

READING WOMEN IN LATE MEDIEVAL ENGLAND

READING WOMEN IN LATE MEDIEVAL ENGLAND

By

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines and identifies the ways in which devotional activities became feminized textual practices in the later Middle Ages. Tracing the vicissitudes of elite women's involvement in the production and dissemination of a series of devotional texts, *Reading Women in Late Medieval England* offers a new critical lens through which to better understand women's involvement in the literary culture of the late Middle Ages by focusing on the historical figure of the aristocratic laywoman reader. It pursues her influence across a generic range of devotional material in English and French, from female hagiography to didactic prose to prayer, including translations undertaken by women. The texts under consideration here, ranging in date from the mid-fifteenth to the early sixteenth centuries, represent the most popular books in medieval libraries and arose in a context of growing vernacular literacy and a movement toward affective forms of piety. Drawing on a number of fifteenth-century sources, including wills, household accounts and library inventories, the project recognizes the fundamental and specific engagement of women with some of the most important developments in vernacular literature, late medieval spirituality and book culture.

Falling easily into two sections, the first two chapters of this study focus on manuscripts commissioned for or by women readers and examine the ways in which the presence of specific women readers enters into the text. The second two chapters shift the focus to early printed books and take up the issues surrounding the presence of the woman reader as patron and the development of

her cachet with respect to devotional literature made available to a broad and diverse audience. Reading women back into the leaves of the books they read, owned and commissioned, I investigate their presence via two prevalent metaphors: that of speaking and that of seeing. The voice and visibility of the elite woman reader, available in rare and rarely read texts, allows me to reconsider and refigure late medieval devotional literature not as a genre fashioned *for* women, but as a genre fashioned *by* women.

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This study examines the reading communities that arise from the shared experience of an encounter with the book. It is my pleasure to acknowledge the institutions and individuals who have made up my own reading community and who have shared their own experience during my encounter with *this* book.

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INTRODUCTION

Reading women reading: from image to text

*For a woman that can rede may better knowe the peryls of the
sowle and her sauement than she that can nought of it.*

--Geoffrey de la Tour, *The Book of the Knight of the Tour Landry*

*... as a man may noght see that mysseth hise eighen,
Na moore kan no clerk but if he caughte it first thorough bokes.
Although men made bokes, god was the maister,
And Seint Spirit the samplarie, and seide what men sholde write.
And right as sight serveth a man to se the heighe strete,
Right so lereth lettrure lewed men to reson.*

--William Langland, *Piers Plowman*

This study begins with an image. The recto of folio 34 of London, British Library MS Royal 2 a.xviii (commonly known as *The Beaufort Hours*) shows a typical late medieval depiction of the Virgin at the Annunciation: kneeling before an open book, she is interrupted at her reading by Gabriel's auspicious announcement (figure 1.1). Below this image, there appears a historiated initial with an illumination showing a woman in fifteenth-century dress kneeling before an open book, mimicking the example of the Virgin in the illustration above. The communication flow of the Annunciation scene is interrupted by the woman in the miniature, for it is she to whom Mary returns her gaze, not Gabriel. Critics agree that the woman is likely the book's patroness, Margaret Beauchamp.¹ Rebecca

¹ The Beaufort Hours comprises two sections. The first was probably produced for John Beaufort and his wife Margaret Holland around 1410 and is thought to have been part of a psalter that is now in Rennes, Bibliothèque

Krug, in her recent book-length study on the role of the medieval family and family structures in women's literate practice, sees in this image a didactic purpose that instructs the reader in the visual harmony between the reader of the book, the image of the reader of the book, and the Virgin (72). She suggests that depictions such as these allowed mothers to "teach their daughters to read not only by living example [...] but also by identifying themselves with specific pictures in their books" (73). In this way, the image of Mary and the patron-portrait mimicking Mary's reading function as an exemplum of pious literate practice with Mary acting as a role model for laywomen readers, both inside and outside of the text. Indeed, the iconography of Mary's association with books is most often understood in terms of its influence on the perception of laywomen readers in the late medieval period. The presentation of Mary as a regular reader lends respectability to laywomen occupying themselves with books.

There is, however, a second influence to consider: that of Margaret Beauchamp on the image of the Virgin. As D.H. Green and Susan Groag Bell

Municipale. On the provenance of the manuscript see Kathleen Scott, *Later Gothic Manuscripts, 1390-1490* (2:127-32); Edith Rickert, "The So-Called Beaufort Hours and the York Psalter"; and Michael K. Jones and Malcolm G. Underwood, *The King's Mother* (32). Folio 23, verso, depicts an Annunciation that also includes the figures of the two original patron-owners at the base of the image kneeling at prie-dieu with open books; it is considered one of the finer examples of English painting (figure 1.2).

The second half of the manuscript is a book of hours thought to have been commissioned by Margaret Beauchamp, John Beaufort's daughter-in-law, in the early 1440s from a London artist named William Abel. Entries in the calendar were probably made by or for her with later entries referring to the near relatives of her daughter, Margaret Beaufort, who inherited the book on her mother's death.

have noticed, before the fourteenth century, Mary at the Annunciation was not portrayed with a book but instead was most often depicted occupying herself with the more domestic tasks of spinning or weaving. It is in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries that images of Mary reading at the Annunciation, and at other occasions, begin to proliferate.² Green observes that while “there is no reference to Mary reading at the Annunciation in the gospels” the appearance of depictions of her reading coincides with “the rise of lay literacy, especially on the part of women” (121).³ Both Green and Groag Bell suggest that these two developments are not unrelated. The appearance of Margaret Beauchamp within the pages of her own book of hours serves as an image of self-definition that positions her in a larger world of piety and knowledge, characterizing her as devout and learned and

² See especially Susan Groag Bell, “Medieval Women Book Owners” and D.H. Green, *Women Readers in the Middle Ages* for the popularity of this image, not only in England but also on the continent.

Laurel Amtower suggests that the source for the shift from Mary spinning to Mary reading at the Annunciation is found in the late thirteenth-century text, pseudo-Bonaventura’s *Meditationes vitae Christ*. Nicholas Love’s fifteenth-century translation, *Mirror of the Blessed Lyf of Jesu Crist*, explains that when the angel Gabriel appeared, Mary was in her private chambers at prayer and “in hire meditationes peraventur redyng the prophecie of ysaie” (qtd. in Amtower 66).

As I will discuss shortly, the increase in depictions of Marian reading in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries corresponds to a similar set of images showing Anne teaching her daughter how to read. For more on this specific image see Wendy Scase, “St. Anne and the Education of the Virgin: Literary and Artistic Traditions and their Implications”, and Miriam Gill, “Female piety and impiety: Selected images of women in wall paintings in England after 1300.”

³ See D.H. Green for the associations of Mary with reading in the apocryphal tradition (120-121).

On the rise of lay literacy in the Middle Ages see Michael Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record: England 1066-1307*; Janet Coleman, *Medieval Readers and Writers, 1350-1400*; M.B. Parkes, “The Literacy of the Laity”; and Paul Saenger, “Books of Hours and the Reading Habits of the Later Middle Ages.”

documenting her use of the book, as well as indicating her possession of a valuable and expensive object.⁴ While the appearance of Mary in a book of prayers may work to remind women readers of the female ideal to which they should aspire, Mary's novel appearance as a reader herself may well be a reflection, as well as an endorsement, of the contemporary practice of literate noblewomen who were patronizing books, and the images appearing in them. In other words, Margaret Beauchamp, and other women readers like her, may be acting as a model for the Virgin.

This study is informed by the hypothesis that the increasingly popular depiction of Marian reading that corresponds with the striking increase in the number, presence and visibility of women readers in late medieval culture cannot be coincidental. It applies this hypothesis not to the iconography of reading women, but to the devotional texts that women were reading; in other words, it seeks in texts the influence of their women readers. The scholarship of the last two decades has emphasized the importance of late medieval women as owners and testators of books, and patrons of both secular and religious literature.⁵ In this

⁴ For more on images of book owners as self-definition, see Lucy Freeman Sandler, "The Image of the Book-owner in the Fourteenth Century: Three Cases of Self-definition." The book-owners Sandler discusses are all male.

⁵ Among the many important studies of medieval women's reading habits and book ownership see particularly Susan Groag Bell, "Medieval Women Book Owners: Arbiters of Lay Piety and Ambassadors of Culture"; Julia Boffey, "Women authors and women's literacy in fourteenth- and fifteenth-century England"; Mary C. Erler, *Women, Reading, and Piety in Late Medieval England*; D.H. Green, *Women Readers in the Middle Ages*; Ralph Hanna III, "Some Norfolk Women and their Books, ca. 1390-1440"; Anne M. Hutchison, "Devotional Reading in the Monastery and in the Late Medieval Household";

study I focus exclusively on women's ownership and patronage of devotional literature in the vernacular, in part because as a category it represents the lion's share of texts with which medieval women were most closely associated.⁶ Carol Meale in her seminal study of the "representational witnesses" of medieval women's books has found that the evidence of patronage and wills shows "religion was by far the dominant reading interest of medieval women" (137). My own study is anchored by the understanding that medieval women typically demonstrate the prevalence of reading with a spiritual intention. Indeed, it is a critical commonplace that women played a particularly active role in the production and dissemination of vernacular devotional literature in late medieval England. Academic studies of the reading habits of medieval women are doing much to uncover the far-reaching networks of female textual communities that flourished during the late Middle Ages, while at the same time, scholars are recovering histories of medieval women's book ownership, library building and patronage activities that are the necessary complement of their reading habits. Building on the important bibliographic work that has identified books women

Carol M. Meale, "'... alle the bokes that I haue of latyn, englich, and frensch': laywomen and their books in late medieval England"; and Felicity Riddy, "Women talking about the things of God: a late medieval sub-culture."

⁶ It must be noted that female textual culture is not separate from lay culture, though the movement of devotional reading habits from religious women to the laity is marked by a promotion of laywomen in particular. Importantly, the laity seems to have taken its cue from religious women; Vincent Gillespie notes that the laity "came to increasingly occupy a position in the educational hierarchy similar to that which had long been occupied by women religious" (4). It is beyond the scope of the present study to attend to the enormous influence of religious women on readers of both genders, but it is noteworthy that women seem to be at the forefront of a new readership.

owned, commissioned, and translated, I seek to nuance our understanding of women readers and women reading in the Middle Ages by looking to those books themselves, at the way they are presented to the reader, in what form, and under what precepts and influences they operate.

I concentrate specifically on the literary activities of the aristocratic laywoman reader in this project, though I acknowledge the numerous studies that have shown the important role of religious women in the development of a female literary culture in late medieval England and how the reading tastes of women outside the cloister were greatly influenced by women inside the cloister. As David Bell puts it, “it was the nuns [...] who stood at the fore-front of English spirituality” (76), and scholars such as Meale, Mary Erler and Felicity Riddy have already demonstrated that the movement of books between religious and laywomen reveals an overlap in the reading tastes of women within certain reading communities. Erler reconstructs what she calls the “social context for female reading” by tracing the networks of women’s book ownership and exchange “across the divide of secular and religious life” and observes that the divide is superseded by the strength of female friendships among laywomen and women religious (*Women, Reading and Piety*, 25). She speculates that “the greater freedom and greater wealth of laywomen” allowed them to obtain books that nuns then maintained in convent libraries (“The Exchange of Books”, 361). Similarly, Riddy suggests that the “literary culture of nuns in the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries and that of devout gentlewoman not only overlapped but

were more or less indistinguishable” and that laywomen were guided in their reading by the reading habits of nuns (110). This female solidarity in reading is not surprising in a culture where women in religious orders housed guests, educated their boarders and shared their churches with the laity. I do not deny that devout laywomen were imitating the reading habits and preferences of their enclosed sisters—secular women with money and leisure often imitated the routines of the abbey by scheduling daily seclusion for reading and prayer, for example⁷—but I work to distinguish aristocratic laywomen from women religious in this study by concentrating on the public nature of their literate practice.

As Karen K. Jambeck has observed, patterns of literary patronage and book ownership show that women who were key players in maintaining and strengthening the medieval nobility also sponsored the production of a variety of devotional works (244); I consider here the extent to which women were aware of the public significance of their literary patronage and reading practices.

Jambeck’s overview of the patronage networks of medieval noblewomen shows that women tended to support the production of texts—most often of a religious or devotional nature—that sustained and reflected ideals and values that were

⁷ A record of the daily routine of the public and private devotions of Cecily Neville, Duchess of York and mother of Edward IV and Richard III, survives in a post-1485 household ordinance and has been analysed in detail by C.A.J. Armstrong. Lady Margaret Beaufort, mother of Henry VII and a cousin of Cecily Neville, also maintained a rigorous schedule of daily devotions modeled on monastic habits, which her confessor, John Fisher, details in her funeral sermon. See my Chapters 2 and 4, respectively for further discussions of the personal piety of these women.

important to them.⁸ As patrons of manuscripts and printed books and as guardians of their families' spiritual welfare, medieval noblewomen were, in Groag Bell's term, "arbiters of lay piety" within society as a whole. Furthermore, medieval literary and devotional activities were becoming increasingly associated with a community of women whose cultural cachet was class-, rather than gender-based, not least because medieval noblewomen had the means to own books and the leisure to read them. I contend that aristocratic women's engagement with written texts became a socially and publicly influential means of providing religious and moral instruction to a broader audience, particularly as manuscript production began to give way to the print trade.

In some respects, then, this is a study of medieval women's power as public authority.⁹ As Jennifer Bryan helpfully points out, women who were denied official positions of government in medieval religious culture—they could

⁸ Jambeck traces patronage activities through a matrilineal line in several families, including the family of Margaret Beaufort, who is the subject of Chapters 3 and 4 in the present study. See Karen K. Jambeck, "Patterns of Women's Literary Patronage: England, 1200-ca. 1475." See also the collection *The Cultural Patronage of Medieval Women*, edited by June Hall McCash, to which Jambeck's article belongs.

⁹ I use the term "power as public authority" deliberately, following Erler and Maryanne Kowaleski's use of it in the introduction to their collection of essays *Women and Power in the Middle Ages*. They note a trend in feminist scholarship that is working to broaden the traditional view of power as public authority to encompass "the ability to act effectively, to influence people or decisions, and to achieve goals", thus shifting the definition of power to include private forms of authority (2). This definition has informed my understanding and my reading of medieval women's use of literary patronage as compensatory power, though I understand patronage as a public activity even if it does not bring with it an officially sanctioned authority.

not participate fully in power structures such as the Church or the guilds¹⁰—may well have “been attracted to other activities that would allow them to demonstrate their influence” (19). It has been suggested that the exclusion of women from participating in spiritual and intellectual life in the Middle Ages led them to involve themselves in more private devotional reading (Groag Bell, 160). In this study I argue, however, that their participation as both readers and patrons in literate culture becomes a public act. Cecily Neville, for instance, who is well known to scholars for her devotional reading, would repeat and discuss publicly with her supper companions in the evening, the devotions she had read privately in the morning, effectively displaying and explicating her private reading activities in a public, social space. Late medieval devotional practice was often predicated on the assumption that public displays such as communal reading could serve as the basis for a private, devotional experience.¹¹ Literary patronage, always already public in the way that it announces its patrons’ involvement in the production of a work, represented a further opportunity for women to exercise influence over reading material. Women could establish a foothold in the production and reception of books and exert some measure of control over what was available, to themselves and to others, to read. Patronage was one of the few

¹⁰ Eileen Power’s pioneering work provides a good general discussion of the position of medieval women in the collection of her essays *Medieval Women*; see especially “Medieval ideas about women” (1-26).

¹¹ See Joyce Coleman, *Public Reading and the Reading Public in Late Medieval England and France*, for an in-depth study of the prevalence of public reading in late medieval Europe. See also Rebecca Krug, *Reading Families: Women’s Literate Practice in Late Medieval England*, for medieval women’s collective reading.

realms where women were allowed a public voice and an opportunity to make active contributions to literate culture. As June Hall McCash observes, there is some suggestion that women's cultural patronage¹² was directed toward "showing women in a positive light in counterpoint to the misogynistic outpourings from male clerics" (34); in Chapter 1, for example, I explore this idea as it applies to female hagiography and the desire to disseminate information about saints whose lives demonstrated the fortitude and eloquence of women. Women's literary activities, I argue, work to provide evidence of women's intrinsic value to society in late medieval England. This study recognizes the fundamental and specific engagement of women with some of the most important developments in vernacular literature, late medieval spirituality and book culture.

Because literary patronage can be difficult to assess—works may be dedicated to women, addressed to them, or written for their benefit, but these impulses do not automatically imply a commission—I have opted to identify the women in this study as readers, though I use "readers" as a blanket term that includes literary patrons. Patronage activities are an important aspect of reading for the women on whom I focus here, though I acknowledge that it is often difficult to pinpoint the nature and extent to which a patron may have been involved in the production of a work. For example, in Chapters 3 and 4, I discuss

¹² The term "cultural patronage" takes into account the multi-faceted nature of women's religious activity. While literary patronage is my main concern in this study, it is part of a greater whole that includes women's sponsorship of artists (including manuscript illustrators), religious communities, and the founding and support of educational institutions.

the patronage activities of Lady Margaret Beaufort, who was a prolific sponsor of both devotional and secular literature, and of scholars and academic institutions.

In 1489, William Caxton dedicated his translation of the secular romance *Blanchardyn and Eglantine* to her, which he says he translated at her “commandement”, though, as Green points out, “this could be no more than an advertising boost, for he also says that this same book [...] was long before sold by him to her” (199). Green’s suggestion that the initiative for the work belongs to Caxton and not to Lady Margaret, despite the cachet her name carries for Caxton, effectively downplays her role in its production and shifts the focus away from the significant role that women played in the production and reception of books in the Middle Ages. I aim in this study to shift the focus back to women, elite women especially, and their contributions to the development of vernacular devotional literature. The difficulty in discerning whether the dedicatee of a work is an active patron—that is, a patron who chooses what should be made available in book form and who exercises some measure of control over what she reads—or a passive one—someone to whom a work has been addressed or presented with the hope for a future commission—is one that I concede, though I do not dismiss any text out of hand because there is a lack of explicit evidence of women’s involvement in its production.¹³ I employ a broad range of fifteenth-century sources, such as wills, household accounts, dedications and library inventories, in

¹³ In the case of Lady Margaret Beaufort, there are extensive household accounts that attest to her direct involvement in the production of books. See Susan Powell, “Lady Margaret Beaufort and her Books”. Powell uses the accounts evidence to draw up a picture of Lady Margaret’s reading habits.

order to establish the provenance of a female literary authority with specific texts but I maintain that both active and passive patrons demonstrate their influence over the texts they sponsor or inspire.

Oftentimes it can seem like an unwritten law of literary scholarship that attributions of female influence in particular require stringent proofs. For women, the presence of a name is necessary (even in a milieu of anonymous authorship) and signature evidence is even better, despite the frequent impossibility of knowing what an inscription might mean.¹⁴ A name in a book can mean authorship, ownership, or it might simply be meaningless marginalia. Nonetheless, scholars require such evidence as proof of female readership (as well as authorship) and this proof is often evaluated on an ascending scale: a name is good, a signature is better, especially if it matches another signature in another document, which is better still if it is a legal document. I do not challenge general scholarly opinion regarding the ownership and readership of any of the texts that

¹⁴ See Peggy Kamuf, "Writing Like a Woman," for a discussion of the threat that the ruthless interrogation of the female signature poses to feminist literary criticism and readings of gender, especially as it pertains to women's writing. Arguing for a post-structuralist liberation of the author from the text, Kamuf suggests that "if the inaugural gesture of this feminist criticism is the reduction of the literary work to its signature and to the tautological assumption that a feminine 'identity' is one which signs itself with a feminine name, then it will be able to produce only tautological statements of dubious value: women's writing is writing signed by a woman" (285-286). Alexandra Barratt also notes that for medieval scholars anonymous texts are usually assumed to be written by males, which is a contributing factor in the requirement for stringent proofs of female authorship; see "'The Flower and the Leaf' and 'The Assembly of Ladies': Is There a (Sexual) Difference?". While I concede Kamuf's and Barratt's points, for the purposes of this project I believe that the presence of a female name, if not a signature, matters insofar as it works to establish a historical female subject.

are the focus of this study although I acknowledge the tendency to employ manuscripts studies against investigations of women's literary activities because of conspicuous absences. My aim in this study is to read women back into the leaves of their books and to suggest, boldly, that the vernacular devotional literature of the late Middle Ages is not, as is generally acknowledged, a genre fashioned *for* women, but a genre fashioned *by* women.

I have already suggested that we can read the popular medieval image of Mary reading at the Annunciation as a visual representation of our understanding of women's influence on devotional literary culture. In order to contextualise further the important prevalence of books and devotional reading for medieval women, I turn now to another popular medieval image, that of Saint Anne teaching her daughter Mary to read (figure 1.3). As Wendy Scase and Miriam Gill have shown, the earliest examples of this image are English and the appearance and prevalence of it seems to reflect a "characteristically English devotion" to Anne and the Virgin as a child (Scase, 84).¹⁵ Pamela Sheingorn has also scrutinized the history of this image and argues that Anne teaching the Virgin to read sheds an important light on female literacy and its acquisition in the late Middle Ages. Because there is no textual counterpart in the Marian literary

¹⁵ Scase points to England's international reputation for devotion to Saint Anne with respect to the papal bull issued by Pope Urban VI in 1381, which made St. Anne's Day a feast of obligation in England. She observes that "devotion to the mother of Mary was something for which the English felt a particular pride and enthusiasm" (83).

tradition for Anne teaching her daughter to read¹⁶, both Sheingorn and Nichoas Orme suggest that the image reflects contemporary educational practices in which women (possibly mothers) instructed young girls in reading. Groag Bell agrees that it is probable that women had a role as educators in the home in the late Middle Ages and further suggests that women were also responsible for the purchasing of books (755-58).¹⁷ While it is unclear whether mothers were directly responsible for teaching their children to read, the idea that medieval artists, working without a textual muse for the image, imagined the education of the Virgin in this fashion has a bearing on the understanding of women's function as teachers.¹⁸ It seems to imply that women most likely played a crucial role in the early education of their children.

The role of the mother as a teacher of reading is especially apparent in a version of this image that appears in Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Douce 231, a book of hours dated to the second quarter of the fourteenth century (figure 1.3). In it Saint Anne holds her arms out to her daughter who stands beside her with an

¹⁶ See Wendy Scase, "St Anne and the Education of the Virgin: Literary and Artistic Traditions and their Implications" for a considered discussion of possible textual sources for the image (87-90).

¹⁷ See also Michael Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record* and Sharon D. Michalove, "The Education of Aristocratic Women in Fifteenth-Century England" for women being taught to read at home by mothers or mistresses.

¹⁸ Orme refers to Isabella de la Mote, who was mistress to Edward III's daughters Philipa and Elizabeth in 1340-1, which supports the argument that women, if not specifically mothers, were responsible for teaching girls to read (26).

