probably commissioned by them. The book eventually belonged to their daughter Joan, who married Robert Newmarch, as is evident from an inscription on the flyleaf which reads "Orate pro anima Johanne Newmarche" (Erler 1995a: 361-362, Doyle 1954: 112-114). Joan was a gentlewoman of

¹⁵Eleanor Cobham is another fascinating lady, who was given a copy of *Ancrene Wisse* by Joan Holland, a devout widow. See my forthcoming article (Innes-Parker, forthcoming in Wada (ed.)) and Griffiths (1969).

¹⁶The lives of both Joan and Cecily Neville provide evidence that women's devout reading and piety shown in other ways (such as patronage of religious houses) are related, suggesting that affective devotion is part of an entire lifestyle for many lay women (see Meale 1997 and n. 2 above). Once again, this suggests that devotional reading is intended to provoke a practical response (see Ross 1997).

¹⁷Edmund Grey was, in fact, a descendant of Joan Beaufort on his mother's side. Joan Beaufort's daughter Eleanor (d. 1433) married Sir Henry Percy, Earl of Northumberland (d. 1455). Their daughter Katherine Percy (b. 1423) married Edmund Grey of Ruthin (b. 1416, d. 1470), who was created Earl of Kent in 1465. Edmund Grey was the son of Sir John Grey and Constance Holand, daughter of John Holand, Duke of Exeter.

Isabel, Countess of Warwick, who left her 100 marks in gold and the costs of "her bryngynge yn to seynt Katrens [hospital, London] or wher ever she woll be elles" in her will of 1439. Joan did, in fact, retire in religious seclusion in St. Bartholomew's hospital close until her death (c. 1453). Harley 2254 is an excellent example of a manuscript commissioned by a devout layperson who wished to live a religious life. *The prickying of love* was, as suggested by Bodley 480 and Cosin V. iii. 24 (above), a popular contemplative text, recommended for lay and religious alike.

The book also includes Hilton's *Mixed life*, a text which was written for an audience of devout lay readers. This is a multi-purpose manuscript, appropriate for pious readers who are active in the world, but equally useful for a devout widow who has retired into religious seclusion or, indeed, for nuns. Harley 2254 passed from Joan Newmarch to the convent of Dartford, either as a gift during her lifetime or on her death (although it is not mentioned in her will).¹⁸ On the front flyleaf are two inscriptions from Dartford: "Thys boyk longyth to Dame alys braintwath the worchypful Prioras of Dartford", and "Ora pro anima domina Elizabeth Rede huius loci". Dame Alice is first mentioned as prioress of Dartford in a document dated 4 July 1461, and her name occurs in records up to 1479; Elizabeth Rede is unidentified (Erler 1995a: 361-362; Bell 1995: 131; Doyle 1954: 112-114).

Another manuscript which was originally commissioned by lay readers, but later passed to a convent, is Bodl. Douce 322 (early 15th century). There are two coats of arms in the manuscript: the arms of Baron on folio 10, and Baron and Knollys quartered on folio 78. These refer to William Baron, and his wife Joan, daughter of Thomas Knollys of North Mimms, Herts. (d. 1445) (Madan 1897: 593-595). The book is clearly intended as a comprehensive collection of religious pieces designed to instruct a lay reader in the practice of a devout life in the world, beginning with a poetic calendar by Lydgate, followed by the affective poems *Cantico amoris* and *Quia amore langueo*, the *Pety job*, and *Parce michi domini*. This material is followed by a treatise on the seven deadly sins, the Middle English *Orologium sapientie*, *The book of the craft of dying*, selections from the *Pore caitiff*, *The ladder of four rungs*, and various other devout texts on prayer, meditation, confession, the bodily and spiritual works of mercy, etc., ending (imperfectly) with the Charter from the *Pore caitiff*. Like Harley 2254, Douce 322 eventually passed to Dartford, as a gift from William Baron to a nun there, as witnessed by an inscription on the flyleaf:

¹⁸Erler (1995a) notes that Joan's maternal grandfather, Piers de Braose, or Brewes, "was a substantial, if indirect early benefactor" of Dartford, so there may have been family connections which influenced Joan's gift.

