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Middle English writings for women: *Ancrene Wisse*

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Introduction

The *Ancrene Wisse* group consists of a series of texts written in the early thirteenth century in the south-west Midlands area. Not only was this group aimed at a primary audience of women, but it also addressed anchoresses, that is, women who had chosen to lead a solitary life in a private cell, often attached to a parish church, or as part of a group of cells which made an anchorhold. Apart from *Ancrene Wisse*, to which we shall give most of our attention in this chapter, the *Ancrene Wisse* group can be subdivided into the Katherine group and the Wooing group. The Katherine group consists of three virgin martyrs' lives, those of *Seinte Katerine, Seinte Margarete*, and *Seinte Juliene*, a treatise on virginity called *Hali Meiðhad*, and a work on the guardianship of the soul called *Sawles Warde*. The Wooing group consists of four prayers and meditations in rhythmical prose.

While all texts of the *Ancrene Wisse* group demonstrate a concern for the anchoritic life, *Ancrene Wisse* allows best entry into this peculiar mode of life. Probably of Dominican origin, *Ancrene Wisse* provides informal advice to three ladies leading the life of recluses. It is a text written in very elegant style by an author who had a good knowledge of Latin literature and who was also intimate with oral traditions. Although a large number of sources were used for its making, the anchoritic rule *De institutione inclusarum*, by the Cistercian monk Aelred of Rievaulx (1109–66), had a large impact on the structure and thematic scope of *Ancrene Wisse*.

The latter is divided into a preface and eight distinct parts. The tone is sometimes familiar, at other times much more official, and the crisp imagery used by the author throughout the text has contributed to its lasting impact, not to mention its importance as a witness to early Middle English prose. It survives, complete or only in parts, in seventeen medieval manuscripts, some of which attest to its adaptability to new audiences.

Since the anchoritic life was largely a female vocation, the role given to male ecclesiastical supervision of anchoresses accounts for one of the reasons why cells were set, no longer in the wilderness, but rather in the vicinity of parish churches. This essay investigates the question of the role played by communities and social networks in the most distinguished anchoritic work written on English soil in the early thirteenth century, in Middle English, and translated a little later into Anglo-Norman and Latin.

My aim is to see how the treatise constructs a nexus of representations of ideas about communities and social networks throughout its eight parts, which the potential, largely undefined, reading subject can appropriate in order to reform, convert, or construct her (new) subjectivity. Some of these imagined communities refer to either the religious or secular sphere, and are connoted either negatively or positively, while other passages in the treatise make reference to real communities in equally ambivalent ways. Those representations serve an important function by forcing the reading subject to assess her own roles within those communities and to decide whether they are compatible with her function. I contend that the representation of these communities plays a momentous role in shaping the subjectivity, not only of the anchoritic readers of the treatise, but of any reader, medieval or modern, approaching the text with a religious intention in mind and able to create the anchoritic paradigm imaginatively for herself.

Imagining the self and secular communities

Representations of the possible ways by which the reading subject could imaginatively interact with secular communities are found throughout the treatise. The world of the nobility, their manners, and the space they inhabit help in tuning the inner feelings of the reader. The authorial intention to take a cataphatic approach (that is, representing the relationship with God by means of images from everyday life for the construction of an intimate relationship with God) is quite evident in the use made of this specific secular imagery. The besieged lady in her fortress capably resisting the assault of the enemy, the further reference to the female readers as firm-standing towers of a besieged city, and the parable of a king loving a noble poor lady, all combine to create empathy on the part of the readers for a sophisticated textual community. *Ancrene Wisse* assumes knowledge of these literary *topoi* and asks for a transliteration of their use in the religious context, as part of an effort to interiorize religious precepts, such as mastering the sense of sight—which may otherwise lead to lecherous behaviour—fighting against temptations in general, and increasing one's love for the lover-knight who is God in his humanity.