See Michael Clanchy for his discussion of the image of the Virgin with Child and a book of hours. Clanchy notes that this is a parallel image to that of the education of the Virgin and suggests it is a depiction that idealizes mothers teaching their sons to read (13).

open book in which the word “Domine” is clearly visible. Each letter of the word is written in a separate frame and, as Scase points out, gives the appearance that Mary is using an alphabet book (94). First reading books were often books of hours and I suggest that the image works in a similar manner to the way in which the image of Mary at the Annunciation does.¹⁹ The depiction of Anne teaching her daughter to read in a book of hours operates as a model for the user of the book; a parallel is implied between the reader inside of the book—Mary reading and learning from a primer—and the reader outside of the book who may be doing the same. Michael Camille suggests that these images work didactically as “role models for mothers and daughters of aristocratic households, who seem to have been at the forefront of new literacy patterns” (35). Scase also notes that the Marian imitation these images invite highlights the importance of reading “as a personal means of entry to the story of salvation” (96). That is, readers see themselves relative to the Virgin and are not only educated in reading but in reading with a redemptive purpose. What is important to the present study is the way in which these images, often depicted in books owned and commissioned by aristocratic women, elide the acts of reading and devotion with matrilineal influences to instruct, but perhaps also to reflect, contemporary reading practices among elite medieval women.

¹⁹ See for example, Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars*, for the use of primers in the acquisition of literacy (222-3).

The use of “Domine” in the Douce 231 image may also be a reflection of the book in which it appears. *Domine labia mea aperies* [Lord, open my lips] from Psalm 1.17 is the first line of the office of the Virgin (Scase, 93).

A nagging question that is never far from examinations of medieval women's literary activities—and one that seems to take an unproductive hierarchical approach to the categories of literary activities—is one that addresses authorship. Numerous bibliographic studies suggest that many women in late medieval England were devoted readers, which tends to beg the question, why, then, were there not more women writers?²⁰ Mary Carruthers, in her seminal article “The Wife of Bath and the Painting of Lions”, posed this question more than three decades ago and it is one that scholars continue to ask with little promise of any definitive answer. As readers of Virginia Woolf know, this query is not exclusive to medieval studies but has been a prevalent topic for discussion in the larger field of feminist literary studies, though it is telling that even Woolf dismisses the literary value of the Paston letters, claiming that they display “no writing for writing's sake”, despite the fact that the collection of letters from a fifteenth-century gentry family contains the largest gathering of personal writings by one woman in Middle English (21).²¹ Even taking at face value the necessary conditions for writing that Woolf assiduously, and famously, identifies in her

²⁰ For records of women's use and book ownership see Susan H. Cavanaugh “A Study of Books Privately Owned in England: 1300-1450”; Margaret Deansley, “Vernacular Books in England in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries”; and Carol Meale.

Barratt identifies five women who wrote in Middle English in her anthology *Women's Writing in Middle English*; they are Julian of Norwich, Margery Kempe (both of whom dictated to an amanuensis) and the translators Juliana Berners, Dame Eleanor Hull and Lady Margaret Beaufort.

²¹ See Diana Watt, “No writing for writing's sake: The Language of Service and Household Rhetoric in the Letters of the Paston Women” for a deeper examination of the value of the Paston letters as women's writing. See also chapter 1 of Rebecca Krug, *Reading Families*.

essay “A Room of One’s Own”, it must be noted that the women who are the focus of my own study do not live in poverty nor are they wanting for a room of their own—many medieval noblewomen kept private chapels for the express purpose of devotional reading and prayer—so the glaring absence of women’s literary output (perhaps a notion that needs a broader definition) still seems to rankle.

In order to answer for this perplexing absence, scholars have looked to both medieval and modern theories of authorship. Alexandra Barratt, for example, accounts for the “lamentable dearth” of writing by women in Middle English by observing that the limits placed on women’s education, and the assumption that authority and authorship were “incompatible” with medieval ideals of femininity, made women “inevitably resistant to the idea of authoring texts” and so they were less likely to assume authority over an original text (*Women’s Writing in Middle English*, 1, 7). Krug approaches the absence of medieval women’s writing from a modern critical standpoint and suggests that the apparent lack of women’s writing for this period is due to the biases of current critical scholarship and a failure on our part to recognize literature by women. She notes that “modern readers tend to assume [...] that the natural result of becoming literate or of learning to use written modes is the composition and distribution of written texts, and ultimately, that the highest form of such production is literary authorship” (210). Barratt’s well-known anthology, *Women’s Writing in Middle English*, works against these very assumptions and

provides a rich vein of inclusive research that lists under the rubric of women's writing items such as personal letters, didactic texts, translations and anonymous texts, alongside imaginative literature. Her retrieval and re-categorization of texts has expanded our understanding of what counts as women's writing, and what requires closer attention. Similarly, Krug looks at women's personal and direct involvement in literate culture and observes that women in the fifteenth century acquired literate skills as a transformative measure in order to produce literature that was "personally relevant" to themselves and members of their own family or community (211). Rather than consider the absence of women-authored books a failure, Krug suggests that literary production simply did not occur to women who—unlike their male counterparts whose professional training allowed for the invention of original literary works—were concerned with familial needs which were reflected in their personal and spiritual literary output (212). Such studies have done much to unsettle the privileged position of literary authorship—itsself a vexed term in the Middle Ages²²—in order to allow for reconsiderations of women's participation in literate culture.

²² In his work on scholastic interpretive practices in the Middle Ages, Alistair Minnis has queried the terms author and authority (*auctor* and *auctoritas*) and their institutional uses. He notes that an *auctor* is a writer whose works represent an origin of universal truths and so possesses a strong sense of authenticity and veracity (*auctoritas*). Indeed, the ultimate *auctor* was divine, an idea echoed by William Langland in the epigraph to this introduction: "Although men made bokes, God was the maister, / And Seint Spirit the samplarie, and said what men should write" (101-2). Though texts might be re-worked, in translation for example, the unquestioned voice of authority of the original text remained. In this way, authorship is always a mode of mimicking an earlier "authentic" work, which muddies modern concepts of "original" literary production in useful ways

My own study takes a similar tack to Krug in that I am invested in re-evaluating what counts as literary production in order to view women who are readers, patrons and translators as, fundamentally and unequivocally, *authors* of the texts they produce. I recognize, for example, the physical conditions of text production in the Middle Ages, particularly the glossing, scribal and compiling activities that came out of monastic scholasticism, and note that in many ways readers in the Middle Ages are always already authors of the texts they read. In a broad sense, medieval readers (scholars, scribes and compilers) became authors because the realities of manuscript culture meant that book producers were, both literally and figuratively, re-writing texts. Medieval transmission of literature depended on the attitudes and opinions of the readers: what they liked they could reproduce and circulate, what they did not they could abandon or manipulate.²³ The agency and ethics of the medieval reader that originated in the monastic scriptoria carried over into the production of vernacular texts that occurred in the

if we aim to read women back into literate culture as producers of text. That is to say, authorship is a malleable term in the Middle Ages that is undercut by a reliance on perceived ethical truths.

See my discussion in chapter 3 with respect to Margaret of York's authorship (as patron) of Caxton's translation of *The Recuyell of the Historyes of Troye*.

²³ Useful studies on book production and reading include Roger Chartier, *The Order of Books* and the essays in Jeremy Griffiths and Derek Pearsall, eds., *Book Production and Publishing in Britain, 1375-1475*; for scholastic interpretive practice see A.J. Minnis, *Medieval Theories of Authorship*, Rita Copeland, *Rhetoric, Hermeneutics and Translation in the Middle Ages* and Suzanne Reynolds's *Medieval Reading: Grammar, Rhetoric and the Classical Text*. Both Paul Saenger, *Space Between Words: The Origins of Silent Reading*, and Joyce Coleman have done extensive work on the practice of reading in daily life in the Middle Ages.

bespoke book trade of mercantile London. I do not claim that the women who are the focus of this study were engaged in a professional way in the book trade of the fifteenth century—they were neither professional scholars nor professional scribes—but it is important to note that the presence of the medieval reader has, historically, had a hand in the presentation and interpretation of literary texts.

The growing book trade in the fifteenth century meant that the market was interested in the desires and demands of the reader and the elite women of this study represent a significant influence on the cultural value of the act of reading in late medieval England; that is, reading as a measure of social status was modeled by aristocratic women whose reading tastes were reflected in the market for vernacular devotional literature.²⁴ Indeed, in the fifteenth century, books themselves were becoming an important measure of identity and social status such that prestige and gentility were intrinsically linked with reading and book ownership. As Laurel Amtower has put it, the book “as tangible proof of the intellectual, aesthetic, and economic values of the aristocracy, was rapidly becoming a symbol for high culture, artificially endowing its owner with higher class status” (11). At a time in England’s history when long-established categories of social identity were in flux, lay literacy across the spectrum of social groups promised access to forms of self-fashioning that had previously been the

²⁴ On the demand for and production of early printed devotional books, see Margaret Deanseley, “Vernacular Books in England in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries.”; George R. Keiser, “The Mystics and the Early English Printers: the Economics of Devotionalism”; and A.S.G. Edwards and Carol M. Meale, “The Marketing of Printed Books in Late Medieval England.”

preserve of the secular and religious elite. Reading came to be understood as an act that had the potential for positive change, both spiritual and social, for the reader.

As the epigraphs to this introduction show, writers in the late Middle Ages understood that the impetus for change could be contained in the book and made the case for vernacular literacy based on these grounds. Geoffrey de la Tour Landry, in the book of instruction written for his daughters that became a popular courtesy text in the late Middle Ages, endorses women learning to read because he recognizes that it is through reading that one understands the “peryls of the sowle” and how to guard against them.²⁵ William Langland in the third vision of *Piers Plowman* also privileges reading as a form of spiritual understanding when he equates books with sight such that they become the eyes through which the world is understood. A clerk sees no more than a man without eyes unless he acquires the skill to “see” from books. Importantly, though these books are written by men, it is God who teaches what men should write in them and in this way books become the vehicle through which “lewed” men learn about the divine. Both of these texts allude to the greater purpose in reading, bound up with concerns of social identity and self-improvement through following the exemplar of God. While reading, in both manuscript and print, was a potent form of social display in late medieval England, it was also inextricably linked with acts of piety.

²⁵ The epigraph is from Caxton’s translation, *The Book of the Knight of the Tower*, printed in 1483.

Nowhere is this correlation more evident than in devotional literature.

Devotional texts focus on reading as a practical way of emulating a spiritual life; careful reading means the reader adopts and enacts models of behaviour that are based on perceptions of God's will. As Bryan has observed, devotional literature encourages readers to focus on themselves. In her recent book-length study on inwardness in devotional reading she states that

it was vernacular devotional literature that engaged their readers' textual, reflexive and self-disciplinary practices insistently and compellingly. Devotional writing tends to highlight questions of use and practice—of the reader's response to and potential alteration by the text. More explicitly than in many other genres the reader becomes the text's direct subject and object of its operations. (4)

It is this explicit investment in the reader that has given rise to this study.

Approaches to the figure of the medieval woman reader frequently focus on bibliographic and testamentary evidence as a tool to measure the social and intellectual history of medieval women on the one hand, and on a psychological perspective as an approach to the experience of reading on the other. Indeed, the psychology of the medieval woman reader has been of particular interest, especially regarding her complicity in or resistance to textual constructions of gender identity.²⁶ The binary model of a passive female reader and an aggressive

²⁶ Substantial discussions on the various reading strategies of medieval women include Anne Clark Bartlett, *Male Authors, Female Readers: Representation and Subjectivity in Middle English Devotional Literature*; Roberta Krueger, *Women Readers and the Ideology of Gender in the Old French Verse Romance*; Elizabeth Robertson, *Early English Devotional Prose and the Female Audience*; and Susan Schibanoff, "Taking the Gold out of Egypt: The Art of Reading as a Woman."

male author has, I believe, limited an understanding of medieval female readers by suggesting that the only reading strategies available were to submit to dominant constructions of gender, or to oppose them.²⁷ Medieval religious writings offer an opportunity to enrich our understanding of the ways in which contemporary female readers approached a text because readers are required to consider reading a serious activity that mediates between the human and the divine; these texts are interested in training readers to recognize didactic narratives that can be implemented into their daily lives. While this necessarily requires that a reader negotiate cultural discourses of gender (as well as additional, and not less important, categories such as class), the aim of devotional reading remains spiritual formation. By paying attention to the ways in which readers are invited to interact with texts, and to the ways in which readers use texts to interact with the world, we can begin to discover how the onus on spiritual formation can work to inspire intellectual formation such that those on the margins of literate society begin to move toward its centre.

This study falls easily into two sections: the first two chapters focus on manuscripts commissioned for or by women readers and examine the ways in

²⁷ I am following here Judith Fetterley's observations regarding a feminist approach to reading, which have been influential on discussions of medieval women readers.

which the presence of specific women readers enters into the text; the second two chapters shift the focus to early printed books and take up the issues surrounding the presence of the woman reader as patron and the development of the aristocratic reader's cachet with respect to devotional literature made available to a broad and diverse audience. The texts under consideration here range in date from the mid-fifteenth to the early sixteenth centuries—texts that grew out of a milieu of increasing vernacular literacy and a rise in affective piety—and represent an array of devotional genres including female hagiography, didactic prose and prayer. They represent the most popular books in medieval libraries, though their status as fixtures for medieval readers often goes unattended due to their perceived, if undeserved, reputation for “dullness.”²⁸ I noted earlier that it is part of my intention here to read women back into the leaves of their books and I investigate their presence via two prevalent metaphors in the texts I examine: that of speaking and that of seeing. The silence of medieval women has often been noted by scholars, especially their silence as authors, and I re-position our understanding of women's authorship by listening for women's voices in the books they commissioned and owned.²⁹ In a similar vein, I interrogate the

²⁸ I reference David Lawton's work on fifteenth-century writers' claims of inadequacy in “Dullness and the Fifteenth Century.” Writers writing after the Constitutions of 1409 asserted a reliance on tradition and authority that has typically been considered derivative, reactionary and “dull.” Bryan usefully characterizes the divide between 1350 to 1410 and 1410 to 1530 as a divide between writerly England and readerly England (26). The absence of many of these popular texts from modern classrooms also seems to be due to this divide.

²⁹ On the absence of women's writing in earlier periods figured as a kind of silence see the introductory material to Alexandra Barratt's anthology *Women's*

visibility of medieval women as icons of devotional reading. Late medieval devotional literature tends to emphasize vision as a mode of knowing and I explore how the aristocratic readers under discussion here are figured as agents of their own gaze, able to see themselves reflected, and to control that reflection, in their own books.³⁰

Thus in chapter 1 I turn to the genre of saints' lives and show, by reviewing the reading audience that is evident in wills and library inventories, that it was popular, and popularly approved, reading material for a female audience in the late Middle Ages. I explore the central place occupied by the female patron in Osbern Bokenham's *Legendys of Hooly Wummen* (London, British Library MS Arundel 327), an all-female hagiography probably compiled for an enclosed woman but sponsored by a number of aristocratic laywomen. I argue that the textual production of a feminine interpretive community that constitutes women as the subject of literary history allows for Bokenham's patrons to share in the

Writing in Middle English; Margaret Hannay, ed. *Silent but for the Word: Tudor Women as Patrons, Writers and Translators of Religious Works*; and Shiela Fisher and Janet E. Halley, eds. *Seeking the Woman in Late Medieval and Renaissance Writing*.

³⁰ On spiritual vision see especially Jeffrey Hamburger, *Nuns as Artists: The Visual Culture of a Medieval Convent*; Margaret Miles, *Visual Understanding in Western Christianity and Secular Culture*; and Barbara Newman, "What Did It Mean To Say 'I Saw'? The Clash Between Theory and Practice in Medieval Visionary Culture."

On the visual imagery of women in books see the essays in Jane Taylor and Lesley Smith, *Women and the Book: Assessing the Visual Evidence* and Kathryn A. Smith, *Art, Identity and Devotion in Fourteenth-Century England: Three Women and their Books of Hours*.

process of literary production as well as reception.³¹ By focusing on metaphors of speech and speaking in the *Legendys*, I read for a distinctly female literate and literary voice that is modeled by the saints within the *vitae* who resemble and reflect the patrons outside the *vitae*. In this way I am able to recover the genre of female saints' lives—often written off as misogynistic accounts of violence against women under the guise of spiritual instruction—as a central discourse in the history of women's literary production.

My concentration on women's reading in this study has revealed that it is somewhat more difficult to prove that medieval women were reading than it is to show that they were writing because evidence of reading is scant, often ephemeral and difficult to interpret. Inventories of book ownership do much to suggest that women in the Middle Ages were devoted readers, though even owning a book does not necessarily mean it was read. As Green wryly observes, any current scholar who takes stock of the books on her own shelves will admit that this is the case (115). The project of reading women's influence into the books they produced is a sometimes daunting and demanding task that requires much conjecture and cautious conviction. Chapter 2 looks at a manuscript in which the influence of the female patron is considerably more transparent than it is in most

³¹ I build here on the concept of a feminine interpretive community in Bokenham that Catherine Sanok explores in her influential book *Her Life Historical: Exemplarity and Female Saints' Lives in Late Medieval England*. While Sanok argues that Bokenham is projecting a non-partisan female community as a response to political turmoil in England (52-54), I focus instead on the ways in which the imagined female audience that Bokenham names participates in and "voices" a feminine authorship within the text.

of the works in this study because its patron, Margaret of York, wife of Charles the Bold of Burgundy and sister of Edward IV, appears in the text itself, modeling for her readers her own approach to devotional reading. *Le dyalogue de la ducesse de bourgogne a Ihesu Crist* (London, British Library MS Additional 7970) takes the form of a lengthy catechism in which Margaret asks Christ for advice on how to live a contemplative life as an active member of the wealthy Burgundian court. As the reader, her questions and responses are articulated for her within the text, though this is complicated by the constant negotiations the text must make to account for the lived reality of the mixed life reader. The concept of the mixed life became an increasingly important idea in the fifteenth century as many lay readers began to adopt the practices of devotion and the texts of enclosed readers; readers outside of the cloister found themselves having to mediate between pursuing spiritual desires and attending to worldly responsibilities. Furthermore, for wealthy readers, as Bryan points out, devotional texts could accomplish a dual function: they “could not only compensate for their readers’ material wealth” but could also “help them to actively negotiate and articulate different kinds of possibilities for themselves” (24). This process of articulation is staged in *Le dyalogue* and I argue that it reproduces for its reader the struggles to reconcile the contemplative and active lives. In so doing it reproduces for Margaret, even as she enacts it, the way a mixed life reader must read a devotional text.

Chapter 3 moves the focus of my discussion away from the singular and personal aspect of the medieval manuscript and toward the accessibility and

affordability of the early printed book. I suggest that a broader and increasingly literate audience was encouraged to follow the lead of elite noblewomen patrons who raised the prestige of the commercially printed book by demonstrating its inherent value to devotional activities. Paying specific attention to Lady Margaret Beaufort, the mother of Henry VII, I interrogate the ways in which she engineered and maintained an austere and pious public persona that was reflected in the books she chose to sponsor and disseminate via the early print trade. In this chapter, I look at the printed incarnation of the *Fifteen Oes*, a widely-read series of fifteen indulgenced prayers that meditate on Christ's Passion, which Lady Margaret, along with her daughter-in-law the Princess Elizabeth, had printed by Richard Pynson in 1491. The fifteen prayers, as is typical of English Passion meditations, are rich in sensual imagery intended to help the reader visualize Christ's tormented body and through which the book impresses on the reader the doctrine of redemption. The prayers foreground the importance of experiencing that redemption through reading in such a way that the book becomes necessary to the experience of "seeing" Christ in the framework of self-examination that the prayers invite. Under the aegis of elite women patrons, who are themselves aware of the book as a vehicle of self-identification, the perception of print and its purpose moves from the commercial toward the spiritual.

Chapter 4 maintains the focus on the reading activities of Lady Margaret Beaufort and her promotion of the print trade, though it examines her involvement via her own vernacular translation of a little known devotional treatise, *The*

Mirroure of Golde to the Synfull Soule, which was printed, again by Richard Pynson, around 1506. The trope of Christ-as-mirror that was at work in the English Passion meditations is here re-figured as the trope of the book-as-mirror. Mirror texts allowed late medieval readers to see themselves reflected back in a text that gave instructions in how to reform the soul in order to properly compose the self. I use Lady Margaret's translation of *The Mirroure of Golde* as a critical lens through which to read her influence as both a political player and a patron of learning, effectively highlighting the connections between devotional and political concerns in the early years of the Tudor reign. Without discounting the spiritual needs of her readers, religious books also represented for Margaret an investment in her son's kingdom and the education of its subjects. I argue that her translation makes available a text that expects readers to participate in the knowledge economy of reading, memory and books by taking on the intellectual work, no longer the preserve of a few advanced scholars, of caring for their own soul. In a seeming renewal of the image of the Education of the Virgin, Margaret models devotional reading as learning for an expanding community of lay readers.

I noted at the outset of this introduction that this study begins with an image. I turn now to texts, rare and rarely read texts, that have slipped under the radar of much literary scholarship, in order to read in women's books what the

images of reading women might suggest to us about their influence on the literate culture of the late Middle Ages. The aristocratic laywoman busied herself with reading, but also with owning books and sharing them, translating and commissioning them, and patronizing writers and scholars and printers, and I contend that such an active and public presence invites us to reconsider her influence on the literature with which she busied herself. Devotional literature has suffered in traditional critical evaluations because it is often thought to pale in comparison to what Nicholas Watson has called, for example, the “vibrant tradition” of fourteenth-century theological writing, though evidence of its importance to the growth of vernacular literacy in fifteenth-century England and its association with a community of influential female readers promises, I think, a vein of a richer hue (561). I offer this study as a way into evaluating the diverse range of texts to which medieval readers turned for spiritual instruction and contemplation, as well as a way into determining how the reading tastes, practices and demands of aristocratic laywomen shaped the devotional culture of late medieval England.

Note: In quotations, thorns and yoghs have been silently modernized and abbreviations expanded, according to my best judgement. Translations to modern English are my own unless otherwise specified.