These booke in whome is contente dyu[er]s deuowte tretis & specyally þe tretis þat is called ars moriendi, ys of the zift of Wylliam Baron esquier to remayne for euyr to the place and nonrye of Detforde and specially to the vse of dame pernelle Wrattisley sister of the same place of licence of her abbas, the whiche Pernelle is nece to the for seyde gentylman William Baron
(Douce 322)

Petronilla or Pernelle Wrottisley was the daughter of Sir Walter Wrottesley and Joan Baron. Joan Baron may have been a sister of William Baron, but it is more likely that she was his daughter and that the term “niece” was used here loosely for granddaughter. Since Joan Knollys Baron had a sister, Beatrice, who was a nun at Dartford, there is a family connection with the convent which may well have prompted her granddaughter to choose it (Madan 1897: 593–595). The inscription is also of interest in that it specifies the *ars moriendi*, of all the texts included in the manuscripts, as the most important. Whether this reflects the interest of William Baron or Pernelle Wrattisley is unknown, but it is an interesting glimpse into the concerns of devout readers.

Although the examples discussed above are manuscripts commissioned by wealthy lay readers and then passed on to convents, not surprisingly, many manuscripts for which we can identify owners or provenance were written specifically for convents or monastic communities. For example, BL Add. 11748 (a miscellany of various vernacular works include Hilton’s *Scale*, a translation of Rolle’s *Oleum effusum*, and an *Arma Christi* poem), was inscribed as follows: “Hunc librum & librum vocatum gracia dei qui est in custodis Willelmi Carente habeant abbatissa & convenus Shafton in succursum Anime Johannis horder” and, in the same hand, “Johannes horder emebat”. A different hand has also inscribed “Iste liber constat Willelmo smyth sacerdoti cuius anime propicietur ihesus. Quem post obitum suum”. Doyle identifies two William Smyths, both clerics, who died in 1423 and 1454. William Caraunt (c. 1395–1476) was the steward of Shaftesbury Abbey, and owned several other manuscripts. The manuscript was clearly intended for Shaftesbury, and Doyle (1954: 118–120) suggests that the *Arma Christi* poem may have been added there (see also Bell 1995: 164).

CUL Ii vi 40 (mid 15th century) also belonged to Shaftesbury. A small volume (4 3/4 x 2 7/8), CUL Ii vi 40 is a collection of vernacular devotional texts including *The contemplations of the dread and love of God*, *The Pater Noster of Richard Ermyte*, Rolle’s *Form* and *Commandment*, the Charter from *The Pore caitiff* and *St. Edmund’s mirror*. The manuscript was owned by Joanna Moureslegh, who was insistent enough about her ownership to attest to it twice: on folios 2 and 4v. is written “Iste leber constat domine Johanne Moureslegh”. Joanna Moureslegh was a nun of Shaftesbury in the mid-15th century (recorded in documents of 1441 and 1460), suggesting that the manuscript was in the possession of Shaftesbury from the beginning. Later, it passed into lay hands. On folio 1v is written “Iste liber

constat Agnette dawn ... (?) filie Tomas ... Grene”. Gillespie (1989) notes that Foxe’s *Actes and Monuments* [1563] mentions an Agnes Downs of Colchester who was accused of heretical views on the eucharist in 1557, and notes that “she may have possessed ‘a book in English’, like so many heretics in those days”.¹⁹ The manuscript was also owned by an Edmund Bramptone (folios 97v and 186v) and the Knyvett family of Norfolk (folio 223v) (*Catalogue of the manuscripts preserved in the library of the University of Cambridge* 1919: 538–539; Gillespie 1989; Doyle 1954: 23; Bell 1995: 164).²⁰

Examples of books which belonged to various convents abound. As seen above, Sidney Sussex Bb 2 14 belonged to two nuns of Syon. Based on documents in the binding of Bodl. Laud Misc. 602, confirming to an abbess and convent various rights in their patronage and possession, it appears that the manuscript was originally owned by Barking or Syon, although it later passed into male lay hands (Doyle 1954: 255). BL IB 55110 (a printed edition of Love’s *Mirror*) was also owned in the 16th century by a nun of Syon, Susan Purefeye. She was a member of a book-owning family, the Purefoys of Leicestershire. The names of Michael and Anna Purefoy are found in Cambridge Emmanuel College 35, a 15th century Latin manuscript which was also read by Grenehalgh and Sewell (Bell 1995: 191). Bodley e mus 232, containing various vernacular works of devotion, belonged to Annes Helperby and Elizabeth Stoughton, who, based on the similarity between this manuscript and others copied for convents (below) were possibly nuns (Doyle 1954: 90–91).