References to a noble and sophisticated textual community apart, the reader also finds invitations to work with representations of other secular communities. Part I, 'Devotion' (p. 19, fo. 7b/10–12; p. 58),[1] asks the anchoress to pray for the community of the sick and sorrowful, as well as prisoners, especially for Christian ones kept in heathen countries. It seems that the main point here is to show the reader how, by means of a sustained imagination triggered by prayer and meditation, she can participate in the betterment of those communities. While she is being asked here to stretch her thoughts beyond the immediate confines of her inhabited space towards the outside world, images of sickness and imprisonment are also called back at other junctures in the guide in order to help the anchoress define her own, largely enclosed, inhabited space, and her inner world.

If the enclosed space of the *reclusorium* plays a momentous role in shaping the subjectivity of the readers, other spaces and other

communities are recalled in the treatise. For instance, part V, 'Confession', considered controversial for the ways in which it assumes a much wider readership than an anchoritic one, makes reference to the public spaces of the medieval village or market town. Such a passage assumes a reader who is not at all linked in any practical way to the anchoritic mode of life. Instead, it seems that the assumed speaker here is a lay Christian:

> Alswa of þe *stude*: Sire, þus ich pleide oðer spec ichirche, eede o ring, i chirchȝard, biheold hit, oþer wreastlunge, ant oðre fol gomenes; spec þus oðer pleide biuoren wortliche men, biuoren recluse in ancre hus, ed oþer þurl þen ich schulde, neh hali þing. Ich custe him þer, hondlede him i swuch stude, oðer me seoluen. I chirche ich þohte þus, biheold him ed te weouede. (p. 163, fo. 86*a*/18–24)
>
> The same for *place*: 'Sir, thus I played or spoke in church, joined in the ring-dancing, in the churchyard, watched dancing, wrestling and other silly games; spoke thus or played in front of worldly men, in front of a recluse in an anchorhouse, or at a window where I ought not to have been, or near a holy thing; I kissed him there, handled him, or myself, in such a place; in church I thought this way, watched him at the altar.' (part V, p. 165)

Ancrene Wisse describes a vibrant secular community whose spaces are filled with communal, playful activities, gossip, dancing, wrestling and other games, some of them clearly sexual in intent. Even more interesting for our understanding of the role played by recluses in medieval society, the space of the anchorhold, perceived from the outside, stands in this passage as a landmark of this small but active community. Part V, 'Confession', even more convincingly than other parts of the rule, has an immediate appeal to Christians in general.

Joining the community of the saints

If snapshots of secular life force the self to imagine interactions with the world, other moments in the text situate the self with reference to an idealized holy community, made up of saints, martyrs, and other biblical characters. Such representation takes place appropriately in part III, 'The Inner Feelings', where idealization of the anchoritic life, solidly grounded on spiritual benefits still to come after physical death, relies on a select community of models. The Old Testament

Judith is venerated in *Ancrene Wisse* less for her military and physical prowess at slaying the almighty Assyrian general Holofernes, than for her life of enclosure, shut up in the upper room of her house with only one handmaid. This life of seclusion followed the death of her husband and preceded her military coup. John the Baptist, the Virgin Mary, and even God in his humanity, who fasted for forty days in solitariness, act as models of a spiritual community to which the reading anchoress aspires to belong. Other figures, like Job and some virgin martyrs, are praised not so much for a life of seclusion, but rather for their determination when facing adversity, often experienced in a very solitary way. The virgin martyr narratives are marked by their politics of heroism, thus inviting their readers and those of *Ancrene Wisse* (and other associated texts) to view the solitary as being heroic too. The privilege of belonging to such an élite community can easily be abused by sinful activity, resulting in immediate loss:

> Godd wat, he mei beon muche deale sorhfulre þat haueð wið deadlich sunne gasteliche islein godd inwið his sawle—nawt ane forloren þe swete feader of heouene ant seinte Marie his deorewurðe moder, oþer hali chirche (hwen he of hire naueð ne leasse ne mare), ant te engles of heouene ant alle hali halhen þe weren him ear for freond, for breðren ant for sustren. (p. 159, fos. 84*a*/23–84*b*/1)
>
> God knows, a man who has spiritually slain God with deadly sin in his own soul can be a great deal more sorrowful—having lost not only the sweet Father of heaven and St. Mary his precious mother, or Holy Church (when he will have neither less nor more from her), but also the angels of heaven and all the holy saints who had been like his friends, his brothers and his sisters. (part V, p. 162)