CHAPTER ONE

**Voicing women's influence in
Osbern Bokenham's *Legendys of Hooly Wummen***

*The fynal cause declaryth pleyndly
Of the werk begunne the cause why
That is to seyne, what was the entent
Of the auctor fynally, & what he ment.*
-- Osbern Bokenham, Prologus, *Legendys of Hooly Wummen*

*Though I am much attached to Bokenham, I am not at all sure that
he is worth extended study ...*
-- Mary S. Serjeantson, preface to *Legendys of Hooly Wummen*

London, British Library MS 327 is a small volume of 193 parchment leaves, a size fit for private reading.³² Margins and lines are carefully ruled and decorations suggest it was a presentation copy designed to follow to monastic standards (Long, 66). It seems to have been thoughtfully put together. The codex is probably the first all-female hagiography in Middle English—the only Middle English legendary compiled according to and informed by sex—and comprises thirteen women saints' lives in verse written by Osbern Bokenham, an Augustinian friar of the priory of Stoke Clare in East Anglia. The lives all appear to have been written between 1443 and 1447 and include the lives of saints Margaret, Anne, Christina, the 11 000 Virgins, Faith, Agnes, Dorothy, Mary

³² The manuscript measures approximately 15cm high, 10cm wide and 3cm thick. It is described by Mary Serjeantson in her *Early English Text Society* edition (xxiv-v). See also A.S.G. Edwards, "The Transmission and Audience of Osbern Bokenham's *Legendys of Hooly Wummen*."

Magdalen, Katherine, Cecilia, Agatha, Lucy and Elizabeth.³³ The collection has come to be known as the *Legendys of Hooly Wummen*, a title Mary Serjeantson, the collection's first editor, has taken from the prolocutory to the life of Mary Magdalen in which Bokenham makes reference to “dyvers legendys wych my rudenesse / From latyn had turnyd into our language / Of hooly wummen” (5038-40).³⁴ A table of contents at the end of the manuscript implies that the work was not part of a larger collection and a colophon reveals something of the manuscript's provenance, which hints at the matrix of associations between readers and authors, compilers and patrons:

Translatyd in-to englys be a doctor of dyvynite
clepyd Osbern Bokenam a suffolk man frere Austyn of the
convent of Stokclare and was doon wrytyn in Cane
bryge by hys soun Frere Thomas Burgh. The yere of our lord
a thousand four hundryth sevyn & fourty Whose expence dreu
thretty schyligys & yafe yt onto this holy place of nunnys
that thei shuld have mynd on hym & of hyssystyr Dame
Betrice Burgh Of the wych soulys ihesu have mercy. Amen. (289)

As the colophon suggests, Arundel 327 was shaped by several hands: from Bokenham, as the author and translator of the lives; to Thomas Burgh, a fellow

³³ Bokenham states that he began the first legend of the series, Saint Margaret, in “the yeer of grace a thowsend / Foure hundryd and also thre and fourty” (187-188). The prolocutory to Mary Magdalen's life is dated “The yer of grace, pleynty to descrye, / A thowsand, fourhundryd, forty & fyve” (4981-2) and the colophon states that the manuscript was copied in “The yere of our lord a thousand four hundryth sevyn & fourty”.

³⁴ All references to Bokenham's text are to line numbers in Serjeantson's edition of the poem. For clarity's sake, I too will refer to the work as *Legendys of Hooly Wummen*.

Augustinian friar, as the copyist³⁵ (and possibly the compiler) of the manuscript; to Burgh's sister, who may have requested the manuscript herself, and her community of enclosed readers for whom the manuscript was produced.³⁶

A second audience for Arundel 327, and a notable influence on its subject matter, is inscribed in the various prologues and dedications that frame the lives. Several of the translations were made at the request of, or as a tribute to, wealthy women readers who were friends and patrons of Bokenham: *Vita S. Annae* was written for Katherine Denston and her husband John, who had a daughter named Anne (2092-95); Isabel Hunt and her husband John requested the translation of the *Lyf of S. Dorothy* (4976-78); the *Lyf of Marye Maudelyn* was made for Isabel Bouchier, Countess of Eu and sister to Richard, duke of York (5006-75); Katherine Howard and Katherine Denston are both named as dedicatees of the *Lyf of S. Katherine* (6365-66); Agatha Flegge is referred to "specially" in *The prologe of seynt Agas lyf* (8339-40); and the *Lyf of S. Elyzabeth* was begun at the request of Elizabeth de Vere "of Oxenforthe the countesse" (5054, 9534-36, 10610-17). The presence of these women in a book intended for a "holy place of nunnys" demonstrates the overlap in the literary culture of nuns and devout gentlewomen in the late Middle Ages that scholars such as Felicity Riddy and Mary Erler have

³⁵ A.S.G. Edwards notes that the manuscript was probably copied *for* Burgh, rather than *by* him, especially as it contains the work of three different scribes ("Transmission and Audience", 157).

³⁶ A.I. Doyle thinks the manuscript was possibly produced for the Franciscan nuns of Aldgate and Denny, a "center of vernacular devotion" northeast of Cambridge. See "Books Connected with the Vere Family" (236 n. 8).

identified.³⁷ Nuns' reading has usually served as the point of comparison for laywomen readers because book ownership has most often been charted through convent libraries and so may overemphasize the movement outward of reading habits to the secular world.³⁸ Recent studies are beginning to look at the influence in the opposite direction, taking into account the impact of laywomen on their enclosed sisters. Erler makes reference to Roberta Gilchrist, for example, who has shown through her survey of the archeological evidence of women's religious houses, that the close proximity of convents to villages that shared their churches with the parish congregation meant that there may well have been a good deal of interaction between lay and religious women. Gilchrist suggests that the "increasingly domestic personality of nunneries"—that is, the development of smaller familial groups (or "households") within the convent—indicates the possibility that nuns may have been emulating the "lifestyles of secular women" (127). Women's reading activities show a similar overlap and scholars such as Riddy and Erler have long noted the "permeability" of female religious and lay culture in late medieval England.³⁹

³⁷ See especially Riddy, "Women talking about the things of God" and Erler, *Women, Reading and Piety in Late Medieval England*.

³⁸ See, for example, N.R. Ker, *Medieval Libraries of Great Britain* and David N. Bell, *What Nuns Read*. Erler's study does much to demonstrate the importance of social networks between lay and religious readers to the dissemination of religious books in both directions.

³⁹ "Permeability" is the word Erler uses to describe the overlap of religious and lawomen's reading habits. It is a word that effectively captures the ideas of enclosure and accessibility that seem to define the relationship between religious and secular women in late medieval England.

While it is beyond the scope of this present study to measure in any substantial way the influence that aristocratic laywomen had on women religious, I do aim to contribute to our understanding of women's reading in the late Middle Ages by supplementing the focus on nuns' reading with attention to the reading of secular women. Arundel 327 provides a unique lens through which to examine their influence because the inclusion of the paratextual material naming secular patrons in a manuscript intended for conventual readers brings to the fore questions about the visibility and the authority of laywomen. Bokenham's projected readership has been the primary focus of literary and textual scholars though, as Mary Beth Long notes, the named patrons of the work have garnered more discussion than the community of nuns for whom the collection was produced (67).⁴⁰ I too will focus in this chapter on those same named readers and I pay particular attention to the way in which Bokenham's patrons shape his text as muses and models of lay piety.

The announcement in the colophon that the book is intended for "Dame Betrice Burgh" at a "holy place of nunnys", and the various dedications to female patrons throughout the text, interpellates an explicitly female audience for

⁴⁰ Work on possible influences on Bokenham's *Legendys* generally falls into two camps: those who attribute considerable influence to his patrons, and those who challenge this by emphasizing his debt to a masculine literary tradition, especially Chaucer. For the former, see Gail McMurray Gibson, "Saint Anne and the Religion of Childbed" (101-107) and Karen Winstead, *Virgin Martyrs: Legends of Sainthood in Late Medieval England* (141-46); for the latter see Sheila Delany, *Impolitic Bodies* (29-43) and Ian Johnson, "Tales of a True Translator: Medieval Literary Theory, Anecdote and Autobiography in Osbern Bokenham's *Legendys of Hooly Wummen*."

Arundel 327 and identifies women as active participants in the literate culture of late medieval England. As Catherine Sanok notes in her book-length study of the historical and ethical impact of the genre on readers of female saints' lives in the later Middle Ages, "such specific invocations of a feminine audience reinforce the broad expectation [...] that women read these legends as particularly appropriate to their devotional and ethical behaviour" (24). In making gender an explicit and relevant categorization for readers, Sanok logically observes that "female saints' lives [...] ask women to read *as* women" (24). Her conception of gender as a category of both response and representation has provided a useful model for my own consideration of the ways in which we read women reading a literature of exemplarity that models seemingly impossible ideals of perfection.⁴¹ As with much devotional literature written for women by male clerics, the critical reception of female saints' lives has tended to focus on the ubiquitous misogyny

⁴¹ As Kathryn L. McKinley notes, the perfection depicted in saints' lives often presents with the saint demonstrating no corruption at all; that is, like Mary "whose moral perfection was a given in Church dogma in the Middle Ages", saints are morally perfect (95). McKinley finds this is not in keeping with the idea of perfection in medieval theology as defined by thinkers such as Augustine and Aquinas, which "did not mean absolute moral flawlessness" (94) and notes that the effortlessness of hagiographic spirituality makes some saints' lives a highly problematic representation of human sanctity. McKinley is discussing Chaucer's *Clerk's Tale* specifically (she refers to Griselda as "something of a hagiographic Barbie" [96]), though she does seem to imply that this is a trend in ideas about medieval female sanctity especially. See Kathryn L. McKinley, "The *Clerk's Tale*: Hagiography and the Problematics of Lay Sanctity".

Bokenham's saints seems to be similarly devoid of corruption as the example of St. Margaret shows: she is "fyllyd wyth so gret vertu" by her "soveryen lord on hy" that "in fewe yerys she perfyht greu" (397-99).

characteristic of the tradition.⁴² Suffering and sacrifice are lauded as markers of (realistically inaccessible) female perfection that is tested through often graphic violence. Sanok reminds us, however, that “a genre’s representational strategies do not wholly determine its meaning” and so it falls to us to tease out the possible interpretive responses of contemporary readers (26). While hagiography seems to have been the only genre that was deemed suitable for women’s reading in the late Middle Ages,⁴³ it simply cannot be the case that medieval women read only in the way that hagiographic texts demanded of them; that is, to be instructed by and to follow the exemplar of ascetic perfection. It is my aim in this chapter to explore other possible subject positions for readers of hagiographic texts.

The evidence of women’s patronage and book ownership demonstrates that the reading of saints’ lives was a significant aspect of their participation in medieval literate culture. Sanok’s careful reconstruction, via historical records, of the popularity of saints’ lives helps to locate the genre’s contribution to the public presence of women readers and to their active role in its production and

⁴² See, for example, Brigitte Cazelles, *The Lady as Saint*; Simon Gaunt, *Gender and Genre in Medieval French Literature*; Catherine Innes-Parker, “Sexual Violence and the Female Reader: Symbolic ‘Rape’ in the Saints’ Lives of the Katherine Group”; and Sarah Salih, “Performing Virginité: Sex and Violence in the Katherine Group.” For an alternative reading that challenges assumptions about the genre as simply misogynistic, see Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, *Saint’s Lives and Women’s Literary Culture, c. 1150-1300*.

⁴³ Hagiography was often held up as a superior class of literature against romance and theological writings due to its perceived moral value. Sanok observes that after Arundel the only genre of vernacular religious writing that was not restricted was hagiography and notes, following Watson, that hagiographers Bokenham, John Lydgate and John Capgrave are the only well-known fifteenth-century religious writers from this period (27).

dissemination. Drawing on a number of well-known bibliographic studies as well as testamentary evidence and paratextual material, Sanok has identified hagiography as the most attested category of texts associated with women readers. She notes that in Karen K. Jambeck's study of women's patronage, for example, of the 31 works dedicated to women in England in the late Middle Ages, twelve are saints' lives and eight of those are women saints (34). In fact, the majority of the female saints' lives that Jambeck cites are those in Bokenham's *Legendys* making Arundel 327 the best single witness to women's literary patronage in late medieval England. Furthermore, Sanok observes that the evidence for lay patronage of vernacular hagiography skews higher for women than for men suggesting that it "seems largely to have been the preserve of women" (34).

Surveys of testamentary evidence as proof of ownership of hagiographic books yield similar results.⁴⁴ Sanok cites Anne Dutton's analysis of the evidence from wills for women's ownership of religious literature, which, similar to Jambeck's survey of patronage patterns among women, shows that of the 103 texts owned by women, 31 are saints' lives which accounts for more than twice the number of books in the next most popular category of meditative literature (36). Wills are a significant witness to women's ownership and transmission of books, especially hagiographic literature, but, as Carol Meale cautions, their evidence cannot be taken at face value. The solemnity and formality that

⁴⁴ See for example Susan Cavanaugh, Anne Dutton, "Passing the Book: Testamentary Transmission of Religious Literature to and by Women in England, 1350-1500", Carol Meale and Felicity Riddy.

characterizes a will is bound to dictate the type of the books bequeathed, which accounts for the predominance of religious books that show up in medieval wills as bequests. Meale notes that while such bequests “may give an accurate indication of one aspect of a testator’s life, they do not necessarily give a complete account of the books they owned, or of their literary interests” because the books in wills stand in as a memorial of sorts to the deceased (“...alle the bokes”, 131).⁴⁵ In addition, a broader social spectrum is not represented because the majority of extant wills were made by widows and wealthy women and as such the evidence for book ownership among women of the urban middle class is lacking (“...alle the bokes”, 132). The picture pieced together from wills carries with it the desire of the testator to be associated with certain books at her death and is limited by class, such that any accurate conclusions about women’s book ownership drawn from wills are tenuous at best.

Nonetheless, if inventories of wills are not as reliable a source for the popularity of saints’ lives, we can also consider the somewhat more ephemeral evidence of inscriptions to give an indication of the use and value of a book for a particular owner. Inscriptions in colophons or on flyleafs suggest, as Mary Beth Long puts it, a certain “pride in ownership” as well as functioning as a tacit reminder “to any borrower of the book that it must be returned” (47). London,

⁴⁵ Importantly, however, wills are strikingly visible evidence of benefaction and worked to leave a high profile record of a testator’s generosity and piety. Wills can be considered alongside the ownership of religious books and artefacts—which will be discussed further in Chapter 3—as part of a larger strategy to construct a reputation for piety and respectability that was especially important for women.

British Library MS Harley 4012 contains the *vitae* of Anne, Katherine and Margaret and was owned by East Anglian gentry woman Anne Harling, confirmed by the inscription “Thys ys the boke of dame anne wyngefeld of harlyng” (fol. 153r).⁴⁶ Long describes the manuscript as well-planned and expensive, with gilt accents and decorative inkwork, and suggests that such an inscription could betray an anxiety, upon its loan to another reader, that the valued and valuable book may not find its way back (47). Anne Harling’s book reveals a couple of salient points: first, that the book operates as a status symbol for the owner that becomes a part of the owner’s identity and the inscription works in a similar manner to the patron portraits I discussed in the introduction; second, and more germane to the present discussion, Anne Harley’s book shows that while it is difficult to measure the degree to which a book may have been used by an owner, a book that announces its owner in its pages was probably lent to a borrower who very likely did read it (or who had it read to them). Inscriptions work simultaneously to demonstrate the way that books are shared among readers and to obscure those readers from its history because a single name in a colophon does not accurately reflect the plurality of readers a book may have had. In short, there may well be *more* women reading saints’ lives than the existing evidence of book ownership allows. Indeed, the prominence of saints’ lives specified among

⁴⁶ For more on this manuscript see Anne Dutton, “Piety, Politics and Persona: London, British Library MS Harley 4012 and Anne Harling.” It is a collection of religious texts in both prose and verse, typical of those owned by aristocratic women though Dutton notes that it is rare to find this type of collection in the library of a gentry woman.

women's books, at a time when ownership of any books was rare, demonstrates that saints' lives were an important and valued part of women's literary culture in the late Middle Ages. The extraordinary evidence of Bokenham's *Legendys*, that records the names of six female patrons, then, is worth further investigation.

Despite Serjeantson's assertion that Bokenham's work is not "worth extended study" (vii), there has, in fact, been a great deal of study devoted to the legendary, especially regarding its literary and stylistic influences. Eileen S. Jankowski, for example, has argued that the verbal similarities between Bokenham's *Legend of St. Cecilia* and Chaucer's "Second Nun's Tale" suggest that Bokenham used Chaucer's version of the life when he was making his own translation. Both Paul Price and Sheila Delany, however, argue against Chaucer's influence and read Bokenham rejecting Chaucer's rhetoric, even critiquing it, in order to develop an unadorned style better suited to devotional writing. Delany also argues that the *Legendys of Hooly Wummen* constitutes a spiritual response to Chaucer's collection of female saints' lives, *The Legend of Good Women*, in order to "revalidate orthodox hagiography in an unambiguous way" (33). These arguments are, for the most part, concerned with Chaucer and his reputation in the fifteenth century rather than with identifying the range of inscribed, implied and intended audiences for the text, which I will take up in this chapter.

Another critical approach to Bokenham, and one to which I will devote some sustained consideration in the next few pages, is to read his work as Yorkist propaganda promoting the claims of Richard, duke of York, to the English throne during Lancastrian rule. Delany sees Bokenham practising a “partisan Yorkist politics” in the *Legendys*, especially in the dedication to Isabel Bouchier, sister of Richard of York (129-133). She also argues that the entire collection of female saints’ lives, because of its singular focus on women, obliquely works to support Richard’s dynastic claims, which were based on his descent from Anne Mortimer and Philippa, daughter of Lionel of Clarence. Carol Hilles also sees a political agenda suggesting that the legendary “appropriates women’s religious culture” in order to strengthen Richard’s claim to the throne by “using allusions to his female patrons, descriptions of the sacred bodies of holy women, and the voices of his heroic female protagonists to animate and empower his own authorial identity and to confect a popular voice in support of York” (189-90, 192-3). Both Hilles’s and Delany’s arguments turn on the assumption that the *Legendys* is a deliberately ordered collection of *vitae* with a “meaningful and intentional structure” that shows “the progressive development of an authorial voice” (Hilles, 193). The view that it is a coherent whole has been challenged by A.S.G. Edwards and, more recently, Simon Horobin whose discovery of a new manuscript containing nine of the thirteen lives collected in the *Legendys* has prompted a reconsideration of how and why Arundel 327 was compiled. Such a discovery, Horobin observes,

invites an appraisal of Bokenham “on his own terms” rather than as a political or literary (read: Chaucerian) reflection of fifteenth-century England (935).

In the prologue to Bokenham’s other known extant work *Mappa Angliae*, which details England’s geography, he makes reference to a much larger collection of saints’ lives that has been the focus of much speculation among scholars⁴⁷:

For as moche as in the englische boke the whiche y have compiled of legenda aurea and of other famous legendes at the instaunce of my specialle frendis and for edificacioun and comfort of alle tho the whiche shulde redene hit or here hit, is often-tyme in lyvis of seyntis [...] menciyoun made of dyvers partis, plagis, regnis & contreis of this lande Englonde, the whiche, but if they be declared, byne fulle hard to knowene. (Horstmann, 6)

The work Bokenham refers to, long considered lost, is a translation into Middle English of the immensely popular *Legenda aurea*, a collection of saints’ lives compiled by the Dominican friar Jacobus de Voragine that survives in more than eight hundred manuscripts. Simon Horobin found this legendary lost work of Bokenham’s in 2005 in the library of Sir Walter Scott at Abbotsford House.⁴⁸

The discovery of the medieval manuscript, which contains a complete translation of the *Legenda aurea* as well as additional lives in both prose and verse, provides

⁴⁷ See especially C. Horstmann, *The Lives of Saints of Our Contrie of England* (v). For an early argument suggesting that the fifteenth-century translation known as the *Gilte Legende* is Bokenham’s lost work, see Sister Mary Jeremy, “The English Prose Translation of the ‘Legenda aurea’”; for a more recent argument against this attribution, see Manfred Gorch, *Studies in Middle English Saints’ Legends* (133-35).

⁴⁸ The manuscript is described in Simon Horobin, “A Manuscript found in Abbotsford House”. See also, Simon Horobin, “Politics, Patronage, and Piety in the Work of Osbern Bokenham”.

new evidence in support of Edwards's conception of Arundel 327 as a piecemeal compilation.

Basing his conclusions on the manuscript evidence of Arundel 327, Edwards notes that the manuscript was assembled in different stages, that its assembly was a more haphazard affair than has been allowed for in theories like Delany's and Hilles's, and that it was never envisaged by Bokenham as a complete whole. Edwards's description of the *Legendys* as an "ad hoc" collection of a selection of Bokenham's translations—due to irregularities in the planning of the manuscript⁴⁹—leads him to speculate that there is "no controlling schematic or other necessity to the sequence of legends as we now have it" (159). The new evidence provided by the Abbotsford manuscript would seem to support Edwards's claims about its assembly and queries critical arguments for the integrity of the manuscript based on an overarching design. Horobin observes that the ordering of the legends in the Abbotsford manuscript follows the liturgical calendar and that the lives of St. Agatha, St. Dorothy, St. Mary Magdalen and St. Margaret have their traces of dedications to patrons completely excised (941-42).⁵⁰ This disrupts Delany's assumption that Bokenham is directly

⁴⁹ Edwards identifies two distinct sections in the manuscript that show variations throughout in hands, ruling, rubrication, decoration and pagination that suggest the manuscript was not carefully planned and which he finds "curiously at odds with the evident technical competence of those involved in the manuscript's preparation" (158-9).

⁵⁰ The legends of Lucy, Agnes, Faith, Christina and the 11 000 Virgins also appear in the Abbotsford manuscript. Anne, Katherine, Cecilia and Elizabeth do not appear in the manuscript, though Horobin assumes that they very likely

answering Chaucer's *Legends of Good Women* and that his choice and order of texts are meant to follow Chaucer's model to "rehabilitate the original" generic form that Chaucer is parodying (32). The reappearance of certain *vitae* in Abbotsford suggests that Bokenham did not consider the lives of the *Legendys* exclusive to that collection; nor did he write exclusively female lives (Horobin, 942). Horobin suggests, and here he supports Edwards's earlier findings, that Arundel 327 "represents a selection of Bokenham's work" and that it was assembled specifically for its particular audience at a particular time (942). This is verified by the colophon.

What is most interesting about the discrepancies between Bokenham's two collections of saints' lives is the way in which the legends are reused, rearranged and readapted to fit new contexts. Indeed, Edwards suggests that when Burgh had the manuscript copied, his copyists were probably working from several booklets of the *vitae* rather than a complete collection. He posits that the booklets (inherently delicate and so no longer extant), possibly containing only one life each, were disseminated widely and independently of one another before Burgh compiled his legendary (162).⁵¹ Furthermore, the evidence from London, British Library Additional 36983, which contains the beginning of Bokenham's life of St.

formed a part of the original collection and are now missing due to lost leaves ("Politics, Patronage, Piety", 941).

⁵¹ See Edwards for his suggestion that other short pious works, such as some of Lydgate's religious poetry, may also have circulated in booklet form at around the same time. He suggests that these pious booklets may have been produced for presentation to named patrons (162). See also Julia Boffey and John J. Thompson, "Anthologies and Miscellanies: Production and Choice of Texts" for forms of booklet circulation.