While it is not surprising to find vernacular books, especially those addressed to women readers, in convents, many were also owned by monasteries. BL Add. 10053 (a collection of vernacular works, including Hilton’s *Scale*, *The mirror of St. Edmund*, and the *Letter of Jerome to Demetriades*) was written for John Pery, a canon of the Augustinean Priory of the Holy Trinity at Aldgate (Doyle 1954: 96). Bodley 207 (Love’s *Mirror*) was owned by the Augustinean Priory of Newark in Sussex (Doyle 1954: 147), and Bodley 592 (Hilton’s *Scale*) was owned by Glastonbury (Doyle 1954: 269). Hereford Cathedral P i 9 (Bonaventure’s *Meditationes*, the Latin *Life of St. Francis* and Rolle’s *Form*) was made for the friars of the Oxford Franciscan house (Mynors and Thomson 1883; Ker 1977: 984).

¹⁹Gillespie (1989) also notes that Foxe records the burning of a widow for possessing a “skrol” containing the Lord’s Prayer, Articles of Faith and the Ten Commandments in English.

²⁰As seen above, like CUL Ii.vi.40, many manuscripts passed from convents to lay hands, particularly after the dissolution. For example, Sidney Sussex Bb 2 14 (above) belonged to two nuns of Syon, but eventually found its way into the hands of a recusant family, the Abingdons, and the manuscripts owned by the Roberts family of Willesden likely came from religious houses. The fluidity suggested by the relatively free passage of manuscripts between lay and religious readers (in both directions) suggests that the concerns of devout laypersons were not that different from their religious counterparts, at least in essence.

Not surprisingly, many manuscripts were associated with Carthusian houses. Cambridge Trinity College B 15 18 was owned by Sheen c. 1499, and was annotated by Greenhalgh. In the 16th century it was owned by a Henry Brereton (Mooney 1995: 18). BL Add 37049, BL Add 37790, both large collections of vernacular works, were owned by Mount Grace, and Add 37790 was annotated by Greenhalgh (Doyle 1954: 192). CUL Add 6578 (Love's *Mirror*) also belonged to Mount Grace, and was possibly loaned to another charterhouse in the south (Doyle 1954: 144-145). BL Harley 6579 and CUL Ee iv 30, both containing copies of Hilton's *Scale*, belonged to the London Charterhouse (Doyle 1954: 262-263, 265).

Many manuscripts also passed from religious owners to other religious readers or houses as gifts. As seen above, the anchoress Margery Pensax gave Harley 2387 to Syon as a gift. CCCC 268 (Hilton's *Scale*, *The seven points of true wisdom*) was given by Elizabeth Wylby, a nun of Campsey in the early 16th century (recorded in documents of 1514 and 1526), as a gift to an unidentified recipient.²¹ Since Elizabeth Wylby also gave a copy of *The chastising of God's children* to Dame Catherine Symonde, "to pass from her to another sister of Campsey" (Bell 1995: 123), it is reasonable to assume that CCCC 268 was also intended to go to another sister. Harley 2397 (Hilton, *Mixed life*, *Bonum est*, and *Scale II* [but not Book I]) contains an inscription recording the gift of the manuscript to the Minoreesses of London at Aldgate by their abbess, on the condition that they pray for the souls of her family: "Dame Elyzabeth Horwode, abbas of the Menoresse off London, to her gostle comfforthe, bowght thys boke, hyt to remayne to the vse off the sisterrs of the sayde place, to pray for the yene [gain] and ffor the sowles of hyr ffader and her moder, Thomas Horwode and Beatryxe, and the sowle off Mayster Robert Alderton" (Bell 1995: 149). It is possible that the manuscript was commissioned by Elizabeth Horwode for the precise use of her nuns.²²

Other manuscripts passed as gifts between convents. For example, BL Harley 2409 (*The contemplations of the dread and love of God*, a Middle English version of Flete's *De remediis*, the English *Life of St. Catherine of Siena* and *The nine points of virtue*) belonged to Swine, but passed to Nuncoton as a gift, recorded in an inscription on folio 78v: "Be yt remembryd that dame Mald Wade, priorys of Swyne, has gyven this boke to dame Joan Hylytoft in Nuncoton". Dame Mald or Matilda Wade was prioress of Swine from 1473 until 1482 (Bell 1995: 171). Doyle notes that "Joan Hylytoft has made notes on the

²¹On folio 169v in a 15th century hand is written "Memorandum that I Elizabeth Wylby... N[onne] of [Camp]essey, gyffe thys boke" – the rest of the inscription has been cut off from the bottom of the leaf (Bell 1995: 123).