The loss of the spiritual community through sinful behaviour is described as a murderous act, killing not only father and mother, but also the anchoress's children who are her good works. Representations of imagined communities, be they religious or secular, importantly shape the ways by which the solitary reader addresses her own position with regard to the development of her inner feelings and her growing desire for God.

Social networks: secular communities

Although at times *Ancrene Wisse* loses its close focus on the anchoritic recipients by offering material for the use of a multiple audience, some passages on the other hand construct a precise representation of real social exchanges, which might have been necessary for, or a threat to, the conduct of an anchoritic mode of life. Part II, 'The Outer Senses', admonishes its primary readership against the dangers that inevitable social contacts within the confines of the anchorhold make possible: *Ouer al þat ȝe habbeð iwriten in ower riwle of þinges wið uten, þis point þis article of wel to beo bitunde, ich wulle beo best ihalden* (p. 34, fo. 15*a*/8–10): 'Above everything that you have written in your rule about outward things, I would have this point, this article about being well-enclosed, best kept' (part II, p. 71). The space of the *reclusorium*, whatever its size and the number of its inhabitants, enables the performance of activities inappropriate to their religious standing. Inevitable interaction with the outside world, often taking place in the parlour, through its carefully described windows, is fraught with dangers, which are closely addressed in *Ancrene Wisse*. One becomes aware that the preservation of solitariness is hard to come by in an environment where social contacts are inevitable. A codification of what is or is not permissible is listed in detail, with reference to the spaces in which those activities can take place. The parlour and church windows play distinct functions, with different levels of permissibility with regard to social interaction. From the parlour window the anchoress should let her maidservant do the talking with her guests, only waving occasionally to them. The church window, on the other hand, fills a sacred function by allowing the sight of the Eucharist: but by performing that function, it also makes visible the parish community attending the Eucharistic consecration at specific times. Indirectly, the anchoress might feel a sense of belonging while witnessing those communal performances. At other times, it was possible for some of the members of this community to come dangerously close to the *reclusorium* by means of its other windows. For those who were well intentioned and useful to the livelihood of the anchoress, like a spiritual guide or confessor, a proper mode of behaviour is stipulated,

while emphasis is placed on what the anchoress should or should not do to avoid unnecessary and dangerous social interactions. While the ultimate aim is to flee the world community, possibilities such as kissing a man or making the anchorhouse a space where intensive gossip develops are real enough:

> Me seið up on ancren þat euch meast haueð an ald cwene to feden hire earen, a meaðelilt þe meaðeleð hire alle þe talen of þe lond, a rikelot þe cakeleð al þat ha sið ant hereð, swa þat me seið i bisahe: 'From mulne ant from chepinge, from smiððe ant from ancre hus me tidinge bringeð.' (p. 48, fo. 23*a*/14–19)
>
> It is said of anchoresses that almost everyone of them has some old woman to feed her ears, a gossip who tells her all the local tid-bits, a magpie who cackles about all that she sees and hears, so that the saying now runs, 'You can hear the news from a mill or market, from a smithy or an anchorhouse.' (part II, p. 81)

Representations of social networks and the spaces they create play a part in the process of constructing the solitary self. As a result, it is important to take into consideration the particular conditions in which that self is fashioned. The social visibility and the more general politics which mark thirteenth-century solitary life charge it with images representing exchanges, communication, gossip, and transactions. Leading a solitary life in the thirteenth century is not a lonely enterprise, but one carried out for the sake of several communities, physical and spiritual: the immediate community of the parish and the diocese, for which special permission and physical support (cell, food, wood) are necessary, and the larger community of Christians, for whom a life devoted to meditation and prayer infers important spiritual benefits. *Ancrene Wisse* projects a model in which this sense of interaction with the outside world is clearly explicated. It does not occlude the possible dangers of such interactions or of an excess of them, but it is well aware of the necessity of some interactions with those communities for the survival of the model.