Dorothy on its last folio, corroborates Edwards's theory because it seems to have once included only this legend (Edwards, 163).⁵² This suggests that the individual legends were able to operate as modules that could be shuffled and adapted to meet the needs of a variety of readers and to match the design of a variety of manuscripts in a bespoke book trade. This also suggests, and this is Edwards's conclusion, that it was probably Burgh and not Bokenham, who was the compiler of the Arundel 327.⁵³

While this does not necessarily refute Delany's or Hilles's arguments that the order of the *Legendys* is deliberate—Burgh, rather than Bokenham, may well have had a scheme in mind when he arranged the manuscript—their conclusions may necessitate some recasting.⁵⁴ Both Delany and Hilles maintain that the legendary reveals something of Bokenham's political alignment, an argument that is predicated on affiliations between the socially elite families of the patrons and their mutual support for the Yorkist cause. Horobin disagrees with the arguments

⁵² BL Additional 36983 is a fifteenth-century miscellany that contains romances, Chaucer lyrics, as well as *The Abbey* and *The Charter of the Holy Ghost* and other devotional material. There is a brief description of the manuscript in Sarah M. Horall, *The Southern Version of the Cursor Mundi*.

⁵³ Mary Erler, *Women, Reading, Piety* (120), and Karen Winstead, *Virgin Martyrs: Legends of Sainthood in Late Medieval England* (119), both agree with Edwards's assertion that Burgh was the compiler of Arundel 327.

⁵⁴ Richard of York was a patron of Clare Priory, where Burgh was a friar. His inclusion of the dedicatory materials in a manuscript for his sister's convent may attest to an obligation to his patron, if indeed the Yorkist overtones were as apparent to contemporary readers as they are to Hilles and Delany. As I will discuss shortly below, Sanok sees a less clearly defined use of partisan politics occurring in the text. For more on the Clare Priory and its affiliations with Richard of York, see Delany, *Impolitic Bodies* (13-15). For a discussion of the priory and its tradition of patronage by Clare women, see Hilles, "Gender and Politics in Osborn Bokenham's *Legendary*" (197-200).

surrounding Bokenham's political alignment and suggests instead that the lives are united because the various patrons shared similar devotional and literary interests. He notes that Bokenham's removal of the dedications and prologues describing the circumstances of the composition of the *Legendys* from the Abbotsford manuscript—particularly the prolocutory to the life of St. Mary Magdalen dedicated to Richard of York's sister, Isabel Bouchier—demonstrates that Bokenham was not entirely dependent on his named patrons as his only audience and therefore not committed to any political agenda ("Politics", 943). His suggestion, however, that devotional and literary interests are not also political is perhaps a hasty one, given that texts are always already bound up in the culture of their production and reception; I do not engage here in any speculation about Bokenham's politics though I do submit that neither religion nor reading are apolitical.

Sanok follows Delany and Hilles in reading the *Legendys* in terms of dynastic issues but she does not identify the same sharp polarization between the Yorks and the Lancasters. She notes that the political fortunes of several of Bokenham's patrons would soon divide along dynastic lines, but within the legendary he allows patrons to "cross boundaries of genealogy and family loyalty that would shortly become less permeable" (56).⁵⁵ By focusing on what she calls

⁵⁵ In terms of the factional divisions between patrons, Sanok pays particular attention to Isabel Bouchier and Elizabeth de Vere, both of whom are mentioned in the Magdalene prolocutory, and Katherine Howard and Katherine Denston who are paired in the prologue to the legend of St. Katherine. Isabel Bouchier and her husband enjoyed the patronage of her brother, Richard of York,

“the problem of the fractured political community” of fifteenth-century England, she posits that Bokenham creates a feminine audience, through the naming of his female patrons, “as an alternative community associated with both a static... devotional realm and a private domestic one” (56). In this way she shares Hilles’s assertion that the focus on domestic piety is part of a “strategy of dissent” (196) though she sees that dissent operating against divisive fifteenth-century politics. Her argument also allows for a deliberate order for the *Legendys*, which begins with the prologue to the life of St. Margaret, written at the request of Thomas Burgh, whose mention in the prologue makes it the only legend addressed to a sole male reader. Sanok sees this demonstrating the instability and danger of the public, and publicly political, masculine social world, which throws into sharp relief the subsequent twelve legends and the “private devotional and domestic world, figured through and by [...] the feminine audience with which they are affiliated” (63). Furthermore, Sanok argues that the production of a feminine

while Elizabeth’s husband and son were executed in 1462 for their involvement a plot to restore Henry VI to the throne (56). See Michael Hicks, “The Last Days of Elizabeth Countess of Oxford”, and for more on Elizabeth and Katherine Howard, see Anne Crawford, “Victims of Attainder: The Howard and de Vere Women in the Late Fifteenth Century.” Katherine Howard’s husband John became the duke of Norfolk under Yorkist rule and Katherine Denston’s brother, John Clopton, who was a lay member of the Lancastrian institution Bury St. Edmunds along with her father, was accused of treason for his Lancastrian commitments, which he later denounced to avoid execution (56). For more on Katherine Denston, see Gail McMurray Gibson, “Saint Anne and the Religion of Childbed.”

C.A.J. Armstrong puts it best when he notes that drawing a division between the “saintly Lancastrians and the worldly if politic Yorkists” would be foolish because the “very nature of the Wars of the Roses offers irrefutable if unfortunate evidence that the nobility and the blood royal formed but a single whole” (137).

interpretive community that elides divisive categories like partisan associations “offers a distinct canon, [...] which is understood to have particular interest to women readers, whether they are religious or lay, virgin or mother, bourgeois or aristocratic” (53). Sanok makes the bold and compelling claim (especially on point for the present study) that the *Legendys* “constitutes women—their patronage and reading preferences—as a subject of literary history”, a claim that is “attested by the place of Bokenham’s collection in histories of medieval patronage and, recently, in studies of women’s literary culture” (54). The specific historical information Bokenham provides about his patrons, Sanok suggests, should not be read as social history inasmuch as it should be considered a part of the fiction of the *Legendys* and critics should ask what purpose they serve that fiction (55). My own query, however, stems from the textual evidence analysed by both Horobin and Edwards that identifies the legends as literary chameleons, able to adapt to a variety of contexts for a variety of readers. The paratextual material that is either added or maintained in Arundel 327 is not a “fiction” so much as it is a fact of literary production and I approach Sanok’s question here in reverse. Instead of asking what purpose the paratexts serve the fiction, I wonder what purpose the fiction—that is the *vitae* themselves, which have been shown to be interchangeable to some degree—serve the paratexts, which are exclusive to Arundel 327.

I am indebted to Sanok’s argument here in my thinking about the purpose of the named female audience in Bokenham’s *Legendys* and the way it makes

women readers and patrons visible. I wonder, however, about her characterization of the separate, alternative community they comprise as fully private, static and domestic. Many of Bokenham's patrons, as C.A.J. Armstrong has put it in his discussion of Cecily Neville,⁵⁶ "would scarcely admit of distinction between their individual and public existence" (137). "As mothers of families," Armstrong continues, "and still more as heads of great households their responsibilities, whether spiritual or worldly, were too constantly before their eyes" (137). In addition, as patrons they are not acting within the private sphere but in public; patronage by its very nature announces its entrance into public discourse by putting on display a relation of obligation and symbolic capital.⁵⁷ As June Hall McCash has noted, patronage was "one of the few domains in which a public role for women was sanctioned" and one that "provided rich opportunities for women to make their voices heard" (1). Sanok points out that the critical reception of the *Legendys* has come to an impasse in the debate over identifying

⁵⁶ Cecily Neville was the Duke of York's wife and a model of feminine aristocratic piety. Horobin believes she was the owner of the Abbotsford manuscript and that it was produced for a "tightly knit audience constructed around the duke, his family and supporters" though he maintains that Bokenham's praise for the Duke of York had more to do with the fact that he was the patron of the Clare Priory and not due to any political ambitions ("Politics", 942).

I will discuss Cecily Neville further in chapter 2, particularly the influence of her reading tastes on her daughter, Margaret of York.

⁵⁷ I follow Laurie A. Finke's understanding of Pierre Bourdieu's term "symbolic capital" to describe the means by which wealth is converted into forms of prestige, status and social control through acts of generosity, like patronage. She notes that patronage relationships are unequal, involving the exchange of different kinds of resources, including "intangible, but no less vital resources such as power, influence and status" (76). She defines "status" not as a function of one's occupation or role, "but of one's proximity to powerful patrons" (76).

and quantifying the level of (political) influence that Bokenham's patrons had on his text (55), though I am not interested here in measuring what has proven elusive for scholars wiser far than I. I am interested in the role of women's patronage, however, and how the legends seem to be marked by the presence of laywomen in the paratextual materials that are deliberately included in a manuscript compiled for nuns.

I understand the presence of Bokenham's patrons in his legendary as an indication of their influence or power, whether it is political, economic or cultural; that Bokenham mentions them at all suggests that they had power worth gaining access to and I am interested in what their presence can tell us about women's patronage activities. The production of texts and of manuscripts was slow, arduous and costly work in the Middle Ages and, as McCash has observed, "dedications would scarcely have been made lightly" (3). She also notes that "institutions, laws and social structures were defined to reinforce male values" but cultural patronage provided an opportunity for medieval women "to insert or validate their own perspectives [thereby] helping to shape the cultural milieu of their own times and of future generations" (34). As well, because medieval women were rarely allowed to hold official positions of power, Laurie A. Finke reminds us, patronage "offered women an ideal informal mechanism through which they might exercise some effective personal power outside of the official institutions of medieval government" (*Women's Writing*, 76). In this chapter I make the assumption that Bokenham's patrons maintain a power that he is

interested in accessing, though querying the nature of that support—whether political or economic—is not my purpose here. I am more concerned with what Bokenham’s patronage relationships provided for his patrons. I ask, for example, what Isabel Bouchier has to gain, if anything, by being associated in the *Legendys* with Mary Magdalen? Or why the life of St. Katherine may have appealed to Katherine Howard or Katherine Denston, both of whom are named as dedicatees? In what follows I examine Bokenham’s reference to his literary patrons alongside his references to saints as agents of his poetic production. I argue that Bokenham blurs the boundaries between his patrons and saints such that his patrons are able to share in the process of production as well as reception. To use McCash’s terms, I read the *Legendys of Hooly Wummen* for traces of women patrons’ speaking, not directly, but through the works they sponsor, and for the ways in which the text gives them a voice.

If we can agree that Bokenham’s *Legendys* invites a distinctly gendered hermeneutics—that is, that it invites women to read *as* women, as Sanok wisely suggests—it follows that we can read beyond the invocations to the feminine audience that set up such an invitation, and trace this bias in the *vitae* themselves as well. Indeed, Delany has noted that “the frequent compliment paid to the female martyr” in medieval hagiographies that “her courage is equal to a man’s or

that she had a male spirit in a female body”⁵⁸ is conspicuously absent in Bokenham’s legend and observes that his saints “succeed as women, requiring no transmogrification into ‘spiritual men’ for their excellence to be grasped” (181). In what Delany calls Bokenham’s “modest struggle against misogyny”, he gives women “equal access to grace” by having them demonstrate courage, strength and wisdom, including the presence of mind to impart savvy political advice, though he stops short of making “an open subversive claim for women’s social rights” (198). He also manages to reflect the gendered community that is the (presumed) audience of his text with the gendered community within the text itself, a community privileged by its association with and proximity to the saint.

Both Sanok and Delany have referred to the moments of female solidarity in the legends that bear out a programme of feminine camaraderie that Bokenham seems to follow in dwelling on the response of women to the suffering of St. Katherine and St. Christine.⁵⁹ When Katherine, for example, is led to her execution, she is not alone but:

Many a matrone of hy wurthynesse,
 Many a wedwe, & many a maydyn ying
 Aftyr hyr folwyd, ful sore wepyng
 For sorwe that she this wys shuld dye. (7280-83)

⁵⁸ Delany notes that this idea accrued currency and authority from the apocryphal gospel of Thomas in which “Simon Peter said to them, ‘Let Mary leave us, for women are not worthy of life,’ Jesus said, ‘I myself shall lead her and make her male.’ (qtd. in Delany, 181).

⁵⁹ Both Delany and Sanok remark on the creation of a female community in the same passages I discuss from the lives of St. Katherine and St. Christine. See Delaney (181-2) and Sanok (56-7).

This is a reworking of John Capgrave's version of the St. Katherine story, to which Bokenham directs the reader earlier in the legend as if to invite comparison,⁶⁰ where she is followed to her execution by an assembly of pagan men and women whom she urges ("tartly", to use Delany's word) to weep for themselves and their own sin with the threat of hellfire over them if they fail to do so (Delany, 182). In Bokenham, Katherine does not threaten the women who accompany her—whose grief for her crosses the bounds of the feminine estates of mother, widow and maid—but she "benygnely" addresses them as "noby l wyvys & wedwys & maydyns ying" (7285) and asks that they leave their weeping and to "ioyith & makyth good chere" that she will join her lord "as hys owyn spouse" (7289-92). She couches both her suffering and her salvation in specifically gendered terms, here as she imagines a shift from maid to wife, by marking herself as a member of the female community, even one that is pagan; it is her womanhood that is underscored at the moment of her passion. Sanok has observed that sex in this passage takes precedence over differences in estate and differences between pagan and Christian in order to provide a "thematic parallel and interpretive guide" for the patrons of the life, Katherine Denston and Katherine Howard, who will land on different sides in the War of the Roses (57).

⁶⁰ But who-so lyst to knowleche for to have,
 And in that mater envereyd to be,
 My fadrys book, maystyr Ioon Capgrave,
 Wych that but newly compyld he,
 Mote he seke, & he there shal se
 In balaadys rymyd ful craftyly
 Alle that for ingorance here nowe leve I. (6354-60)

I agree with Sanok and Delany that Bokenham seems interested in creating a “woman-conscious atmosphere” (Delany, 181) but I also wish to draw attention to the matter, and language, of class which I suggest also works to collapse categories of readers in order to illuminate a common approach to interpretation. St. Katherine who is a “kyngys doughtyr” with a “ryht grete” fortune (6398-6400) seems to share a noble status with the women who weep for her. They are described as women of “hy wurthynesse” (7280) and Katherine calls them “noby” (7285) which draws a further parallel between the community of women inside the text (the crowd of sympathetic women and St. Katherine) and the community of women outside the text (patrons and conventual readers). That is, matrons, widows and maidens of a high degree are associated in the text with the saint, also of high degree, who is a virgin espoused to Christ just as Bokenham’s patrons share literary and devotional interests with their cloistered sisters. In this way Arundel 327 bears out and textualizes the observations that Riddy and Erler have made about the cheek-by-jowl existence of lay and religious devotional practices.

Similarly, in the legend of St. Christine when she is brought publicly to the high court, it is the reaction of the women to her father’s cruelty that Bokenham inscribes. When the women see her, Bokenham notes that “among hem was meny a wepyng eye, / And wyth a grete woys thai [...] dyde preye” (2446-7) for god to show her mercy. Later, when her head is shaved and “brennyng colys ther-up-on be spred” (2749), the women protest her torture by

claiming that to harm one maid is to harm all women: “in this mayde als mych as in the / All wommen thou confoundyst utirly” (2753-54). Again distinctions between pagan and Christian and virgin, wife and widow are elided to privilege a community of women who would speak together “with a great voice” for one of their own whose suffering is the suffering of “all wommen” in that moment. The response of the women in the text is an exemplum of sorts for the readers outside of the text, who can read in their collective prayer the cohesion of a feminine community. It is my aim in the rest of this chapter to examine the ways in which the emphasis on women’s voices and speech in the *Legendys* works to foreground women’s participation in the literary production of the legendary itself. I contend that the *Legendys* gives voice,⁶¹ both literally and metaphorically, to women participants in medieval literate culture not only as readers of the text whose response is modeled for them, but also as producers of the text, who model for readers the practical application of a distinctly feminine literary influence.

As I have already mentioned, Bokenham is careful to erase traces of the misogyny in his legendary that so often inhered in writing about women in the Middle Ages, even women saints,⁶² perhaps in deference to his female patrons.

⁶¹ Hilles also identifies “Bokenham’s female voice” in the legendary though she reads his appropriation of the “voice of the virgin martyr” as a means of defying “his literary fathers and the Lancastrian political agenda supported by their work” (203). As I have mentioned, I do not engage in the political agenda of Bokenham or his patrons though this has been a rich vein of scholarly enquiry; I am more interested here in Bokenham’s appropriation of the voice of his patrons.

⁶² Delany notes that Bokenham treats his saints with some respect by carefully excising traces of any traditional “misogynistic motif such as the demon’s lament in Margaret or the scholars’ antifeminism in Katherine or a

Indeed the identification of patrons with saints in the *Legendys* goes far to cement their influence as producers of the literature, especially in the ways that Bokenham characterizes his saints as, in Sanok's useful term, "agents of poetic production" (79) who are subtly aligned with the patrons of their legend. The prologue to the legend of St. Agatha anticipates her facility with speech when Bokenham details the etymology of her name, which is made up of

... "aga", wych "spekyng"
 And "Thau," wych betoknyth "endyng,"
 Thys wurd "Agatha" seyde ys, quod he;
 And wurthyly, for pleynly she
 Fyrst & last in hyr spekeyng
 Perfyht was, as shewyth hyr answeyng. (8305-10)⁶³

Her oral performance in the legend is most notable in the exchange with her tormentor Quyncyan over the issue of her "ientylnesse" and how she is able to abandon her noble status and lower herself before Christ (8456). Delany observes that in Voragine this exchange is short and "characteristically dry" but Bokenham expands it to some twenty lines that explore ideas of gentility, service and liberty (173). Agatha tellingly responds to Quyncyan's pressing questions about her pedigree that her state is indisputable and she is a "ientylwumman [...] as bern

potentially sexist one such as the nudity of the protagonist" (181). She sees Bokenham avoiding "gratuitous indignities" to the saint, so that Lucy is soaked in oil to invalidate her witchcraft, rather than in urine (181).

⁶³ Sanok also discusses this passage though she understands it in terms of the saint demonstrating perfect speech for the patron noting that Bokenham's "invocation of the virgin martyrs as muses reestablishes their exemplarity for [his] female patrons" (79-80). As I will discuss shortly below, I read this influence as moving in the opposite direction and suggest instead that the patron is something of an exemplar for the saint, or at least for the saint as she appears in this particular narrative.

wytnesse / Al my parentele ryht wele kan” (8444-45). Quyncyan cannot understand why she serves Christ if she is “ientyl” and “fre of byrth” because “servage & ientylnesse [...] to-gedyr no wys may be combynyd” (8456-57). Agatha responds by reinscribing Quyncyan’s own terms, in service of her argument. She tells him

That crystys servage ys grettest gentrye,
And most soveryn fredam & lyberte
Is in hys servyse prouyd to be;
Whom to servyn ys a kyngys offyhas. (8462-65)

Quyncyan can make no reply to her logic that identifies her service to Christ in the highest terms of a “kyngys offyhas” and demands instead that she “leve al this talkyng” (8466). True to her namesake she is able to perfect Quyncyan’s speech by having the last word. St. Agatha’s ability to verbally finish off her tormentor prompts Bokenham to ask her to reward those who love and worship her with same ability and to “have *in speche* swych perfeccoun / That alle here wurdys mow sownde vertu” (8332-33, emphasis mine). The saint should also “specyally ... attende” (8339-40) to his dedicatee, Agatha Flegge, who was the wife of John Flegge, a knight and administrator, who jointly held with her husband several land grants from the duke of York.⁶⁴ The text achieves already what Bokenham requests of the saint, that such perfection in speech should “sownde vertu”; that is, Bokenham’s ventriloquizing of St. Agatha’s perfect speech comes at the behest of

⁶⁴ For more information on Agatha Flegge and her husband see Delany, *Impolitic Bodies* (19-21).

Agatha Flegge, who was herself a “ientylwumman” and who is providing devotional literature under her aegis in the service of her namesake.

A similar negotiation between writer, patron and muse takes place in the prayer to Mary in the prologue to the legend of St. Anne composed by Bokenham for Katherine Denston, daughter of local gentry and wife of John Denston, a coroner and justice of the peace.⁶⁵ Bokenham asks Katherine to pray to Mary to grant him inspiration (as well as more material means) to write the legend of her mother, St. Anne:

... my frende Denston Kateryne,
 Lyche as I can this story to begynne,
 If grace my penne vochesaf to illumyne.
 Preyth ye enterly that blyssed virgyne,
 That she vouchesaf some beem lat shyne
 Up-on me of hyr specyal grace,
 And that I may have leyser & spaas,
 Thorgh help of influence dyvyne
 To oure bothe confort & solace
 This legende begunne for to termyn. (1466-76)

Katherine is figured here as the intercessor—a role that is usually reserved for Mary—and the means through which Bokenham is able to write the legend, not only because he asks her to secure him “specyal grace” but also because she provides for him the “leyser & spaas” necessary for writing. His request for “leisure and space” is yoked linguistically in the couplet to his request for divine inspiration, both of which fall to Katherine to acquire for him. The devotional activity of praying to the virgin for inspiration and material comfort calls into

⁶⁵ For more information on Katherine Denston (nee Clopton) see Delany, *Impolitic Bodies* (15-17).

question what Bokenham might mean when he suggests that both are supplied by “influence dyvyne”; while inspiration may be achieved via “some beam” the more mundane necessity for physical comfort must be dependant on the patron’s wealth and generosity though the text suggests that both are equal and necessary. In this way, Katherine is made saint-like as the supplier of the medieval version of “a room of one’s own” which is on a par with divine inspiration and integral to literary production.

Sanok has remarked on this same passage, concluding similarly that Bokenham “celebrates his patrons as agents of the work”, but she sees this as a strategy to circumvent the often “inappropriate models” that female saints present for their female readers (78-80). Virgin martyrs speak publicly “proclaiming their faith and preaching to hostile pagan communities”, usually defying the authority of a father or a husband in order to do so and this violation of the status quo, Sanok observes, complicates the doctrine of exemplarity that was so important to late medieval devotional practice because these are not easy examples to imitate (78). Sanok suggests that Bokenham’s strategy of drawing a parallel between the saintly (or virginal) muse and his patrons provides an exemplary relationship that places literary production at its centre and manages to erase the imperative to imitate the less seemly aspects of the saints’ lives because the patrons can imitate the saints in their role as muses safely mediated by a clerical author through whom they can speak (78-80).