²²For more information about Elizabeth Horwode and the reading circles associated with the minoreses at Aldgate, see Boffey (1996).

homes of Dorset and Wilts relatives and friends, it seems; there are also the names of nuns or other friends or owners, 'Elyzabet Loketon,' M. [William?] Bygod' (the latter of an important Yorkshire family)" (Doyle 1954: 93).

Monks also gave manuscripts as gifts to their monasteries. CCCC 402 (a copy of *Ancrene wisse* addressed to a single anchoress) was given to Wigmore Abbey by John Purcel at the request of a brother Walter of Ludlow, the current precentor (Millett 1996). BL Harley 330, which contains (among other things) Hilton's *Scale* with Book I in English and Book II in Latin, was given to Reading Abbey by one of its monks, William Wargrave (Doyle 1954: 120-121).²³ Bodley 505 (*Chastising*, *The mirror of simple souls*) was given to the London Charterhouse by Edmund Stourer (Doyle 1954: 125), and Rawlinson C 57 (*Chastising*) was given to Sheen by John Kingslow, the first recluse at Sheen (Doyle 1954: 237-238).

In some cases, manuscripts were compiled or copied by their original owners for their personal use. As seen above, Bodl. 131 seems to have been copied by John Morton for use by himself and his wife, and many of laypeople who commissioned manuscripts must have had some control over the contents of the books they commissioned. However, most books which were actually copied by their original owners were written in a religious milieu. For example, BL Arundel 507, a late 14th century volume of English, French and Latin devotional material, belonged to a monk of Durham, Richard de Segbrok, and seems to have been compiled for his personal use (Doyle 1954: 76). Another manuscript that was compiled by a monk, seemingly for his own use is BL Add. 37787, a huge compendium of prayers and meditations in English and Latin compiled in the early 15th century by John Northwood. His elaborate inscription of ownership is found on folio 183:

Iste liber constat Johanni Norpewode monacho. qui ipsum habuerit. vel qui in eo legerit habeat eum karitatiue specialiter recommendatum in missa sua priuata commemoracione. vel saltem oret pro anima eius. Et quicumque hunc librum ab eo alienauerit absque eius licencia: malediccionem dei incurrat. fiat fiat. Amen.

On folio 182, Northwood's novitiate at Bordesly is recorded in an elaborate inscription with illuminated borders, noting that he became a novice on 26 May, 1486. Interestingly, this manuscript seems to have soon found its way into lay hands, owned by "Goody" Peyto, who later gave the book to a "Goody

²³Doyle notes: "Laud misc. 79 was restored by the same monk to his abbey, after loss, in 1490; ULC Inc.5.D.2.25, Sophilogium Jacobi Magni (pr. Lyons 1495) was given to him in 1498 (Bodl. Q.Rec. viii p.54); Douce F.205, Mancinus de quatuor virtutibus (pr. London, c.1520?) was also procured by him for Reading" (Doyle 1954: 120-121).

Throckmorton".²⁴ This is another example of a manuscript that has been owned by several family members; Doyle identifies Goditha, daughter of Sir Thomas Throckmorton, as wife of Edward Peto (d. 1487) and mother of Cardinal William Peto. In the 16th century the manuscript was owned by an unidentified wife of John Rudalli, and a Susanna Willescotta²⁵ (*Catalogue of the additions to manuscripts in the British Museum* 1912: 140-150).

The copying of manuscripts for personal use was not confined to male owners. A fascinating example of a manuscript compiled specially for the use of a woman reader is BL Harley 494, the prayerbook of Anne Bulkeley, possibly a nun of Syon. The book contains a mix of English and Latin texts, mostly prayers and meditations, copied in a number of different hands. It appears that Anne Bulkeley may have had some influence over the choice of texts in this manuscript; her confessor or spiritual advisor certainly did. The devotional nature of the texts, and the suggestion of personal choice in their selection, has much to tell us about Anne Bulkeley's private devotions, making this a manuscript that warrants further study.