Whether social interactions are fought against or connoted positively in *Ancrene Wisse*, their imprint is forcefully encoded in the psyche of its readers. It is significant also that in some parts of the treatise the past of its readers is assumed to be that of former noble ladies, or individuals belonging to the landed gentry, who had had responsibilities within the household, and had entertained guests and given feasts in the not so distant past. The prescriptions against the

conduct of secular transactions in part VIII echo those necessary to run the community of a noble household.

> Na chaffere ne driue ȝe. Ancre þat is chepilt, þat is, buð forte sullen efter biȝete ha chepeð hire sawle þe chapmon of helle. Þing þah þat ha wurcheð ha mei, þurh hire meistres read, for hire neode sullen. Hali men sumhwile liueden bi hare honden.
>
> Nawt deore dehtren ne wite ȝe in ower hus of oðer monne þinges: ne ahte, ne claðes, ne boistes, ne chartres, scoren ne cyrographes, ne þe chirch uestemenz, ne þe calices, bute neode oðer strengðe hit makie, oðer muchel eie. Of swuch witunge is muchel vuel ilumpen ofte siðen. (pp. 213–14, fo. 113*a*/8–18)
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> Do not conduct business. An anchoress fond of bargaining, that is, one who buys to sell for gain, sells her soul to the merchant of hell. Things that she makes, with her director's advice, she may sell for her needs. Holy people often used to live by their hands.
>
> Dear daughters, do not look after other people's things in your house: possessions, clothes, boxes, charters, accounts, indentures, church vestments or chalices—unless need or violence makes it necessary, or great fear. From such guarding much evil has often come about. (part VIII, p. 201)

One ought to note how the comments made here imply that, even though the primary audience *Ancrene Wisse* addresses does not suffer from the deficiencies listed, it is nevertheless assumed that anchoresses elsewhere do participate in business ventures, and interact actively with medieval mercantile society.

Anchoresses, religious communities, and the household

Business interactions of this nature are not recommended. However, their imprint on the psyche of the female reader is significant and seems to suggest an anchoritic model shaped by a market economy. The model anchoress participates in a business transaction with her community, offering in exchange for her permanent and stable place of abode—and the means to sustain her physical life—a spiritual counterpart in the form of prayers and meditations. The good anchoress therefore needs to use discernment in order to check whether the ventures she participates in will make her a better spiritual commodity in her community. There is a price attached to the

position of the anchoress, and the regulations offered in *Ancrene Wisse* enable the anchoress to measure her own position in terms of her spiritual marketability.

Recently, serious attention has been drawn towards the succinct, but nevertheless very significant, references to both the English and Anglo-Norman language communities to which the readers of *Ancrene Wisse* belong. In part I, 'Devotion', anchoresses are invited to read from English or French texts, while further on, in part IV, prayers can be made, according to the treatise, in one's own language, thus implying a multilingual anchoritic audience at the time of composition or revision. Such a comment rings with a new tone in light of the work by Jocelyn Wogan-Browne on women's literary culture in Anglo-Norman. The shifts from a single recipient, to the three anchoresses, and finally, in the Corpus version, to the community of English anchoresses are symptomatic. In fact, much of part IV, 'Temptations', is community-orientated and the most significant addition in the Corpus manuscript comes as a natural development to this communal concern:

> 3e beoð, þe ancren of englond, swa feole togederes—twenti nuðe oðer ma. Godd i god ow mutli, þat meast grið is among, meast annesse, ant anrednesse, ant sometreadnesse of anred lif efter a riwle, swa þat alle teoð an alle iturnt anesweis, ant nan frommard oðer—efter þat word is. For þi 3e gað wel forð ant spedeð in ower wei, for euch is wiþward oþer in an manere of liflade, as þah 3e weren an cuuent of lundene ant of oxnefort, of schreobsburi, oðer of chester. þear as alle beoð an wið an imeane manere. ant wið uten singularite—þat isanful frommardschipe, lah þing i religiun, for hit to warpeð annesse ant manere imeane, þat ah to beon in ordre. Þis nu þenne þat 3e beoð alle as an cuuent is ower hehe fame, þis is godd icweme, þis is nunan wide cuð, swa þet ower cuuent biginneð to spreaden toward englondes ende. 3e beoð as þe moderhus þat heo beoð of istreonet, 3e beoð ase wealle. (p. 130, fos. 69*a*/13–69*b*/1)
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> You are, you anchoresses of England, very many together—twenty, now, or more. May God increase you in goodness—you who live in the greatest peace, the greatest oneness and constancy, and in the concord of a steadfast life: following a single rule, so that all pull one way, and all are turned in the same direction, not away from one another—so it is said. And so you are journeying well and making good speed along your way; for you are all turned toward one another in a single manner of living, as though you were a single convent, in London, Oxford, Shrewsbury or Chester. Since all are one, with a common way of life and without singularity—which is a foul turning away, a low thing in religion, for it breaks apart oneness and a common way of life, which there ought to be in an order—the fact you are like a single convent now makes you greatly honored; it pleases God and is now widely known, so that your convent is beginning to spread toward the end of England. You are like the mother-house from which they have sprung; you are like the spring. (part IV, p. 141)

The Corpus manuscript develops the sense of community that is part of the construction of thirteenth-century solitariness to the greatest extent. The anchoresses find stability in their solitary enterprise by being offered a paradigm for common identification, so that a sense of belonging to community strengthens their identities as solitaries. Not only do they together constitute a convent, but they are also described as forming an order. Although the entire passage should be read metaphorically, as it is clearly indicated when Jesus is described as the prior of that convent, and further reference is made to the cloister as the cloister of heaven, it nevertheless presents the reader with a strong sense of community, and, in view of this passage and other pieces of evidence, it is surely valid to argue for the importance of how community shapes the self in *Ancrene Wisse* in particular, and in thirteenth-century anchoritic culture more generally.

However, at a literal level too, a sense of community, and of the preservation of healthy relationships between its members are frequently expressed by the circulation of written or oral information about its members. Messengers play a significant role in conveying oral or written messages between sisters. The *Ancrene Wisse*-author seems well aware of the means by which information circulates between anchoresses when talking about the content of those messages. A sister should never speak evil about another sister, but she should nevertheless *warni oþer þurh ful siker sondesmon, sweteliche ant luueliche as hire leoue suster, of þing þat ha misnimeð 3ef ha hit wat to soðe* (p. 131, fo. 69*b*/24–7): 'admonish the other through a very trustworthy messenger, sweetly and lovingly as her dear sister, about anything that she does wrongly if she knows it to be truth' (part IV, p. 141). Despite the absence of conventual space, some of the points raised in the text about friction between sisters reveal many of the practical difficulties that all communities face in their daily routine. There would appear to be a sufficient circulation of information between the *Ancrene Wisse* sisters to allow the development of a set of networks that make possible an exchange of personal, intimate,

feelings. Despite not living together within the physical space of a convent, *Ancrene Wisse* offers plenty of evidence that, for the anchoritic readers of the text, the sense of community is a significant signpost for the delineation of their spiritual life, as well as impacting on the way they configure their daily life. The address to *leoue sustren* ('dear sisters') in several passages of the text (especially from part IV onwards) reinforces this sense of belonging.