This is a convincing argument, though it seems to rob Bokenham's patrons of any agency in the process of literary production at all. Moreover, it suggests, on the one hand, that all women readers of saints' lives are literalists ready to leap vociferously onto the public stage (which may well have been the fear of clerical authors) and, on the other, that Bokenham is fully in control of the writer-patron relationship, which amounts to little more than a fiction as it is textualized in the prologues. I suggest instead that the threat is not so much that women will imitate female saints and become loquacious, public preachers the moment they put down their books, rather, their participation as patrons in the literate culture means that they have already started to do so, albeit within the parameters managed by male authors. What Sanok observes as a mediating measure on Bokenham's part to control women's speech is, I think, an indication that patronage represented for some women a measure of control over their own speech and, importantly, a public forum for it. I have already discussed the ways in which patronage provided opportunities for women to exercise personal power politically, culturally or economically, though it is important to add, following Finke, that because patronage relationships are personal and "entered into voluntarily", they are also volatile because they can be terminated "by either party at any time" (*Women's Writing*, 75). It would be unwise of Bokenham to exercise too much control over the production of his saints' lives, lest he lose his "leisure and space" to write them. While I agree with Sanok that he makes his patrons saint-like in their literary production, I contend that he does not shift their agency onto the

saint so much as he manages to sanction their participation as patrons by making the saints more like them. This is especially true in those legends that privilege feminine speech in the public domain as an integral part of their narrative.

The prolocutory to the life of Mary Magdalen narrates the commission of a Middle English text that specifies in detail the social context of its origin, its relationship to the literary activity of other women, and its patron's personal interest in the subject matter. Delany observes that Isabel Bouchier, Countess of Eu, was the "most highly placed and well-descended" of Bokenham's patrons, being both nobly born and married into one of England's most prominent families (21). She was, as Bokenham reminds his readers, Richard of York's sister: "Doun cenveyid by the same pedegru / That the duk of york is come, for she / Hys sustyr is in egal degre" (5006-08). Her husband, Henry, viscount Bouchier, was descended from Edward III (as was Isabel) and eventually became treasurer of England (1455) and Earl of Essex (1461-81). Isabel lived at Clare Castle, adjacent to the Clare priory—where both Bokenham and Thomas Burgh were brethren—of which she and her husband were both benefactors. Bokenham recounts a Twelfth Night celebration that likely took place at Clare Castle, during which the countess requests that he translate the legend of St. Mary Magdalen into English for her:

"I have," quod she, "of pure affeccyoun
Ful longe tym had a synguler devocyoun
To that holy wumman, wych, as I gesse,
Is clepyd of apostyls the apostyllesse;
Blyssyd Mary mawdelyn y mene,

[...]

Whos lyf in englysshe I desyre sothly
To han maad, & for my sake
If ye lykyd the labour take,
& for reverence of hyr, I wold you preye.” (5065-75)

The voluntary and personal nature of the patronage exchange is dramatized by Bokenham, who, as a guest in Isabel’s home, is made the proverbial offer that he cannot refuse. Isabel signals her personal affection for Mary Magdalen and her desire for an English version of her life, but she asks that Bokenham begin the translation only if he likes the sound of the labour, which he would undertake not for Isabel per se, but for reverence of Mary Magdalen though notably that “labour” is couched in the verse between Isabel’s interest (“my sake”) and the saint’s (“for reverence of hyr”). Presented as it is as a commission between patron and saint, Bokenham seems to suggest that refusing Isabel would also be refusing the saint. Furthermore, the request is made after she has talked with Bokenham about his “dyvers legendys [...] of hooly wummen” (5035-45), including the legend of St. Elizabeth. He admits that he undertook this translation

At request of hyr to whom sey nay
I nether kan, ne wyl, ne may,
So mych am I boundon to hyr goodnesse,
I mene of Oxenforthe the countesse,
Dame Elyzabeth ver by hyr ryht name
Whom god evere kepe from syn & shame. (5051-56)

The mention of Elizabeth de Vere, another of Bokenham’s influential patrons, locates his legendary within a community of powerful women patrons and his deference to her seems to endorse his suitability for Isabel’s request, an event that

he takes some pains to describe (5020-89). His inability to “sey nay” to Elizabeth is echoed in his inability to refuse Isabel, which, he states, is difficult because he cannot deny “a-statys preyer, which after the entent / Of the poete is a myhty comaundement” (5082-83). The patron’s “comaundement”, a word that is often used to describe a patron’s commission, as will be evident in subsequent chapters, is nearly on a par with the poet’s own inspiration.

Furthermore, in a prayer to Mary Magdalen part way through her legend Bokenham asks that she speed Isabel “in al hyr werkys & get hyr blysse / Wych of this wrytyng cause princypal isse” (5742-43). This is no small point. The prologue to the entire collection begins with an analysis of the reason and scope of the work, which Bokenham explains, following Aristotle, via the four causes.⁶⁶ The first (or efficient) cause, he tells us, “is the auctour, wych after hys cunningg doth hys labour / To a-complyse the begunne matere” (13-15). In describing Isabel as the “princypal cause” of his poem, Bokenham, by his own definition, identifies her as the “auctor” of “this wrytyng”. As I have already mentioned in

⁶⁶ Aristotle identifies the four causes thus: the formal cause as a thing’s substance (i.e. the shape of a statue); the material cause as its matter (the bronze from which a statue is made); the efficient cause as its motivating force (the sculptor); and the final cause as the objective (his reason for making it). See Alistair Minnis, *Medieval Theory of Authorship: Scholastic Literary Attitudes in the Middle Ages*, for a more detailed discussion of the four causes and how they were used to introduce lectures and works of literature (28-31).

Minnis notes that various writers were using Aristotle’s paradigm to provide a basic structure to the introductions to their work and that they made some modifications as necessary (160-64). Bokenham shuffles the order here and in doing so he seems to privilege the efficient cause, or the author: “The fyrst is clepyd the cause efficyent, / The secunde they clepe cause materyal, / Formal the thrydde, the fourte fynal” (10-12).

the introduction to this study, and as will become more apparent throughout, medieval authorship was a malleable term, referring at once to the moral properties of a work as well as to the makers of it. It is a central tenet of this study that makers of a text—including poets and translators, as well as readers and patrons—fall under the rather compendious term “auctor”. Because Bokenham uses the term “auctor”, if slant, to describe the role of Isabel Bouchier in his translation of the life of Mary Magdalen, then we must allow for, and carefully consider, the range of positions that mediate the literary authority to produce texts in medieval England and reconsider the influence of the patron on the text, on the poet, and on the audience.

The life of Mary Magdalen begins with a description of her great wealth and beauty and how she squanders these gifts by succumbing to the lure of sensual pleasures. She lives her life as a sinner until she repents via the mercy of Jesus “thorgh whos doctryne she was in entent / of hir for-lyf to makyn a-mendement” (5414-15). She and her family (her brother Lazarus and her sister Martha) follow Christ and his disciples, supporting them and offering them the hospitality of their house in Bethany. Mary has extended personal contact with Christ, listening to “hys wurdys ful devouthly” (5539), and achieves perfection through her own acts of mercy, with which she comforts Christ by nourishing and sheltering him and, importantly, remaining by his side at the crucifixion and witnessing his resurrection. Having recounted the first part of Mary’s life, Bokenham then describes Mary’s work in Marseilles where she preaches “cryst

most stedfastlye” (5786) to the heathen people who listen to her gladly. There she prays for the princess, who had been barren, to conceive a child and, when mother and son die in childbirth, her prayers resurrect them. Thereafter, Mary retreats to the wilderness to live in seclusion where she is raised to heaven by angels at the seven canonical hours each day. She re-emerges from the wilderness after thirty years, takes communion and dies before the altar. “A ful redolent odour in that same plass” (6286) remains for seven days after her death in the church where many of the sick are cured by her goodness. The legend is a narrative of Mary’s progress from sinner to penitent, to authentic witness and apostolic preacher, to a Christ-like figure with the power to revive the dead and finally to a hermit and ascetic. She embodies at once an active life lived in service to Christ and the contemplative life spent in seclusion and prayer and in this way her *vita* relates a version (if especially extreme) of the mixed life, a life that balances active service and contemplative devotions to which noblewomen were often recommended.⁶⁷

Delany more broadly characterizes the Magdalen narrative as a reflection of humanity’s progress “from birth into original sin to salvation by faith”—or, from the fall of Adam to redemption in Christ—and suggests that this makes her

⁶⁷ In fact, Mary and her sister Martha are figured as emblems for the active and contemplative lives in late medieval England, which is articulated in the legend itself:

...we seen that the ocupacyoun
 Of actyf lyf in this mortalyte,
 To the lyf of inward contmplatcyoun
 May in no wyse paryfycat be;
 Wych two lyvys fygyrd fynde we
 In these two sustres, Marthe & Marye (5570-75)

legend more accessible to the ordinary reader (53). Furthermore, Mary Magdalen is unique in the collection because she does not suffer torture, which lends her *vita* a normality that is not as apparent in the grotesqueries of more conventional martyrologies (Delany, 54). The Magdalen's legend is also unique in that it is the only one in the collection that narrates the life of a sinner redeemed, though her fall is, tellingly, described in class-based terms. Like Isabel Bouchier, she was "born of the most wurthy kyn" and comes "of the royel blood descendyd" (5369-71) and inherited a great fortune upon her parents' death, including "a castel callyd Magdalum [...] where-of she namyd was Magdalyne" (5384-86). When she succumbs to sensual pleasures she not only loses her virtue, but also her social standing: "so comoun she was, that ful pytously / hir name she lost" and she became known as "Marie the synnere" (5405-08). In this way, sinfulness becomes a threat not only to the soul, but also to noble lineage and the cachet of a prestigious name. Medieval saints often came of "noble stock" and, as André Vauchez observes, it became a commonplace that sainthood was the special preserve of the aristocracy:

While by no means all noblemen were considered saints by the church, it had become almost impossible for someone not of noble stock to acquire a certain repute in this domain, so firmly entrenched became the conviction that moral and spiritual perfection could flourish only in one of noble birth and illustrious descent. (26)

Bokenham's life of Mary Magdalen shows that, while it may only be possible to achieve spiritual perfection if noble, it is also possible to lose that nobility through sin, which punishes the sinner and the family of the sinner by sullyng the claim

on nobility with the taint of “common” behaviour. Bokenham seems to recognize that the social conditions for sainthood parallel his patrons’ lives, both in their wealth and social standing and in their capacity for charity. When Mary Magdalen is forgiven her sins through the mercy of Christ and, famously, anoints Christ’s feet in the house of Simon the leper, she follows him and his apostles and because “she ryche was habundaunthly, / She mynystyrd hym & hys in there nede” (5504-05). Through this charity to Christ, Mary attains “hy perfeccyoune” (5534). The Magdalen story demonstrates the proper use of abundant riches for members of the nobility, whose worldly concerns for material wealth and status were often at odds with the concern for spiritual validation. Patronage presented an opportunity for the aristocracy to display their largesse under the aegis of spiritual edification and Isabel’s patronage of Bokenham has the double advantage of affording him the leisure and space to produce the translation, and of providing a vernacular version of the life of Mary Magdalen for an audience of English readers, accomplished under her name. She mirrors Mary Magdalen’s generosity, albeit on a smaller scale, which models virtuous behaviour (both Mary’s and Isabel’s) for all of its readers but in the specific realm of devotional literary activities.

Isabel’s mention in the prolocutory of Mary Magdalen as “the apostyllesse” suggests that she is interested in the saint’s career as a public preacher with authority over the apostles. As Delany has shown, not every version of Mary Magdalen’s life dwells on her skills in oratory; she notes that

Christine de Pizan, for example, omits mention of her preaching entirely in the third section of her *Book of the City Ladies* (90). Indeed, Mary Magdalen was a controversial figure for much of the Middle Ages with a debate in the early history of the church concentrated on whether or not Christ had commanded her, counter to the prohibition against female preachers, to teach Christian doctrine in public.⁶⁸ In the late Middle Ages, however, sermons, plays and hagiographic writings, including Bokenham's *Legendys*, begin to proliferate and seem to acknowledge Mary Magdalene's role as the first witness to the resurrection and as an apostolic preacher. Indeed, Bokenham seems to enter into the debate when he emphasizes and celebrates her skill in speech, which Delany reads as a "conscious artistic choice" and a "daring one" for the period (90). In her *vita*, after Christ's ascension, she is driven to preach to the heathen people of Marseilles when she sees them sacrifice to their idols:

She hem revokyd from hyr ydolatrie
 And prechyd hem cryst most stedfastlye.
 Alle that hir herdyn awundryd were,
 What for hyr beute on that o party
 And for the facundy wch she oysyd there,
 And for the swetnesse eek of hyr eloquency,
 Wch from hyr mouth cam so plesauntly
 That thei haddyn a very delectacyoun
 Style to stondyn & here her predycacyoun. (5785-93)

She achieves perfection in speech not only through acts of mercy but also through listening to Christ's doctrine from the human Christ himself and learning her

⁶⁸ On Mary as a preacher, see Alcuin Blamires, "Women and Preaching in Medieval Orthodoxy, Heresy and Saints' Lives"; Kathryn Ludwig Jansen, *The Making of the Magdalen* (49-99) and Nicole Beriou, "The Right of Women to Give Religious Instruction in the Thirteenth Century."

eloquence from him. The poem tells us that the “sweetness”—anticipating the sweet odour that emanates from her after death—comes of her “so devoutly” kissing “up-on cryst oure saluaturys feet” (5796-97) which gave her the “savour” of “goddys wurde” (5800). Delany notes that this “direct oral-pedal contact” is what makes Mary Magdalene a preacher and identifies the Magdalene legend as the one that “most fully expresses the incarnation of Jesus” because of all the legends in the collection it foregrounds the physicality of both the saint and Christ (93-94). I take Delany’s point though I also understand Mary’s “oral-pedal contact” with Christ as a metaphor, however strange and however literal, for the generative inspiration of the word of God that underpins theories of medieval authorship. All authors were, ultimately, imitating the authority of God and the writings of the Bible and so were standing on the shoulders of giants (or kissing their feet) in order to do so. The success of Mary’s sermon, while attributed to Christ’s inspiration, is still remarkable, however, because it is female speech succeeding in the male preserve of preaching. Patriarchal ideals that prohibited women from public speaking and teaching are directly challenged by a woman who successfully imitates Christ’s rhetoric in order to effect a conversion of heathens. That this *vita* is ascribed, by its poet, to the literary authority of Isabel Bouchier further underscores notions of female agency in the usually masculine fields of writing, teaching, and oratory.

This last category, oratory, is probably best explored in the life of St. Katherine, which immediately follows St. Mary Magdalen in Arundel 327.

Calling on St. Katherine to assist him in “wurd & werk” (6343), Bokenham writes her legend for the “gostly consolacyoun” of Katherine Howard, and to “conforte” Katherine Denston, both women of the mercantile elite in East Anglia. Delany calls it the “most explicitly gender oriented life” in the collection not because Katherine is an eloquent noblewoman who engages in public speaking—Mary Magdalen does the same—but because her speech is in direct competition with men (169). Concentrating solely on her passion, rather than including the story of her conversion (Bokenham recommends reading Capgrave [6356-60]; see my note 60), Katherine’s legend is the narrative of a sustained argument with her tormentor, the emperor Maxence, who is impressed by her beauty and wisdom and wants her to renounce her Christian faith and become his concubine. She is a practiced speaker who is well-trained in the seven liberal arts; in fact, such is the conviction and eloquence of her argument that the emperor calls for fifty rhetoricians to debate with and defeat her, whom she neatly converts. Katherine endures tortures, with the aid of Christ, and converts the queen and one of the emperor’s highest officers with “holy talkyng” (6990), who also are martyred for their faith. Bokenham’s version, unlike others such as Capgrave’s,⁶⁹ takes as its central episode Katherine’s public debate with the fifty sages and orators that Maxence hires to refute her. Like Mary Magdalen, she assumes speech in a traditionally masculine milieu and, further, she succeeds in its execution by

⁶⁹ See Delany for a more detailed discussion of the ways in which Bokenham omits much of Katherine’s *vita* that appears in Capgrave’s version, which she finds to be especially misogynistic (169-72).

bettering professional speakers and undercutting the received, and popular, medieval notion that women are inferior orators.

... Katherine is well-prepared, however, for her eventual triumph over the orators by the breadth of her liberal education. So “profoundly” informed is she in “ych science / Of the sevene wych be clepyd liberal” that there “was no clerk founde in that cuntre, / What-every he were or of what degre, / But that she wyth hym coude comune” (6392-97). Her educational history suggests that her triumph over the rhetoricians is a foregone conclusion as does her propensity for code-switching; she is able to engage the emperor in skillful logic—“by many sylogysyms & by many an argument” (6493)—as well as in “comown speche” (6499).⁷⁰ As Hilles has noted, in *Voragine* Katherine’s debate with the orators is a “virtuoso performance”, but in *Bokenham* she reduces the fifty orators to silence, by using “wurdys bare” (6762) to defeat their “pompous phylosophye” (6804) (205). She surrenders her own learned and philosophical rhetoric in favour of plain speech:

Of yow I ask leyser & space
Myn entent pleynly for to declare,
Wyth-owte rethoryk, in wurdys bare
Of argumentatyf dysceptacyoun.
For truly I mak a pretestacyoun
That syth I am in crystys argumentys
Instruct, I for-sake alle argumentys
Of seculer kunnyng, & of phylosophye,
And othir thyng to kun I now denye
Than hym wych welle is of alle vertu

⁷⁰ Both Delany and Hilles remark that Katherine is like *Bokenham* himself in education as well as verbal prowess. See Delany, *Impolitic Bodies* (94) and Hilles (205).

And of al kunnyng, my lord cryst Ihesu. (6760-70)

She gives a brief account of Christ's incarnation, passion and resurrection and concludes:

Lo, syrrys, this my phylosophy ys,
Myn wyt, myn art, & al my kunnyng,
Bysyde wych I knoueleche to kun no thyng,
Thys kunnyng passyth al tresore & cophyrs. (6792-95)

Her modesty regarding her wit and her art is understated here. The emperor has accused her of using “treccherous sotylte” (6657) to ensnare him in sophisticated arguments “by poysye, / By rethoryk or ellys by phylosophye” (6693-94) and she counters this accusation by demonstrating that she is equally adept in speaking without “argumentatyf dysceptacyoun”, tellingly, when she speaks about Christ. Delany notes that her “plain homiletic style” here operates as an *imitatio* of Christ who also “adopted a lower style [...] becoming human in order to address humanity” (95). I suggest, following Hilles, that this is also an *imitatio* of Bokenham's own rhetorical strategy within the collection.

Hilles reads Bokenham's stylistic preference for plain speech in the *Legendys* as a response to his literary forefathers (Gower, Chaucer and Lydgate) and their Lancastrian leanings. She sees in the life of St. Katherine especially that Bokenham “develops the relationship between rhetorical simplicity and religious virtue” that he has been establishing in contrast to the sophisticated, courtly poetry of Gower, Chaucer and Lydgate, whom he references throughout the poem

(206).⁷¹ She suggests that Bokenham “utilizes the voices of the virgin martyrs to transform his dullness [i.e. his unadorned style] into a position of moral superiority” (206). Indeed, by the end of the collection in the life of St. Elizabeth, his final reference to his literary fathers makes clear the inadequacy of sophisticated poetry to describe the virtue of his saints:

For thow I had kunnyng for to ryme
 And eek to endyten as copyously
 As had Gower & chauncers in ther tyme,
 Or as now hath the munk of bery,
 Ioon Lytgate, yet coud not I
 Thys blyssyd wumman Elyzabeth commende
 After hyr merytys suffycyently,
 And therfore to secyn I now intende. (10529-36)

He echoes Katherine here, asserting the difficulty of signifying true virtue with elevated rhetoric and so decides to avoid it. More telling still, however, is that Katherine in her address to the orators seems to echo Bokenham when she asks for “leyser & space” her “entent pleynly for to declare”. In almost identical language, as is evident in the epigraph to this chapter, Bokenham begins his legendary by seeking to “declaryth pleynly [...] the entent / of the auctor” (21-24). Further, Katherine also makes the same request for “leisure and space” that Bokenham asks of Katherine Denston in order to make the legend of St. Anne. I argued earlier that by asking Katherine to pray to Mary on his behalf for divine inspiration, Bokenham effectively links his need for material support with his need for spiritual support, which comes through Katherine’s prayer and her purse.

⁷¹ Delany characterizes this relationship as a “polemic against overclassicizing poets” in contrast to an Augustinian Christian aesthetic (45).

In this way, Katherine and not Mary is his muse and, like Isabel, the “primary cause” of his text. As if to signal this shift in Katherine Denston’s literary pedigree, he ventriloquizes ⁷² himself seeking patronage, in the voice of the saint named for his patron; that is, in St. Katherine’s triumphant speech, he reminds his patron of her role in his poetics by echoing the voice of the poet in the voice of the saint modeled on his patron. In this way, Bokenham locates women’s voices in an unadorned style that he proposes as an alternative to the purple poetics of his near-contemporary male poets: a voice that is suitable for illuminating the passion of female saints and the passion of Christ, thereby addressing the devotional needs and literary interests of a powerful female readership.

Earlier in this chapter I noted that the misogyny of female saints’ lives has tended to relegate them to a peripheral place in the history of medieval women’s literature despite the fact that female saints’ lives offer a copious amount of evidence for women’s participation in the literate culture of the Middle Ages.

This critical concern (which is an important and productive one) may have, until

⁷² My use of “ventriloquization” recalls Elizabeth Harvey’s use of the term in *Ventriloquized Voices: Feminist Theory and English Renaissance Texts*. While Harvey uses it to query the process of transvestism that occurs when male authors voice female characters in classical and early modern drama and poetry and claims that it erases the gender of the authorial voice, I use it here to suggest that Bokenham is not obscuring the gender of his patron, but highlighting it by associating her with both the female saint who is her namesake and with himself as the author of the work.

recently, obscured the fact that female saints' lives can also be understood as central to women's literary history and that the category of "women's literature" owes much to the genre's inclusion of women in its narratives. Bokenham's collection of female saints' lives provides a significant example of the genre in late medieval England, focusing as it does on women both inside and outside of the text. The manuscript is an extraordinary witness to women's participation in literate culture, recording as it does the names of six women patrons and announcing its intended ownership by Betrice Burgh and her enclosed sisters. The lively debates about its production, compilation and dissemination—varying from careful and detailed codicological analysis on the one hand, to rich and thoughtful literary and historical analysis on the other—have contributed much to our understanding of the text's audience and purpose. In this chapter I have sidestepped the issues of the text's political agendas and literary influences, topics that have been thoroughly and expertly explored already, and concentrated instead on reading into the saints' lives, the lives of the women for whom the text was written.