4. Conclusion: The "gender gap"?

The manuscripts which we have traced, however briefly, yield an immense amount of information. There is substantial evidence that these texts, originally composed for a specifically female audience, were widely read and owned by women, who passed them on to other women. Such patterns of ownership and transmission suggest that their authors had a keen sense of what would appeal to their intended readers. Yet, at the same time, the texts that we have examined clearly held a wider appeal; they were read by men and women, religious and lay, noble and middle class, orthodox and not-so-orthodox. Some were adapted to "suit" new and varied audiences; others were simply read by audiences other than those to whom they were originally directed.

The wide variation in readership of texts that were originally addressed to female audiences suggests that medieval readers were more flexible in their notions of "gendered" reading material than has often been supposed. While texts addressed to women readers do contain many indications of their authors' (often misogynist) attitudes towards their female audiences, such attitudes do not seem to have served as barriers for either male or female readers. Sometimes, indeed, specifically gendered addresses, such as Hilton's "ghostly sister", are altered, as

²⁴On folio 2 is inscribed "Iste lyber pertinet ad me mi lady Peyto. Amen yt est yta fyat amen so be heyte ... by the gefte of d[ame?] Goodyth Peyto thy booke Goody Thokmarton" (*British Museum, Catalogue of Additions to the Manuscripts in the British Museum in the Years MDCCCCVI 1912: 150*).

²⁵On folio 61 b is in a 16th century hand "uxor Ilohni Rudalli hunc possided codicem." On folio 2 is also "Susanna Willescotta vendicat. 1571".

in Harley 2387, where *Scale* begins "Gostly broper in Ihesu Crist". Such alterations would, on the face of it, suggest that gendered addresses (and content) were considered important enough to be worth the trouble of altering or editing entire texts. Yet, Harley 2387 itself provides evidence that readers themselves were not overly concerned with such addresses, belonging as it did to an anchoress and, later, Syon Abbey. Women were clearly comfortable with texts addressed to men; more important, perhaps, men were clearly both comfortable with and intensely interested in texts originally addressed to women readers. The gendered, and often vitriolic, comments on women's weaknesses in these texts did not seem to have been considered by their readers as inapplicable to male readers, suggesting that "feminine" weakness and error could also be read as, quite simply, human. Indeed, while superficial genderings, such as addresses and pronouns, were sometimes altered, the actual content of these texts was not. The devotional guidance offered in these texts was clearly found of use by many readers, male and female, from many walks of life.

Many of the manuscripts discussed here were clearly intended to offer devotional guidance for devout women and men, both religious and laypersons who, in spite of their involvement in the daily activities of the world, wished to find time for contemplation. Hilton's *Mixed life* is an example of a text specifically addressed to such a layperson, but it is clear that many texts originally addressed to religious or enclosed readers were also read by laypersons wishing for guidance in the devout life. Indeed, towards the end of the 15th century, the ratio between lay and religious readers shifts dramatically, as more and more lay men and women commissioned and read devotional books, suggesting that even the divide between lay and religious readers was narrowing, at least for vernacular texts.

The reading patterns uncovered here suggest that, contrary to received opinion, women were not relegated to the marginal wastelands in their devotional reading. New developments in vernacular devotional writings rapidly found their way into the hands of women who were, it is increasingly evident, intelligent and sophisticated readers. Nor were their reading habits and materials substantially different from many men, particularly laymen. Although the manuscripts discussed in this paper represent only a fraction of those which survive, the gaps we have discovered between intended and actual audiences suggest the need for further research into the influence of socially and culturally constructed notions of gender on reading practices and assumptions about reading in the thirteenth to fifteenth centuries. While many of the manuscripts reveal specific information about women readers, most suggest wider patterns of readership, and most were owned by men. It is clear that, whatever assumptions and attitudes are displayed by the authors of these texts specifically addressed to female audiences, the readers of the manuscripts were flexible and adaptable, suggest-

ing that the division between male and female must be re-examined in light of the actual readership of these texts, rather than the intended audiences. This is not to say that a "gender gap" did not exist – rather, that gendered attitudes and patterns of reading are more complex than has previously been recognized, and that these complexities must be addressed through further research into the reading patterns of both men and women. Only then can women's literacy be understood in its context in the late medieval world.

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