Secular communities, the community of English anchoresses, language, and religious communities all play a part in shaping the anchoritic model that is offered in this rule. One additional community, that of the household, receives sustained and detailed attention in part VIII, 'The Outer Rule'. This part contextualizes the anchoress in her daily activities, as she surveys and controls the activities of her servants. *Ancrene Wisse* provides information about the practical aspects of her life in her new household, whose architectural space, the anchorhouse, is markedly more spacious than the small cubicles described in liturgical ceremonies of enclosures or represented in manuscript illuminations, such as, for instance, Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 79 (fo. 96a). With unflagging energy, the text covers many aspects of the roles each should play in this particular community. Prescriptions on food and drink, on gifts and possessions, on clothing and occupations, on haircutting and bloodletting, on the rules of conduct for the maidservants, as well as on the teaching by the lady anchoresses of the maidservants, serve to make this final part of the treatise very similar to books of conduct designed for noble households. Despite the idiosyncrasies which mark the anchoritic mode of life, it is easy to find similarities between some of the activities predicated in the treatise and secular activities which a noble lady would undertake in her own household:

> Eauer me is leouere se ȝe doð greattre werkes. Ne makie ȝe nane purses forte freondin, ow wið bute to þeo þat ower meistre ȝeueð ow his leaue, ne huue, ne blodbinde of seole ne laz buten leaue . . . As of oðre þinges, kun oðer cuðde hu ofte ȝe underuengen, hu longe ȝe edheolden: tendre of cun ne limpeð nawt ancre beonne . . . Amites ant parures, wordliche leafdis mahen inoh wurchen. Ant ȝef ȝe ham makieð, ne makie ȝe þrof na mustreisun. (pp. 215–16, fos. 114*a*/16–114*b*/2)
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> I would always rather you do the more coarse kinds of handiwork. Do not make purses to win friends, but only for those for whom your director gives you leave, nor caps, silk bandages or lace without leave . . . As for other things, how often you should receive friends or family, and how long keep them with you: family feeling is not proper for an anchoress . . . Ladies in the world can make enough keepsakes and collarbands; but if you make them, do not make them to show off. (part VIII, p. 203)

Analogies to ladies in the world are recurrent, and not innocent, in this part of the treatise. The anchoress's role in controlling discipline within the household bears significantly upon the way she imposes proper codes of conduct upon her maidservants. In fact, the role of maidservants in enabling the solitary mode of life in the middle of a community cannot be stressed enough, since they are the gateway for information to come in and out of the anchorhouse. The circulation of information, which they have the power to transmit in and out of the anchoritic space, may well determine the spiritual quality of the life experienced by their ladies within. Hence the care with which the lady anchoress needs to control the moods of her maidservants, bring them to peace with one another, asking them to kneel in front of her and to acknowledge their faults. Concern for their education in general, and their literacy, is well documented elsewhere in part VIII. In fact, as the author suggests, this final 'stucche' or branch, which should be read each week to the maids, serves as a mini-rule for them, within the larger rule. The good running of the household relies heavily on the ways by which the anchoress controls the code of conduct of her inferiors in the household. The healthy development of the microscopic community that inhabits the anchorhold necessitates a set of prescriptive rules which the anchoress, as undisputed hierarchical superior, needs to implement forcefully. The final part of *Ancrene Wisse* makes a strong case for a rule written for a religious, hierarchically organized, household.

Conclusion

The theme of community, which is the concern of this essay, foregrounds an aspect of anchoritism which is not immediately visible when approaching this text for the first time. The aim is not to deny the solitary aspects of the anchoritic life as described in *Ancrene Wisse*. On the contrary, the focus on communities in this text serves to demonstrate what the concept of solitariness in the

thirteenth century entails, how it has to be negotiated, and how solitaries themselves need to configure strategies for preserving their solitary status, within a bustling, mercantile medieval society, whose diverse activities took place not very far from the windows of the anchorhold.

In fact, some of the other early Middle English texts written for women also participate in defining this solitary status. The virgin martyrs' lives offer models of women on their own heroically facing religious and political adversity. *Hali Meiðhad*'s and *Sawles Warde*'s dominant discourses are about sealed bodies and moral intactness. The Wooing group in addition shows what potential for performance solitary life in the thirteenth century offered. Those early Middle English writings for women, like *Ancrene Wisse*, speak in favour of a spirituality of enclosure. However, in doing that, they also point to the tensions which such a life entailed, with the impossible aim of preserving spiritual, moral, and bodily enclosure in a world marked by the interactions of anchoresses with the literal and spiritual communities which constituted medieval society.