Careful to avoid the murky waters of biographical criticism, I have argued that Bokenham strategically voices his patrons' participation in literary production through the voices of the saints whose legends they have sponsored. Neither silent nor obedient, and sometimes not even chaste, Bokenham's saints nevertheless provide moral and devotional examples to a gendered audience that is reflected in the text. Their exemplary value is augmented by their association

with socially elite women; the women patrons, in turn, are able to demonstrate in a public way their commitment to their own spiritual lives and the spiritual lives of the broader audience of English readers. In this way, Bokenham's patrons are also like him as producers of English texts, and he flags this similarity with linguistic parallels between his own stated poetics and the speech of his female saints who already resemble their namesake patrons. This blurring of boundaries between writer, patron and saint demonstrates the collaborative activity that characterizes medieval authorship. The necessity and practice of multiple authors is reflected in the very assembly of the medieval manuscript; an artefact subject to the whims of writers, scribes and compilers as well as patrons and readers. Assessing the influence of any single "author" in a text is a tricky exercise given the layers of anonymous participation and the difficulty of quantifying and qualifying that participation. I have argued for an overlap in the roles of Bokenham and his patrons based on stylistic clues and telling, if tenuous, similarities between Bokenham, his patrons and his saints, but I have been unable to provide irrefutable evidence that Bokenham, or his patrons, saw themselves in the saints' lives he produced. In the next chapter we shall see a patron whose influence on the text is more transparent because she appears as herself in the text, marking it as her own as she models for her readers (and herself) the way in which a text can be an exemplar for how to live a spiritually valid life, especially as an aristocratic woman.

CHAPTER TWO

**A woman talking about the things of God:
Margaret of York's dialogue with Christ**

*Y sey not thou schalt fle bodili from the world or from thi wordeli
goodis for thes ben principal ocasiones, but I counsele the in herte
and in wil that thou fle al suche vanites, for thay thou be a lord or
a laidi, housbond-man or wif, thou maist have as stable an herte
and wil as some religious that sitteth in cloistre.*

--Contemplations of the Dread and Love of God

*If I had not seene it and knowne yt I wold never write it but I was
there duringe this feaste and daylye there present. [...] I suppose
that no prynce, christen ne heathen, mighte have furnished so riche
ne so tryumphante a feaste as this was, ne have shewed nor
displayed so manye riche bagues and jewells as were shewed at
that feaste.*

--account of the ceremony to celebrate the marriage of Margaret of
York and Charles the Bold, 1468. Oxford, Bodleian MS
Rawlinson B. 102

The frontispiece of Brussels, Bibliotheque Royale de Belgique MS 9296, a manuscript commissioned by Margaret of York between 1468 and 1477 from her almoner Nicolas Finet, depicts its patron occupying herself by administering to her subjects through the Seven Corporal Works of Mercy (figure 2.1).⁷³ The miniature, which opens part one of the text *Benois seront les miséricordieux* [Blessed are the merciful], is divided into eight separate scenes that portray

⁷³ The Seven Corporal Works of Mercy are described by Christ in Matthew 25: 35-39 as the good deeds that would be rewarded at the Last Judgement.

Margaret performing the seven acts of benevolence: giving food to the hungry, drink to the thirsty, clothing the naked, sheltering the poor and pilgrims, visiting those in prison, visiting the sick and burying the dead. In each of the scenes she is accompanied by Christ, who looks on as a passive observer.⁷⁴ It is a subject from the catechism found in numerous paintings and murals from the early fourteenth century onward and, while surviving images depict both men and women performing the works, the prominence and number of examples of the image with female protagonists has long been noted (Gill, 102). It seems to model for women in particular the manner in which they might secure spiritual well-being through the practical performance of compassion and charity, as well as through contact with Christ himself.

This is borne out in the textual counterpart to the image. The image operates as an introduction to the *Benois*, an ascetic treatise that focuses on the active life of mercy and good works. Andrea Pearson has described the manuscript and notes that it comprises three parts: the first two include scriptural passages from the Old and New Testaments and rules for behaviour established by the Church fathers; the third lists appropriate works of mercy (“Productions of Meaning,” 39). It was compiled and translated from materials found in the Carthusian monastery at Hérinnes in Hainaut by Finet who produced it “a la requeste de tres grande et tres excellente dame et tres redoubtee princesse madame Marguerite d’York” [at the request of the very grand and very excellent

⁷⁴ This image is also described by Andrea Pearson, “Productions of Meaning in Portraits of Margaret of York,” (40).

and very formidable princess, madame Margaret of York] (fol. 1v; qtd. and trans. in Pearson, “Productions of Meaning,” 38). It forms the pendant to a treatise on the contemplative life, *Le dyalogue de la ducesse de bourgogne a Ihesu Crist*, an original composition written by Finet for the duchess around the same time as the *Benois*, which survives in London, British Library MS Additional 7970.⁷⁵ The *Dyalogue* aims to train the reader in meditative prayer and teaches an understanding of meditative prayer through contemplation of Christ, and confession and meditation on the Passion and hell. The manuscripts together form a mirror of active and contemplative virtue in which Margaret is invited to see herself reflected. The final frame of the illustration from the *Benois* seems to anticipate Margaret’s use of the text insofar as it portrays a scene of reading. In it Margaret, in the presence of her patron saint Margaret of Antioch, kneels before her prieu-dieu on which rests an open book. She seems to be holding the left page

⁷⁵ Though the only recorded date in the manuscript is 1502, which is attached to a presentation inscription, Pearson has suggested that the manuscript was probably commissioned by Margaret shortly after her marriage in 1468. Noting that the colours of the duchess’s dress in the frontispiece illustration are those that the duchess wore on her wedding day (in later portraits she is depicted in more sombre colours) and that the text describes Margaret as the sister of Edward IV and the wife of Charles the Bold (in later books she is given the title the Duchess of Burgundy), Pearson posits that the texts were commissioned by the Margaret as guides for her new life as a busy Burgundian duchess. (“Production of Meaning,” 38-9).

The manuscript itself comprises 142 leaves of vellum measuring 20 cm x 14 cm, with single columns of one bastard secretary script throughout. Headings are in red and initials are decorated throughout in gold. There are two major decorated pages: one is a miniature showing the risen Christ appearing to a kneeling Margaret with a border of flowers, birds and a banner with the arms of the duchess and a vase in the lower border with the initials “C M” (Charles and Margaret) (figure 2.3); the other is a title page with a full border of flowers, birds and initials with the arms of the duchess.

of the book in her hand, either in readiness to turn over the page or, more likely, having just done so; it is a portrait of reading in progress. Despite her physical engagement with the book, however, Margaret curiously does not seem to direct her attention to the text in front of her. Instead, her gaze is leveled outward, outside of the frame, in fact, and toward the depictions of the Seven Corporal Works of Mercy that she herself performs. The final frame demonstrates for Margaret the process and idealized product of her reading.⁷⁶

This image might profitably be read against a second, related contemporary image: that of Margaret's step-daughter Mary of Burgundy, who is shown in her book of hours engaged in reading (figure 2.2). It is a well-known image that is often looked to as evidence to support aristocratic women's ownership and use of books of hours.⁷⁷ In it, Mary sits before a gothic window surrounded by personal objects—an ornate rosary, a richly woven purse, a tiny dog nestled in her lap—that identify her with wealth and luxury.⁷⁸ Like the image of Margaret, she is caught in the act of reading; she holds the book above waist

⁷⁶ Pearson reads this final frame somewhat differently. She suggests that the final two frames depict the burial of the dead and that the one completes the other, though she also considers the final frame independently. She similarly notes that Margaret seems to be enacting the contemplative life here and that both the active and contemplative lives are portrayed “inviting *Le dyalogue* and the *Benois seront les misericordieux* to be considered in tandem” and providing “a visual and textual guide” to Margaret (“Gendered Subject,” 53).

⁷⁷ See for example, Sandra Penketh, “Women and Books of Hours”, D.H. Green, *Women Readers in the Middle Ages* (83-129), and Laurel Amtower, *Engaging Words: the Culture of Reading in the Later Middle Ages* (72-77).

⁷⁸ Penketh reads a number of these objects for their significant emblematic use, particularly the dog, who denotes faithfulness; the iris, which identifies the purity of the Virgin Mary; and the carnations, which are symbols of betrothal (266).

height, supported on a rich cloth, and looking down at it, she traces with her left forefinger the words on the page.⁷⁹ Through the window of the church behind her, the Virgin and Child appear before the altar, and to the left of them, Mary appears again, kneeling, with a small book beneath her arm. Penketh reads the scene beyond the window as a visualization of the prayer that Mary is reading and “an attempt to create—by some empathetic turn of the imagination—an exact replica of the words she looks at” (266). Like a medieval version of an animated thought bubble, the double presence of Mary situates her both inside and outside of the book and the viewer is meant to understand the image as a visual representation of the interiority of the act of contemplative reading. Amtower suggests further that the anachronism of the sacramental scene (in which the Virgin sits in a gothic cathedral attended by ladies dressed in the height of fifteenth-century fashion) “illustrates the imaginative interaction between reader and text, projecting Mary’s own experience of lived life onto the scenes she reads from her open prayer book” (74). Amtower insists that

the adoration *must* be portrayed in contemporary dress, because it exists in the contemporary moment of Mary’s own mind. The dual interrelated images of silent, absorbed reader and the fantastic, colourful gothic image playing out above her makes insistent the didactic message: The recreation of the past springs into conscious reality only by means of a creative fusion of text and reader. (74)

As I suggested earlier with respect to images of the Virgin reading, this portrait also relays the interrelationship between the reader and the text and recognizes

⁷⁹ Green has examined the original and notes that the right page has been partly lifted, presumably by Mary’s right forefinger which is obscured by the cloth, poised to turn over the page (118).

how the reader, in reading, functions as a part of salvation history by recomposing that history as a part of her own.

Returning then, to the image of Margaret in the final frame of the *Benois* miniature, we may be given to understand that it is operating in the same manner as does the image in *The Hours of Mary of Burgundy*. It instructs Margaret in the correct reception of the text; she reads, imagines herself into the text performing the acts of mercy in the presence of Christ and then, ideally, leaves the book and ministers to the needy in the world. The *Benois* is a manual for how to live an active life in the service of God and so the imaginative work of reading that invites the reader to see herself taking part in the text's project functions as a means of furthering the lessons of the text and of making reading an integral part of the active life. The questions I seek to answer in this chapter have to do with precisely the interrelationship between the reader and the text represented in these two images. This chapter turns the focus of its inquiry to Finet's companion to the *Benois*, *Le dyalogue de la ducesse de bourgogne a Ihesu Crist*, a text that is expressly concerned with training the reader to lead a contemplative life. If reading is already figured as contemplation, as these visual representations of reading suggest, how is contemplation imagined in the *Dyalogue*? What expectations are placed on the aristocratic reader as she takes up the book for the purposes of spiritual guidance? And what does the reader, Margaret of York, bring to the text herself?

In the previous chapter I suggested that the participation of Bokenham's patrons in the literary production of the *Legendys* was marked in the text by the voices of the saints whose legends they had sponsored. I proposed, for example, that we might consider Isabel Bouchier, the patron of the life of Mary Magdalen, as the voice in the Magdalen's preaching, particularly in her capacity of bringing the teachings of the text to an audience of (mostly women) readers. This kind of textual ventriloquization is even more clearly defined in the *Dyalogue* because Finet has conceived of his treatise as a conversation between his patron, Margaret of York, and Christ in which Margaret asks Christ for his advice on how to live a contemplative life. As Nicole Rice has recently discussed, dialogic texts take the reader through "forms of self-reformation and teaching" that reproduce their clerical advisor's own "virtuous practices" and as such the format allows the "dynamic nature of instruction" to display "ways for interlocutors to teach and learn simultaneously" (50, 53). Rice uses the term "dialogic" purposefully to invoke Bahktin's idea of the dialogic as an open exchange between teacher and learner that operates as a mode of resistance to more rigid "unitary language" (52). Following Bahktin, she sees in dialogic texts of spiritual guidance "responsive understanding [as] a fundamental force, one that participated in the formulation of discourse, and is moreover an *active* understanding" (52-3). She posits that dialogue "creates a new matrix for literary discrimination and mutual imitation among clerical author, lay reader, and Christ" (53). This recognition of textual dialogue as a form of flexible communication between interlocutors is an

important factor in my understanding and exploration of Margaret's experience as a reader and an influence on the text she reads. Rather than visualizing herself enacting what the text tells her to do, as meditative devotional treatises I discuss in later chapters ask of their readers, Margaret is given a voice within the text, which offers a semblance of autonomy in the course of her conversation with Christ. In this way, the text insists on her direct and deep involvement in the act of reading. The inward turn of contemplation in the text is aided not by visualization, but by *conversation*, a conversation in which Margaret must work through the devotional programme of balancing the active and contemplative lives with what she identifies as the "plusiers occupacions" [several occupations] (fol. 20v) that are required of her as the wife of Duke Charles of Burgundy, "oon of the myghtyest Princez of the World that bereth no crowne" (qtd. in Blockmans, 29).

The balance of the active and contemplative lives, both of which were necessary for salvation, was an ideal that most noblewomen, in England and on the continent, sought to maintain in the later Middle Ages. Christine de Pisan in *The Treasury of the City Ladies*, for example, acknowledges the particular difficulty for aristocratic women to maintain this balance:

The princess says to herself, "I see very well that, as I do not feel myself to be the sort of person who can wholeheartedly choose and follow one of these two lives, I will try hard at least to strike a happy medium, as St. Paul counsels, and take as much as I can from both lives according to my ability." (40)

As Bryan points out, the concept of the mixed life was not one that was originally applied to noblewomen but to secular clergy in their role as ministers to the day-

to-day needs of their congregations, though it grew in popularity in the later Middle Ages as more and more lay readers turned to monastic literature in order to practice devotions modeled by the professional religious (21-2). The lengthy introduction to the *Dyalogue* touches on the demands of maintaining a contemplative life within the world and suggests that the active life be used as a means of supporting—by keeping it uncluttered—the imaginative space required for contemplation:

Comme la vye humaine est devisee en deux membres qui sont la vye active et contemplative et que pour parvenir a beatitude qui est la fin aquoy toute humaine creature est cree il est besoing et necessance que ces deux vyes soient bien ordonnees ensamble en la personne raisonnable. Car la vye active embrase la personne en lamour de son proisme pour acomplir les oeuvres de misericorde tant corporelles comme espirituelles et refraint et reboutte les concupiscences de la petit sensitif ad ce que raison et entendement ayent franc et liberal ouvraige es choses contmplatives et divines pour contempler et plus de clerement veoyr la fin spirituelle aquoy elle est ordonnee qui est la seconde vye qui est ditte la vye contemplative. (fols. 2-3v)

[As human life is divided into two parts, which are the active life and the contemplative, and in order to reach beatitude, which is the reason that all human creatures are created, it is needed and necessary that these two ways of life should be properly balanced in a reasonable person. Because the active life embraces a person in the love of her neighbour to accomplish works of mercy that are as much corporal as spiritual and to refrain from and rebut desires for sensory things, so that reason and understanding can work freely and liberally in things contemplative and divine, in order to contemplate and see more clearly that spiritual end to which she is ordained. This is the second way of life, that is to say the contemplative life.]

The works of mercy that Margaret performs publicly, “as much corporal as spiritual”, are described here as a kind of busy work designed to keep her from the

desires of her senses so that she may be free to contemplate her own relationship with the divine. Pearson sees this passage privileging the contemplative life over the active life and suggests that the active life prepares the reader for contemplation, an idea that is echoed in the frontispiece to the *Benois* (“Gendered Subject,” 55). I agree with Pearson that Finet seems to recommend the contemplative as the preferred path but I also see this passage reflecting a familiar set of instructions that a number of fourteenth- and fifteenth-century texts provided for the mixed life reader in order to help them carve out space for contemplation in their hectic lives.⁸⁰ Bryan observes that late medieval readers were encouraged to internalize their reading, very often in terms of a space delineated in opposition to the physical space of their busy world following the “ideals of the cloister” (23). One such text (which Bryan also references) is the popular *Abbey of the Holy Ghost*, a copy of which appears in London, Lambeth Palace Library MS 432, advising that those readers who “may not be in bodely religeon myght be in goestly religeon” and that the “the abbay of this religeon be best yfoundid [...] in a place that is callid consciens (fol. 37v).⁸¹ In other words,

⁸⁰ One such popular text was Walter Hilton’s *Epistle on the Mixed Life*, a copy of which seems to have been owned by Margaret’s mother, Cecily Neville. Her household ordinance lists as suitable public reading material “a boke of Bonaventure and Hilton in the same in Englishe” and “Hilton of contemplative and active life” (*Orders and Rules of the Princess Cecill*, 37). For a brief discussion of Hilton and mixed life readers, see Bryan, (23-4).

⁸¹ *The Abbey of the Holy Ghost* was a text with which Margaret would have been familiar as it appears in a collection of devotional and moral treatises that she commissioned, now in Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Douce 365 (*L’abbay de Saint Esprit*). For a brief description of the manuscript, see Muriel Hughes, “The Library of Margaret of York, Duchess of Burgundy” (69).

the reader is figured as isolated from the world in spirit only and she must create a room of her own, as Catherine of Siena did long before Woolf, in her own mind.⁸² The *Dyalogue* performs a parallel maneuver when Christ tells Margaret that she should “afayres et entre dedens ung lieu secret et sy te receulles en considerant ma presence” [make and enter into a secret place and meditate while considering my presence] (fol. 103v).⁸³ Contemplation requires a separate, and separately imagined, space apart from the everyday world and the *Dyalogue* invites an imaginative response to the obstacle of worldly distractions. It does so, however, through an acknowledgement of the necessity of the active and busy life of its patron, figuring the active life as a distraction for the physical body so that “reason and understanding” have space for contemplation, which simultaneously anchors the active life as a fundamental part of the contemplative.

In a similar vein, but shifting the focus from the physical place of contemplation to a consideration of the self, the first epigraph to this chapter from *Contemplations of the Dread and Love of God* sets up a division between worldly and spiritual identities. The “heart and will” remains unaffected by the social identity of “lord or a laidi, housbond-man or wif” and occupies a private space—like the “lieu secret”—separate from the “principal ocasiones “of an active

⁸² In what Andrew Taylor terms Catherine’s “famous injunction” she states that the reader must “make yourself a cell in your own mind from which you need never come out” (qtd. in Taylor, 46).

⁸³ Pearson argues that this passage aids Margaret in visualizing an intimacy with Christ that would be unavailable to her as a secular reader and I think she is right though I also think it is just as productive to read that “secret place” as a private space for reading and devotions separate from public life.

(secular) life. This divided identity is made explicit in the *Dyalogue* through the forms of address that Margaret, early in the text, sets up between herself and Christ. She asks, in order to “preparer mon cuer pour toy devotement” [to prepare my heart for your devotion], that Christ refrain from addressing her with the formal “dame” [lady] and to address her instead as “nacelle” [handmaid] (fol. 9r-v).⁸⁴ In this way she effectively maintains a suitable social hierarchy with Christ that is in direct opposition to her position in the secular world though still fundamentally informed by its precepts. In order to begin her tutelage under Christ in the way to properly engage in the contemplative life, she must re-position (or Finet re-positions for her) her social identity; a social identity that is, paradoxically, bound up in her private reading activities.

Distinguishing between Finet’s voice and Margaret’s in the *Dyalogue* is a subtle but important point that cannot go unexamined, even if we acknowledge the difficulty of assessing a singular literary authority in any kind of conclusive manner in the production of a medieval manuscript. While it is undisputed that Margaret commissioned the *Benois* and the *Dyalogue* from Finet, it is less clear what her influence may have been on the text itself. Art historian Andrea Pearson makes a convincing case that Finet instigated the production of the manuscripts in order to “coax his new protégé, a foreign bride, into reinventing herself” (“Productions of Meaning,” 37). In her discussion of Margaret’s self-fashioning

⁸⁴ Pearson also discusses this shift though she sees it as creating a more intimate relationship between Margaret and Christ, especially when he addresses her as “ma fille” instead of “nacelle” (“Gendered Subject,” 51), a shift in address I will also discuss shortly.

in portraiture, particularly the patron-portraits in the *Benois* and the *Dyalogue*, Pearson claims that

Self-fashioning simply cannot be the case here, however, since the didactic intent of the books necessarily excludes the duchess' participation in this way. The purpose of procuring instructional materials for oneself is, after all, to gain access to information, not to express it. With commissioned didactic images such as these, the patron's initial goal as a reader and spectator would have been to obtain advice and gain knowledge, not to convey her views. ("Productions of Meaning," 41)

While she makes a sensible argument against Margaret's influence on the *Dyalogue*, I offer an alternative view that restores her participation as a user of the text. I do not divorce Margaret-as-reader from Margaret-as-patron in this chapter, but I think it is productive to consider her use of the text as a public figure whose reading is on display in order to better understand her "expression" of it. Sanok has pointed out that the "regulatory script" of didactic literature "never fully governs practice and its social meaning" and suggests, following sociological and feminist theories, that the performance of that script "inevitably alters it" (xiv).⁸⁵ She helpfully acknowledges that "if regulatory fictions define women's identity and practice, they also, inevitably, allow them to reshape the social meaning and performance of those fictions" (xiv). Like Rice and her understanding of the dialogic text as a fluid exchange in which learning is figured as active, Sanok finds in didactic literature the potential for revision of its tenets. These ideas govern my approach to and understanding of not just Margaret of York's "voice" in the *Dyalogue*, but all of the women whose reading practices I examine in this

⁸⁵ Sanok mentions Michel de Certeau and Judith Butler specifically.

study. I noted at the outset that the influence of the aristocratic laywoman reader on devotional literature is worth examining more closely because her readership has shaped the genre in significant ways. Here and in subsequent chapters I examine more closely the active life of the reader-patron alongside her contemplative reading as a means of gaining access to the modes of self-fashioning that played out for elite noblewomen in the public eye. For its part, this chapter will read the *Dyalogue* as a potent form of Margaret's self-expression (*pace* Pearson) that participates in the larger contexts of personal political power and the female literary culture in which she was deeply involved.⁸⁶

Margaret of York was the third daughter of Richard, Duke of York, and Cicely Neville, and sister to two kings of England: Edward IV and Richard III. On July 3, 1468, she married Charles the Bold, Duke of Burgundy in a union arranged by her brother Edward and by the duke who hoped to gain support in

⁸⁶ I include a French language text in this study on reading in late medieval England not only because it was commissioned by a powerful English patron, but because it acknowledges in the corpus of medieval "English" literature the complexities of multi-lingual and multicultural territories at work in the literature of England produced during the fifteenth century (the latter end of the main Francophone period in England). The *Dyalogue*, and its commission and use by a figure no less "English" than the sister of King Edward IV, demonstrates the central place of that other vernacular to women's devotional, political and literary practices.