Note

1. All references to the Middle English version of *Ancrene Wisse*, by page, folio, and line number, are to the following edition: *Ancrene Wisse, Edited from MS. Corpus Christi College Cambridge 402*, ed. J. R. R. Tolkien, EETS 249 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962). I have provided modern punctuation and expanded all abbreviations silently. Translations, with reference to part and page, are from *Anchoritic Spirituality: Ancrene Wisse and Associated Works*, ed. Anne Savage and Nicholas Watson, The Classics of Western Spirituality (New York: Paulist Press, 1991).

References and suggested reading

Barratt, Alexandra. 'Anchoritic Aspects of *Ancrene Wisse*', *Medium Aevum*, n.s. 49 (1980), 32–56. This essay examines the issue of what it meant to be an anchoress and whether *Ancrene Wisse* is really an anchoritic treatise.

Cannon, Christopher. 'The Form of the Self: *Ancrene Wisse* and Romance', *Medium Aevum*, n.s. 70 (2001), 47–65. This essay offers a convincing exploration of the form of *Ancrene Wisse* and the way it serves for the representation of the bodily self of the anchoress.

Dobson, Eric J. *The Origins of Ancrene Wisse*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976. Even if Dobson's answers have been superseded, his study ploughs the field that all subsequent studies on authorship, recipients, and institutional and cultural contexts have to investigate.

Georgianna, Linda. *The Solitary Self: Individuality in the Ancrene Wisse*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1981. This book examines notions of the self in the anchoritic context in general, and in *Ancrene Wisse* in particular.

Millett, Bella, with the assistance of George B. Jack and Yoko Wada. *Ancrene Wisse, the Katherine Group, and the Wooing Group*. Annotated Bibliographies of Old and Middle English Literature 1353–8675 vol. 2. Woodbridge: D. S. Brewer, 1996. The starting-point for any serious research on the *Ancrene Wisse* group.

Millett, Bella. 'The Origins of *Ancrene Wisse*: New Answers, New Questions', *Medium Aevum*, n.s. 61 (1992), 206–28. This piece should be read as a follow-up to Dobson's. It challenges Augustinian authorship, as well as the addressee of the three sisters living in the Deerfold near Wigmore. It suggests Dominican authorship, with a date of composition after 1221.

Renevey, Denis. 'Enclosed Desires: A Study of the Wooing Group'. In William F. Pollard and Robert Boenig, eds., *Mysticism and Spirituality in Medieval England*. Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1997, pp. 39–62. This article touches upon the notion of enclosure and the psychological paradigm that it sets for the performance of meditative prayers.

Renevey, Denis. 'Figuring Household Space in *Ancrene Wisse* and *The Doctrine of the Hert*'. In David Spurr and Cornelia Tschichold, eds., *The Space of English*. Swiss Papers in English Language and Literature 17. Tübingen: Günter Narr, forthcoming. This is a companion piece to the one offered as part of this volume. It explores further communities by putting attention on the role of space, more particularly household space, in *Ancrene Wisse* and *The Doctrine of the Hert*.

Wada, Yoko, ed. *A Companion to Ancrene Wisse*. Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2003. This book offers some of the most up-to-date research by leading scholars on several aspects of *Ancrene Wisse*. In the context of this volume, the articles by Watson on the use of *Ancrene Wisse* by later medieval authors and by Millett on 'The Genre of *Ancrene Wisse*' deserve particular attention.

Wogan-Browne, Jocelyn. *Saints' Lives and Women's Literary Culture: Virginity and its Authorizations.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001. A groundbreaking book on women's literary culture, with special emphasis on the Anglo-Norman material.

1. Centres of literary and historical significance in medieval England. Map by Niall Brady and Michael Potterton, courtesy of the Discovery Programme, Dublin.