England against Louis XI of France.⁸⁷ The marriage also sealed a trade agreement between England and Burgundy that was mutually beneficial for both territories but it was most important for bringing with it the promise and hope that Margaret, Charles's third wife, would soon produce a male heir (Blockmans, 29). The duke described Margaret in a letter to his subjects in the city of Valenciennes as "bien taillee pour avoir generation de prince du pays" [well built for the production of an heir] though, despite his glowing recommendation, this was an expectation she would be unable to fulfill (qtd. and trans. in Weightman, 64-5). Christine Weightman observes that "the sheer bulk of surviving accounts" of the wedding festivities for Charles and Margaret indicate that it was "the wedding of the century" (30). Replete with pageants, *tableaux vivants* and a tournament called *L'arbre d'or*, the celebrations lasted nine days and were widely acclaimed in detailed and numerous reports—three in French, two in English (printed three times), one in Latin and one in Flemish (Blockmans, 30). The second epigraph to this chapter is one such report, now preserved in Oxford, Bodleian MS Rawlinson B. 102, in which the chronicler notes that if the various objects of material wealth were to be inventoried, "they shoulde occupye a greate booke" (fol. 5v). Wim Blockmans characterizes the wedding as a "huge theatrical performance that displayed the power and riches of the Burgundian dynasty" to its subjects and

⁸⁷ Margaret was clearly considered a prize in the English-French-Burgundian political game as Louis XI also tried to arrange a marriage between Margaret and a French prince in order to stem relations between England and Burgundy. For a comprehensive biography of the duchess, see Christine Weightman, *Margaret of York, Duchess of Burgundy 1446-1503*.

foreign visitors alike, who both witnessed and participated in the spectacle (30).⁸⁸ Perhaps the most telling account of the festivities comes from John Paston, one of Margaret's attendants, who wrote in a letter to his mother that he "hert never of non lyek to it, save Kyng Arthourys cort" (qtd. in Cherewatuk, 125). The comparison to Arthur, a semi-mythical figure who looms large in both English and French chronicle and romance, indicates the level of otherworldly and historical splendour that the festivities represented for attendees as well as the savvy of a Burgundian court well-versed in the power of public display.

As the newest wife in a wealthy territory, Margaret was expected to play an active role in the court and government, as had the duchesses before her. Muriel J. Hughes notes that Charles's mother, Isabel of Portugal, "was widely acknowledged in Europe as an able, intelligent woman" who was also "a deeply religious woman, interested in the welfare of the Franciscan and Carthusian houses and in the reform of the convents" ("Margaret of York," 8). She is understood to have taken part in the marriage negotiations for her son and to have planned the wedding festivities at Charles's urging (Pearson, "Productions of Meaning," 42). In keeping with the practices (and tastes) of the Burgundian court, Isabel was also a generous literary patron and Pearson has suggested that it may have been Isabel and not Margaret who commissioned the *Benois* and the *Dyialogue* for the new English duchess because Finet was her chaplain before he

⁸⁸ For an account of the wedding festivities culled from the various contemporary reports, see Weightman (47-60).

became Margaret's ("Production of Meaning," 42).⁸⁹ Following in her mother-in-law's footsteps, Margaret became the duke's political representative and administrator and stepped into the role of step-mother to Mary, Charles's only child. As such, Margaret was incessantly active, especially given that Charles, known by the sobriquet "le travaillant", was the most industrious of the Valois dukes (Blockmans, 30-1). His frequent and prolonged absences in a series of increasingly unsuccessful military campaign meant that Margaret took on a number of political duties in his stead: in 1475, she resisted a French invasion of Artois and, with some degree of success, convinced the Flemish cities to deploy their forces against the invasion; with Mary, she headed two assemblies of the Estates General of the Netherlands to request further military support for her husband's campaigns in 1476; and in 1477 she wrote to King Louis of France opposing his formal claim to the city of Saint-Quentin, maintaining that Charles was still alive (which he was not) (Blockmans, 31). As Edward IV, Charles and Louis XI became more entangled in the getting and spending of position and power, Margaret of York's political role became more important to both her brother and her husband and after her husband's death in 1477, her political and

⁸⁹ Pearson cites the fact that there is no evidence of "substantial contact" between Finet and Margaret after her marriage when she would have commissioned the texts and that he seems to have been in control of their production to support her thesis that Margaret has little to no agency in the production of the text ("Productions of Meaning," 42). I take Pearson's point though I do not agree that Margaret is only a passive recipient of the text; Finet does, after all, state that the texts were commissioned by her, which, whether true or not, suggests that he understands and values the import of a commission from the duchess.

social obligations changed little. She became a dowager and maintained a palace of eight houses and her staff of over one hundred at Malines, which was to become the new capital of Flanders (Hughes, “Margaret of York,” 9). Hughes states that during this time she received a succession of visits from delegations “needing to discuss Burgundian matters, all seeking her advice” and that from 1482 to 1497, Margaret “played an important role in holding the Burgundian realm together” (“Margaret of York,” 9). I chronicle Margaret’s regimen of political and social responsibilities here to demonstrate that she was well-practiced in the active life and well-versed in the cultivation of a public identity, traits she and Margaret Beaufort, whom I will discuss in subsequent chapters, have in common.

The *Dyalogue* acknowledges Margaret’s worldly life and spends some time identifying the distractions that “ceux qui sont en prelacions et seignouriez” [those who are in the position of prelates or lordships] most often encounter in their pursuit of a contemplative life (fol. 30r). The duchess regrets and is seemingly overwhelmed by the myriad duties that stand in the way of her private devotions, recognizing the assortment of domestic duties that a woman of her station is required to carry out, especially in a large and complex household:

Journellement me viennent tant dempeschemens contre purete
interiore et par dedens et tant dobstades contre sainte et
espirituelle amour et dilection tant de interrupcions contre divine
contemplacion que Je ne voy poit la maniere comment le poray les
choses dessus dittes acomplir. (fols. 30r-v)

[Daily too many obstacles to purity and interiority come before
me, too many others against sanctity and spiritual love and delight,

too many interruptions to divine contemplation that I see no way in which I could accomplish these things.]

Pearson observes that Finet is acknowledging this difficulty to Margaret herself “when he laments in the duchess’ voice” and suggests that he “was at least somewhat sympathetic toward Margaret’s difficulties in working the *vita contemplativa* into her overburdened schedule” (“Gendered Subjects,” 56). This ventriloquization of Margaret’s, and any noblewoman’s, difficulties in achieving personal devotions voices a common concern of mixed life readers who are often attempting to mimic the habits of the cloister in the secular world. Bryan has noted that this attempt to reproduce the “ideals of the cloister created the potential for substantial fissures between the inner life and the outer” (22). In the *Dyalogue*, Christ seems to address these fissures via a compromise and advises her to set aside the concerns of the world and, without neglecting the responsibilities of her station, focus on him as much as is possible. He tells her that the powerful should

leurs offices tendront et exerseront en grant soing et crainte de dieu sans orguel et vanite prudemment et dilligamment et mapelleront et inuoqueront songneusement pour estre adrechiez de mon saint esperit en tous leurs affayres et ne querront point leurs propres prouffis delices et honneurs mais tous iours le prouffit du bien commun (fol. 30r-v)

[hold and exercise their offices with great care and fear of God without pride and vanity, with wisdom and diligence, and scrupulously call on and invoke me to be guided by my holy spirit in all their affairs and never to seek their own profits, desires and honours but to profit the common good every day]

This advice absolves Margaret of any imagined shirking of her devotional duties because it shores up her duties as a duchess in the complex Burgundian court; as long as she keeps Christ and the common good in mind, she may attend to worldly concerns. In fact, she must. Christ proposes for Margaret an outlet through which she may benefit the “common good” by working for the reform of the Flemish church:

Tu feras ce que poras qui en toy sera pour le bien commune en toutes affaires principalement en l'estat de leglise et espirituel affin que les cloiseters soyent reformes et la reguliere observance soit en vigueur meismement es quatre ordes de mendians qui ont a preschier aux aultres car par leur reguliere et examplaire vie et conversacion poroient croistre plusieurs grans biens. (fol. 99r-v)

[You must do what you can for the common good in all your affairs, principally in the state of the church and spirituality so that cloisters can be reformed and regular observance can be in vigorous measure in the four mendicant orders who preach to others, for by their regular and exemplary life and conversation they can generate much good.]

This passage is remarkable in the specificity of its directive for reform and a possible reminder of Finet's voice behind Christ's. As I mentioned earlier, Margaret's mother-in-law, for whom Finet also acted as confessor, was interested in the reform of the convents and it may well be that here Finet is parroting his own concern for monastic reform. Nonetheless, the overlap in worldly and spiritual concerns is here laid bare and Margaret is advised not to turn inward toward contemplation, but to focus her attention on the world outside of the text. This is counter to Pearson's suggestion that Finet privileges the contemplative over the active life because it is in a text on contemplation that Christ encourages

Margaret's active service to the Church, implying that the one is deeply imbricated in the other. Furthermore, it seems that here the *Dyalogue* (or *Finet*?) takes a self-reflexive turn, suggesting that it is through exemplary behaviour and through *conversation* that the common good can be achieved, effectively demonstrating its message through its medium; that is, Margaret's exemplary life and conversation are invoked through an oblique comparison with the mendicant orders in a text that is itself an imagined conversation advising its interlocutor on how to achieve the common good. Through this textual exchange, Margaret—for whom Christ has recommended spending time with “les persone deuotes et religieuses obseruans leurs rigles” [devout people and religious women (nuns) who observe their rules] (fol. 10r)—is enjoined to do what she can to reform the convents toward stricter rule.⁹⁰

Indeed, as Nancy Warren Bradley has already observed, so important is monastic reform in the *Dyalogue* that Christ will accept no excuses from Margaret for not personally accomplishing the task (51-2). He appeals to her position in relation to political power, suggesting that “se tu me dis que tue es flaive de corps, et anchienne de tamps tu as ton mary prince trespuissant” [if you tell me that you are weak of body and too old, you have your husband a very powerful prince] who can help in the undertaking (fol. 100r). In so doing the text acknowledges

⁹⁰ Blockmans points out that as a dowager Margaret was “highly involved in religious affairs, primarily the reformation of the convents toward the observance of stricter rules” and that she “especially favoured the observant Augustinian and Franciscan Orders and continued the Burgundian tradition of support for the Carthusians” (36). This support for reform was one that she seemed committed to long after the *Dyalogue* suggested it to her.

the cachet of her position and the position of others like her, underscoring the importance of the active life for particularly influential readers. Furthermore, he reminds Margaret of precisely what kind of power she has access to her in her husband by suggesting that Charles can obtain “iuridicion sur les gens deglise” [jurisdiction over the people of the church] via his access to “nostre saint pere le pape” [our holy father the pope] and his authority over the church (fol. 100r-v). Margaret agrees, stating that “ne doubte pas certainement que ce ne fut chose moult prouffitable au bien ciuil de reformer leur couuens deformes” [certainly I do not doubt that there is anything so profitable for the civic good as to reform their deformed convents] (fol. 100v-101r). Her charitable activities demonstrate that she took seriously this appeal.

The late 1470s was a “time of decay in many religious institutions” in the Low Countries and Blockmans points out that Margaret “firmly backed a reformist movement, stressing strict monastic rules, respecting absolute poverty and concentrating on the spiritual life” (36). He notes that between 1479 and 1501, in cities belonging to her dowry, Margaret converted several orders and convents to Augustinian rule, drove out the Dominicans, and founded two nunneries of the Poor Clares (36). In 1480, she worked to extend this spiritual reform by making use of her alliance with England and paid a diplomatic visit to her brother Edward during which time she insisted on the foundation of a Grey Friars convent at Greenwich, which flourished there (Bradley, 48). She and a group of English nobles also obtained a papal bull approving three additional

Franciscan houses in England, though this initiative never came to fruition (Bradley, 48). Nancy Bradley Warren has read this maneuver as a dovetailing of piety and politics for Margaret, suggesting that her “support for the devout and her involvement with observant religious turn out to be politically beneficial acts, even political duties” (51). Warren argues convincingly that Margaret’s interest in creating a presence for the Observants in England, so important to her and her Burgundian relatives, went a long way to forge an Anglo-Burgundian alliance. She suggests that the house of Observants at Greenwich “became a living reminder of, and a consecrated monument to, the link between England and Burgundy (49).⁹¹ As such Margaret is able to engender spiritual and political benefits through her support of God, her families and their dynastic aims. These aims are, in turn, supported by the *Dyalogue*, itself a living reminder of the overlap of piety and politics in the reading habits of a powerful patron.

In fact, Margaret’s position as one of the politically powerful in Burgundy is precisely maintained within the text, even as she expresses a wish to eliminate it. Christ reminds her of her social position, despite the care she takes to humble herself before him: “Ma fille tu as longtamps este et es encorez en cestuy monde grant dame seur Edouuart roy dangleterre femme & espeuse de Charles, duc de

⁹¹ For an alternative reading of Margaret’s diplomatic mission to England, see Harry Schniker, “Margaret of York on Pilgrimage: The Exercise of Devotion and the Religious Traditions of the House of York.” Schniker sees the introduction of the Observant Franciscans into England as a side aspect to the creation of an Anglo-Burgundian alliance. I tend to agree with Warren that establishing the Observant orders in England is part of creating the alliance, not least because Margaret’s activities are supported, as Warren shows, by Christ’s advice to her in the *Dyalogue*.

bourgonge” [My daughter, you have been for a long time, and still are, a great lady in the world, sister of Edward, king of England, lady and wife to Charles, duke of Burgundy] (fol. 9v-10r). The form of address that she requested of him—“nacelle” [handmaid]—is rejected in favour of “ma fille” [my daughter], which at once maintains a hierarchy and restores her position as a “grant dame”, but which also manages a familial intimacy, as Pearson has already pointed out (51).

Margaret, in turn, refers to Christ as “mon seigneur” [my lord], effectively shifting the relationship again into a space of ambiguity; a “lord” can be father, social superior, husband or the divine. Having reshaped the relationship with his interlocutor (from servant to child), Christ assures her that “a present tu fais tresagement car tue te applicques du tout a deuocion et aux choses espirituelles en delaisant autant quil est licite toutes ponpes terriennes et a ornemens” [at present you do very wisely for you apply yourself wholly to devotion and to spiritual things, leaving aside all earthly pomp and ornaments so far as it is allowed you] (fol. 10r). Working as something of a disclaimer, Christ’s words manage to exonerate the splendour and spectacle of Margaret’s (possibly recent) wedding, and of the manuscript itself, produced at some expense and personalized for a single reader, by acknowledging that her social position as the consort of a head of state requires some degree of “pomp and ornament.”

What is notable about the announcement of Margaret’s pedigree, and the subsequent allowance that the text makes for that pedigree—both by suggesting that Margaret applies herself to her devotions “wisely” despite her social status

and by capitalizing on that social status to suggest a religious reform that benefits the duchy—is that it is a wholly self-evident announcement to make if the manuscript is, in fact, anticipating the patron as the only reader. Margaret, of course, knows she is the sister of the king of England and the wife of the Duke of Burgundy, and so the announcement of her status in the pages of her book, formulaic though it may be, suggests that such a claim is important for imagining the potential audience of the manuscript—Margaret herself, her family and friends, the court, and future owners and reader—those who might be interested in the ways in which Margaret performs contemplative reading and how it is displayed in the manuscript. As such, Margaret, the fictionalized and the actual duchess, operates as a symbol and an exemplar for the contemplative reader; she models the correct use of the text, both for herself and for subsequent readers who are encouraged to follow her example. In her commissioning of the manuscript, Margaret must have imagined that it would have other readers and in fact an autograph inscription in the *Dyalogue* indicates that she presented it, near the end of her life, to Jane de Hallewin, who was governess to Philip, Mary of Burgundy's son: “Marguerite de angleterre au done a jane de halevyn dame vessenar se lyvre lan xvii” [Margaret of England gave Jane de Hallewin, Lady of Wassenaer, this book in the year 1502] (fol. 140r). In this way, the *Dyalogue* can be further understood as a token of Margaret's engagement in both the very strong Burgundian tradition of manuscript patronage and in the late medieval practice of circulating devotional material through networks of female readers. Her own

spectacular display of the internal dialogue that accompanies contemplation leads me to consider the ways in which exemplarity in devotions advanced goals that stood outside of the direct realm of piety, such as self-representation through patronage and book ownership.

Researchers have been able to reconstruct for Margaret of York a particularly rich library of about twenty-four volumes, of which eight were produced at her express request for her own use, with four others commissioned as gifts; all of them are on parchment and all of them are illustrated or illuminated (Cockshaw, 58).⁹² The extant works, which are all in French, exhibit her taste for moral and religious texts and, as Nigel Morgan neatly summarises, “represent conventional, well-established spiritual reading in England, France and Flanders” (70).⁹³ Indeed, Hughes suggests that Margaret’s taste in books was very likely an influence on her brother Edward’s collection in England (“Margaret of York,”

⁹² For varying assessments of Margaret of York’s library, pieced together from extant manuscripts, heraldic and inscription evidence, and some archival references (although no will for Margaret survives), see: Wim Blockmans, “The Devotion of a Lonely Duchess”; Pierre Cockshaw, “Some Remarks on the Character and Content of the Library of Margaret of York”; Anne-Marie Legaré, “La librairie de Madame”; and Nigel Morgan, “Texts of Devotion and Religious Instruction Associated with Margaret of York.” For an annotated catalogue of the surviving manuscripts from Margaret of York’s library, see Muriel J. Hughes, “The Library of Margaret of York, Duchess of Burgundy.”

⁹³ Caxton’s *Recuyell of the Histories of Troy* has been lost but deserves special mention as it was the first English book in print in a translation commissioned by Margaret of York. I discuss this further in chapter 3.

14). Following the example of Charles and her father-in-law Philip the Good—Blockmans identifies her library with the “Valois tradition of translators and scribes” of the Burgundian court (41)—Margaret is credited with employing the most innovative book producers and illuminators of the period and her library is a cache of materials for art historians interested in the “great period of calligraphy and illumination” (Hughes, “Margaret of York,” 15).⁹⁴ Hughes notes that Margaret’s library shares similarities with the libraries of the previous Burgundian duchesses but that she “offered a wider scope than was usual among [her predecessors’] orders, for [her books] illustrate some of the forms in which moral teaching was appealing to contemporary tastes” (“Margaret of York,” 14). Because there was only one humanist text in Margaret’s library, and no poetic or literary works, most scholars seem to agree with Pierre Cockshaw who reads in Margaret’s collection of surviving books a woman “content to participate humbly in the simplest religious movements of her time [who] did not wish to be an intellectual or a humanist; nor was she curious about culture; instead she simply wished to be devout—with simplicity, with faith, and with devotion”(61).

Insofar as it is possible to discern a reader’s curiosity from a probably incomplete collection of extant manuscripts, I challenge Cockshaw’s supposition that Margaret’s devotion was entirely without intention or that she did not consider the weight that her literary influence carried for her public persona. As I

⁹⁴ For example, Cambridge, Saint John’s College MS H.13, a breviary owned by Margaret, is considered one of the most significant examples of new naturalism in marginal decorations (Legaré, 210).

have already shown, the *Dyalogue* is not solely concerned with simplicity, faith and devotion for the reader, however clearly these tenets are flagged in the text, and devotional literature is not always the vehicle of austere and uncomplicated piety. Cockshaw himself points out that scholars have dated the books in Margaret's collection no later than 1477 after which time it is assumed that she did not make any further acquisitions; this places the time of her book commissioning during the period when she was most active in political life as her husband's representative (59). Though I do not wish to suggest that Margaret's interest in devotional reading was motivated entirely by a desire to display political savvy or worldly concerns, it is nonetheless fair to observe that she saw in books both spiritual and political ends while she was involved in the administration of the duchy. Margaret's mother, Cicely Neville, was very likely an influence on her daughter's reading tastes and literate practices; her own collection of books was religious in content and she cultivated a reputation for personal piety centered on reading.⁹⁵ Cicely's well-documented daily routines of concentration on the Christian life comprised both private and public reading⁹⁶ and demonstrate the sense of community and display surrounding the "private" reading activities of medieval noblewomen. After a day spent on private

⁹⁵ For a classic discussion of the piety of Cicely Neville and her library see C.A.J. Armstrong, "The Piety of Cicely, Duchess of York: A Study in Late Medieval Culture." See also, Pearson, "Gendered Subjects" (50).

⁹⁶ Cicely's record of daily life is recorded in a household ordinance, which Armstrong notes does not simply register the procedure but rather offers a narrative "as if the aim of the anonymous author was to place on record a devout method of life, as a precedent for other noble ladies" (142).

devotions, at mass, being read to at mealtimes, and on household business, Cicely would repeat the spiritual reading she had heard earlier in the day at suppertime for her companions (Armstrong, 142). Assuming then that her mother's devotional practices modeled for Margaret both an active and a contemplative engagement with books, I suggest that we consider Margaret's library building as a form of self-fashioning and read her devotional reading within the context of her public life as a capable Burgundian duchess.

As was mentioned earlier, Margaret's most pressing duty as the duchess of Burgundy was to produce a male heir to succeed her husband, whose only legitimate child was Mary of Burgundy. Pearson reads numerous marital and reproductive allusions in the miniature appearing on the frontispiece to the *Dyalogue* and she suggests that they embed "the image deeply into the goal of perpetuating the duchy through the union of Margaret and Charles" ("Gendered Subject," 56). In it Margaret kneels in a bedchamber before the resurrected Christ toward whom she reaches and whose gaze she meets, even as he leans away from her holding his arm out with his palm down (figure 2.3). Pearson suggests that the image evokes similar depictions of Mary Magdalen at the resurrection of Christ when he commands her not to touch him (*noli me tangere*) for he has not yet risen to heaven ("Gendered Subject," 47). As was noted in the previous chapter, Mary Magdalen was an exemplar for both the active life (in her role as a preacher) and the contemplative life (as a recluse in the wilderness) and the figural connection of the patron and the text implies that Margaret becomes like

the Magdalen. What is more, as Pearson reminds us, in the late Middle Ages Mary Magdalen was also a “powerful symbol of fertility, maternity and motherhood” and as such projects those attributes onto the portrait of Margaret that appears in her book (“Gendered Subject,” 56). Moreover, Warren recognizes the particular significance of Mary Magdalen for the Burgundians, as it was she who converted their legendary king and queen, who subsequently bore a son through her intercession.⁹⁷ Thus the subtle reference to Mary Magdalen retains an amalgam of overlapping meanings that remind Margaret of and align her with the originary legend of the Christian rule of the Burgundians.

In the miniature, however, Margaret is also recognizably Margaret. Her motto “bien en aviengne” [may good come of it] appears twice in the border in close proximity to the initials “C&M” (Charles and Margaret) which are joined with a love knot (Charles and Margaret) (Pearson, “Gendered Subject,” 56); these are devices that reappear in texts associated with Margaret, as we will see in the next chapter. The motto also appears on a planter etched with the initials and it is inscribed on a banderole that is held by a yellow bird as it unfurls toward the canopy of the bed, also bearing the initials “C&M.” Margaret’s motto seems to operate as a response to her husband’s “Je l’ay empris” [I have undertaken it] and

⁹⁷ “La tresglorieuse Magdeliene par sa predication conuertit a marseille le roy et la roine de bourgongne [...] Et eurent vng filz par le pryere de ladicte Magdeleine” [The very glorious Magdalen converted the king and queen of Burgundy at Marseille through her preaching ... and they had a son through the prayer of said Magdalen]. Paris, Bibliotheque Nationale MS F. fr. 17909 (qtd. and trans. in Warren 29). Warren notes that the use of the Magdalen in the legend of the forbears of Charles the Bold implies direct access to Christ via the apostless and inducts them “into the ancient tradition of legitimate Christian rule” (29).

in general terms the exchange implies that Margaret wishes her husband success in his works, though Pearson cheekily notes that the motto takes on a far more pointed meaning within the context of the new marriage: “Charles’s most critical ambition, the production of an heir: a son, the ‘good,’ is the hopeful result of ‘it’” (“Gendered Subject,” 56). Pearson catalogues further visual metaphors for fecundity in the miniature including: the planter that is overflowing with flowers; the yellow bird that resembles a goldfinch, a classical symbol of fertility⁹⁸; and the Valois Burgundian blue and gold in the canopy over the bed (“Gendered Subject,” 56). Pearson also reads in the crimson of the bed covering the colour of the cloak that Margaret wore upon her entry into Bruges after her marriage. She suggests that the remaking of the cloak as a bed covering that surrounds Margaret’s upper body in the perspective of the image is a “deployment clearly orchestrated to suggest her being enfolded in the ducal orbit” (“Gendered Subject,” 56). It also connects both Charles and Margaret to the nuptial bed, already inscribed with their entwined initials. I am indebted to Pearson’s careful and thorough interpretation of this image and I follow her understanding of this image in my own examination of the text of the *Dyalogue*. Whereas Pearson suggests that Margaret is reading an image of herself, and projecting herself into the narrative of that image (both sacramental and social), I read for a similar projection of Margaret into the *Dyalogue*, though I focus on the textual (voiced)

⁹⁸ The goldfinch, according to Pliny, was known as a symbol of fertility because it produced more eggs than other birds (Pearson, “Gendered Subject,” 56).

image of her and the participation of that representation in narratives inside and outside of the book.

The conjugal images that Pearson identifies in the frontispiece of the *Dyalogue* resurface in the text. In language that recalls devotional and hagiographic writings in which women are figured as Christ's bride or lover, Christ envisions Margaret in the spousal bed:

Je roseray avec tu duquel lit lespouse chante es canticques. Nostre lit est flourissant ma fille [...] et en ce lit la me devote me ambrach et estraint de braz de tresnette chastete et vraye charite cest adire des feruens desires quelle a amoy dieu (fol. 13v-14v)

[I will lie down with you in such a spousal bed as in the song of songs. Our bed is flourishing, my daughter (...) and in this bed devote yourself to me, embrace me, and grasp hold of the arms of spotless chastity and true charity, that is to say, of the burning desires that you have for my God]

The text, like the frontispiece miniature, connects Margaret to Christ on a physical level and in a spousal relationship, and as such, it is easy to read the risen Christ in Margaret's symbolically-charged bedroom as a representative for Charles, as Pearson shows ("Productions of Meaning," 45). She points out that in Margaret's England "public celebrations of kingship often included comparisons of a sovereign to Jesus and specifically to Christ as bridegroom" ("Productions of Meaning," 45).⁹⁹ This is a common metaphor to describe women's relationship with Christ that often surfaces in religious literature in the late Middle Ages. For

⁹⁹ Pearson refers to "a pageant staged along the route taken by Margaret of Anjou to the Tower of London the day before her coronation in which Henry VI of England, her betrothed, was presented as Christ" ("Productions of Meaning," 45).

example, in Book IV of the devotional treatise *The Imitation of Christ*, translated by Lady Margaret Beaufort,¹⁰⁰ the speaker-sinner desires to be “inflamed with that brennyng love” that she may be “made partener with all such thy fervent lovers” (279.5-6). She asks that Christ be “my swetnesse & consolacion, my mete & drynke, my love & all my joye” (280.32-33). Similarly, the fifteenth-century mystic Margery Kempe was also so intensely attracted to Christ physically that she had visions of cuddling in bed with him and caressing his toes (66). By participating in the staging of the bridegroom Christ in conversation with Margaret, the *Dyalogue* reinforces the conjugal imagery of its miniature (and vice versa) in such a way that the stated aims of the treatise to “conduit et maine a la vye contemplative” [to direct and lead to the contemplative life] (fol. 4v) are complicated by the social and political world of its patron. The *Dyalogue* also “directs and leads” Margaret to understand her place as a symbol of the dynastic hopes and aims for the Burgundian line.

Despite high hopes, Margaret never gave birth though she did devote herself to the education and upbringing of her step-daughter Mary, who was eleven when Margaret married her father. Both women would have received a pious education and both women had the splendid ducal library at their disposal though Margaret is often understood to have been a strong influence on Mary’s

¹⁰⁰ This is a treatise with which Margaret of York was likely familiar. A manuscript known to have been owned by her, Brussels, Bibliothèque Royale MS 9272-76, includes in its collection of moral treatises *Imitation de Jésus Christ*; see Hughes, “The Library of Margaret of York” (68-9). For more on Margaret Beaufort’s translation of *The Imitation of Christ* from the French, see my chapter 4.

appreciation for lavish books which seems to have developed during her time with Margaret (Hughes, “Margaret of York,” 6-7). The women are often depicted together in manuscript images in books that they had a hand in producing; in the image from *The Hours of Mary of Burgundy* discussed at the beginning of this chapter, Margaret is usually identified as one of the women with Mary in the scene before the Virgin in the nave and in the next chapter, I will discuss an engraving which shows Margaret attended by a group of women, one of whom is regularly identified as Mary. At least one witness to their joint patronage survives in London, British Library MS Royal 15 D.iv in the form of a double autograph dedication: “Foryet nat that ys on of your treu frendes margarete of yorke, prenez moy ajames pour vostre bonne amie marie de bourgogne” (fol. 219r). The book, a French translation of *De rubis gestis Alexandri Magni regis Macedonum*, was originally dedicated to Charles the Bold and seems to have been a popular text as it is extant in 34 manuscript copies (Hughes, “The Library of Margaret of York, 74”). It was probably made under the auspices of both women to be presented as a joint gift though the double autograph can also work as a show of solidarity between the two women and their shared understanding of the representative importance of books and book patronage.

This induction (of sorts) of Mary by Margaret into the milieu of book patronage and exchange is telling if we put it into the perspective of the female literate culture in the late Middle Ages in which both women took an active part. Riddy, in her influential article “Women Talking about the Things of God: a Late-

Medieval Sub-Culture” posits that the existence of women’s “textual communities” contributed to the formation of a female identity that was bound up with books—and the dissemination of books—focused especially on spiritual and moral subjects. What I hope I have shown here is that these “textual communities” also contribute to a female identity that is also bound up, due to the social status of the participants, with the practical and political issues that inevitably surround and inform their devotions. I gesture to Riddy in the title of this chapter, and I acknowledge her enormous contribution to our understanding of women’s interactions with books in the late Middle Ages. I augment this understanding by looking at Margaret’s interaction with a specific book, and note that her private, spiritual life is not easily divorced from her public, political one; in fact, the text counts on the authority that women maintain outside their private reading chapels and elite communities to work for and promote the common good.

I return finally, to the *Dyalogue*, now recast to include its variety of discourses as a political as well as a spiritual object. I suggested earlier that the text, in large part due to its ventriloquization of Margaret’s voice, can be read as a form of self-expression that participates in the larger contexts of Burgundian polity as well as female literary culture. Varying emphases on dynasty and spiritual reform in the text call attention to the active life of its patron, even as it

claims to act as a guide for her contemplative life and I maintain that, despite the efforts of the text to divide the contemplative reader from her social identity, it is important to the programme of devotional activities outlined for Margaret that she retain her standing as an influential Burgundian duchess. A life of contemplation for Margaret, who was expected to assume a wide range of public responsibilities, was a tall order and the text seems instead to demonstrate for her how her personal piety should be performed. She is asked to

prier pour la salvacion de tous universellement et pour la
conversion des infidels et reformation des xpristiens pour les
vivans et pour les mors pour ces prochains subgiez et familiers et
comme le bien de tant qui lest plus divin detant est il plus
commun.(fol. 5r-v)

[pray for the salvation of all the world and for the conversion of
the infidels and the reformation of Christians, for the living and for
the dead, for the neighbouring subjects and friends and for the
good of all who are the most divine to the most common.]

The language in this passage is particular about articulating social categories and it characterizes Margaret's devotional activities as a great equalizer of religions (via conversion), nations and classes. Her prayers become imperative for the salvation of all humanity because they enact a leveling of sorts; in this way her work for the "common good" accrues a depth of meaning that recognizes her nobility, her charity and her spirituality at once.

Despite this attention to the larger Christian community, aspects of the interiority of contemplation still retain prevalence in the *Dyalogue* through Margaret's questions to and requests of Christ. She asks him: "Mon dieu mon createur et mon redempteur enlumine mes yeulx interiores est assavoir

lentendement et raison foy et consideracion de mon ame” [My god, my creator and my redeemer, illuminate my interior eyes to know the understanding, reason, faith and consideration of my soul] (fol. 5r-v.). Margaret’s “yeulx interiores” bring the text back to her own reading and piety and allow for her own understanding of a private and intimate engagement with the text and with Christ. In its remaining chapters, this study will explore ideas of vision as a mode of knowing in English devotional writing and examine its emphasis on the act of seeing as integral to spiritual understanding. The personal piety of medieval noblewomen, cultivated, like Margaret’s, for the sake of others, takes on a new dimension as women make available, via the advent of print, devotional literature that will benefit all souls, both divine and common.

CHAPTER THREE

**The work of print and the work of prayer:
reading and reflection in the *Fifteen Oes*”**

Books are not given to men in vain for amusement, but out of pure necessity, for they are made to supplement and come to the aid of the weakness of memory, which flows away and runs like water in the stream. By which it would profit little to hear or to ask question to learn if memory does not retain it. Thus, for all its skill, as it is said, memory does not suffice for retention. This is why the study of books is necessary in order to retain what one has learned by inquiry and by hearing. In books there are also often found doctrines not heard by which man may learn and retain by reading and studying knowledge and wisdom without a teacher or instructor. For the sense of sight is much firmer than hearing and makes man much more certain, because spoken word is transitory, but the written letter remains and impresses itself more in the understanding of the reader.

-- Guillaume Fillastre, Thoison d’or

In this chapter and the next, I shift my focus from manuscripts and the mutability and exclusivity that a bespoke trade represents, to the “fixity” and multiplicity that comes with the early printed book. In the first two chapters we saw that the modes of production in manuscript culture meant that books could be shaped to suit the imagined readership or the tastes of the patron for whom it was created: a collection of saints’ lives, for example, can be compiled to serve the perceived needs of female conventual readers; or a single, well-planned bespoke volume can reflect its specific reader in its pages. Many manuscripts are hybrid creations, like *The Beaufort Hours*, which was re-imagined and re-bound with a

later text, augmented and personalized by its later owners, Margaret Beauchamp and then Margaret Beaufort.¹⁰¹ Like a medieval version of the ipod, medieval manuscripts were created in their readers' image with a "playlist" of texts that could be added to or excised, depending on the changing tastes of a variety of owners. Despite the plurality of readers a manuscript may have due to wide networks of social and familial connections among readers, the nature of the individuality of the medieval manuscript meant that its circulation was necessarily limited.

Not so the printed book. The process of printing produced multiple copies, by and large identical, of whatever text was printed so that, as William Caxton puts it, "every man may have them attones" (Blake, 100).¹⁰² The reduction in the number of man-hours needed to produce books resulted in texts that were accessible, plentiful and uniform, and as such the book trade moved from a bespoke to a speculative, for-profit business. The press initiated a technological shift in book production that is generally thought to have ushered in a new age of communications with lasting effects on literary and religious culture. Elizabeth Eisenstein's influential history of printing in which she examines the movement from a scribal to a print culture, for example, proposes that a revolutionary, rather than an evolutionary, model of change is best applied to the

¹⁰¹ See Krug, *Reading Families* for a detailed discussion of this manuscript and the ways in which it works as a teaching text for new readers (71-6).

¹⁰² This is from Caxton's epilogue to his translation, *The Recuyell of the Historyes of Troye*, STC 15375. The text is cited from N.F. Blake's *Caxton's Own Prose*. Subsequent citations will be from Blake's edition.

situation of the printing press in Western Europe (45). As Alexandra Gillespie has observed, however, later work on the history of the printing press is more cautious about characterizing the change in this way and scholars have focused instead on the overlap of manuscript and print cultures, suggesting that manuscript and print were complements or imitations of each other in the early years of the press in England (9-10).¹⁰³ Gillespie usefully notes that the new economies of print threatened the prestige value of books not only because the production of multiple copies could be seen as a means of cheapening a text, but also because printed books were “commodities, exchanged for cash or credit rather than for the reputation of a noble author or for the dissemination of moralized subject matter” (64). Her detailed study, *Print Culture and the Medieval Author*, examines the ways in which the idea of the author was developed and employed by printers to safeguard the meaning and value of texts in the context of their proliferation in print.

Following Gillespie’s lead, in this second half of my study I consider ideas of the prestige of the book alongside the “fixity” of print, especially as it applies to the patronage activities of medieval women and the literary authority bound up in a name that is fixed in multiple and accessible copies of devotional books. I have been arguing throughout this study that women’s influence on medieval textual culture was a formidable one, particularly when it came to shaping the

¹⁰³ See especially, David McKitterick, *Print, Manuscript and the Search for Order, 1450-1830*; the collection of essays edited by J.B. Trapp, *Manuscripts in the Fifty Years After the Invention of Printing*; and Adrian Johns, *The Nature of the Book: Print and Knowledge in the Making*.

field of devotional literature. As studies of book ownership and circulation show, English women (and men) owned more devotional texts than any other kind of book.¹⁰⁴ The advent of print meant that more books were available for more people to read and, as Michael Alexander has posited, forty to fifty percent of the printed books produced during the first one hundred years of printing in England were religious and devotional (94-96). In this chapter and the next I contend that the new medium of print allowed for women-sponsored texts, and along with them the women patrons themselves, to reach a wider audience. The threat to the prestige of the medieval book that inhered in an increasingly commercial trade in printed books is lessened by the endorsement of prestige readers. Noblewomen with reputations for leading devout lives came to be associated with the books they read and patronized and, accordingly, a new and newly literate audience could follow their lead in the buying and the reading of books. I posit, then, another influence on the meaning and value of the new printed book, an influence not unlike the idea of the author in which the early printers were investing: the aristocratic laywoman reader. As Gillespie points out, at the time that printed books were entering the market in late medieval England, “*prynte*” was already multivalent; it could mean “to impress upon a surface; to coin; to engrave or write; to fix in one’s memory; to fix” (28). What these various definitions have in

¹⁰⁴ See Kate Harris, “Patrons, Buyers and Owners”; Susan Groag Bell, “Medieval Women Book Owners”; Susan Cavanaugh, “A Study of Books Privately Owned in England, 1300-1450”; Mary Erler, *Women, Reading and Piety*, Vincent Gillespie, “Vernacular Books of Religion”. These are a few among many important studies of ownership and circulation.

common is the sense of permanence attached to the action of “prynte”; the resulting imprint is preserved, or “fixed” whether it be on a physical surface, like the page, or a metaphorical one, like social or cultural memory. In the epigraph to this chapter, fourteenth-century French cardinal, Guillaume Fillastre privileges the book and seeing (or reading) over hearing and memory as the ideal manner in which to retain the wisdom contained in the written word. His description of the written letter impressing itself on the reader’s understanding of a text—the metaphor of writing on a wax tablet being one that later was used to parallel the process of printing on a press—suggests that he imagines readers devoting contemplation to each word on the page, and in doing so he anticipates the increasing importance of the book and reading to late medieval devotions. Having the book in hand meant a reader could read and reread, assess and reconsider a text and its implications, and the advent of print made this experience possible for more and more readers. I suggest that women’s influence on the devotional literature of the later Middle Ages continued with the arrival of print and new ideas about authors and books, which served to solidify that influence, to “fix” it and make it permanent.

This influence is evident in the very first book printed in English.

Adopting an attitude of seeming deference to his patron Margaret of York, William Caxton, in the paratext to his translation, *The Recuyell of the Historyes of*

Troye, offers a narrative representation of how he came to produce his book.¹⁰⁵

Importantly, he credits its inception to the commandment and commission of Margaret of York. He “dispayrs” that his “brode and rude” Kentish English is not up to the task of translating the “strange and mervayllous historyes” he had taken such pleasure in when he read them in “the fayr langage of frensche” and he abandoned the project after “fyve or six quayers” (98). He would have left it still had it not “fortuned that the ryght hyghe excellent and right vertuous prynces [...] lady Margaret”¹⁰⁶ sent for him to discuss diverse matters at which time he let it slip that he had begun this work. She “commanded” him to show her the quires and she found a “defaute” in his English which she “comanded [him] to amende and moreover comanded [him] straytli to contynue and make an ende of the resydue than not translated” (98). This “dredful commandement” Caxton dared not disobey and thus under the watchful and corrective eye of Margaret of York,

¹⁰⁵ William Caxton was the Governor of the English Nation (of merchants) in Bruges, where he frequented the court of Margaret of York. He learned the art of printing on the continent and returned to England in 1476 and set up shop in Westminster. His *Recuyell*, the first of his recorded translations in English, was published in Bruges in 1473-74. It is a translation of a French original by Raoul Le Fevre, a chaplain to the Burgundian prince Philip the Good.

Despite her involvement in the production of the first printed book in English, no surviving early printed books show an indication of Margaret of York’s ownership. Lotte Hellinga argues that several other publications by Caxton likely formed a part of her library; see *Caxton in Focus*.

¹⁰⁶ Caxton’s formal address goes on for some eight lines during which he is careful to detail her titles and pedigree, including her affiliation as the sister of the king of England and France. For more on Caxton’s business savvy as regards his political loyalties, see N.F. Blake, *Caxton and his World* and G.D. Painter, *William Caxton: A Biography*. See also M.J.C. Lowry, “Caxton, St Winifred and Lady Margaret Beaufort,” for an account of how Caxton may have curried favour with the Lancastrian king, Henry VII and his mother, Lady Margaret Beaufort by aligning himself with a cult acceptable to the new dynasty.

he eschews “ydleness, moder of all vices” and takes the labour in hand “for the contemplacion of his lady” and “by the suffrance and helpe of Almyghty God” (100). Upon completion, he printed the book, a skill he “practysed and lerned at grete charge and dispense” in order that “every man may have them attones”, and presented this landmark text to Margaret of York who “well acceptid hit and largely rewarded” him (100).

What Caxton is relating is the self-conscious dramatization of an historic moment in book history that nearly did not happen. Were it not for the timely intervention of the “vertuous prynces Margaret”, Caxton seems to suggest, this first book printed in English, itself a history of origins, would not exist. Furthermore, it owes its origins to Margaret’s learning, or rather, to her ability to read and interpret correctly. Caxton concludes his prologue of the first book by invoking the scholastic figure of the *auctor* and the ambiguous referent of the term bears closer inspection. He describes “folowyng myn auctor mekeli beseching the bounteous hyenes of my said lady” whom he hopes will accept his “symple and rude werk” through her “benyvolence” (98). The term *auctor* is bound up with the medieval concept of literary authority or *auctoritas*. The ultimate *auctor*, of course, was God and the Bible was the source of all written authority; however *auctor* was also associated with classical and patristic writers whose work comprised the moral properties that made it worthy of imitation. Medieval writers could gain credibility for their work by positioning it in relation to ancient authorities. Indeed, Alistair Minnis notes that the ancients were so

revered, and so popular, that even contemporary texts could be ascribed to earlier writers, however unlikely such an attribution might be (11). The malleability of medieval literary authority is reflected in Caxton's use of the term "auctor" to represent the progenitor of his own project. On the one hand, Caxton may well be "folowyng" Raoul Le Fevre, the writer of the French text he is translating, and the most obvious (or at least straightforward) candidate for the "auctor" to whom he refers; he is "mekely" following the superior French he had originally so admired with his own (inferior) English. On the other hand, and given the deferential posture he has already assumed when addressing the Duchess Margaret, Caxton's "auctor" can also refer to Margaret herself. He has already identified her as the linguistic authority on his work and he confesses to emulating his patron in her own practice of contemplation in order to complete his translation. In this way, he endorses Margaret's literate practice and inscribes her role not simply as patron, but also as translator and originator of this English text, the first of its kind in print.

This literary posture is reflected and reinforced by the unique engraved frontispiece for the *Recuyell*, preserved in one copy now in the H.E. Huntington Library, that depicts the presentation scene (figure 3.1).¹⁰⁷ Lotte Hellinga points out that this engraving has become a well-known memorial of sorts to England's first printer though, as she aptly puts it, "there is not a little irony in the fact that

¹⁰⁷ Inscription evidence shows that the Huntington Library copy once belonged to Elizabeth Woodville, Edward IV's queen and sister-in-law to Margaret of York.

the figure seen here as central to the scene, Margaret of York, Duchess of Burgundy and sister of the King of England, Edward IV, enjoys not a fraction of the fame now bestowed on the man depicted as her humble servant, William Caxton” (“Reading”, 1). This imbalance of fame is all the more apparent given the debt to Margaret’s influence that Caxton acknowledges in his paratexts.

The engraving shows a scene full of activity that seems to represent a “real-time” image of the ceremonial presentation of the book to Margaret.¹⁰⁸ Hellinga has identified this engraving as characteristic of the “development of the form of dedication miniatures connected with the court of Burgundy” that began a shift away from more “formal settings” (1).¹⁰⁹ In it, the Duchess Margaret is surrounded by her ladies-in-waiting in what appears to be a stately room with a display of tableware on a sideboard and a fireplace in the background showing Margaret and her husband’s initials (“C & M”) and her motto “bien en aviengne” [may good come of it] below them, clearly identifying the setting as the Burgundian household. The five ladies-in-waiting train their eyes on the presentation scene in front of them. Hellinga suggests that the more elaborate

¹⁰⁸ There is conflicting evidence about the dating of the engraving and whether or not it was pasted into the presentation copy after the event or if it was prepared before the translation. See S. Montague Peartree, “A Portrait of William Caxton” and A.W. Pollard, “Recent Caxtonia”. For our purposes here, the date of the engraving matters little though it would be remarkable if it were made later than the translation because this would mean that it was a true witness to the presentation scene rather than a fictionalized image made in advance of the book’s completion. See Hellinga for an account of the provenance and import of the engraving (2-3).

¹⁰⁹ See also Andrea Pearson, *Envisioning Gender in Burgundian Devotional Art, 1350-1530*, for further discussion of the innovations in manuscript painting taking place in the court of Burgundy.

jewellery of the two ladies closest to Margaret might single them out as more important members of her retinue and that one of them is perhaps meant to represent her step-daughter, Mary of Burgundy (7). Given that the two women shared a close relationship as well as an enthusiasm for library-building and literary patronage, it may well be likely that the engraver would choose to represent Mary in the presentation scene. Margaret herself, wearing a v-necked dress with a wide belt and a hennin with a wimple, is dressed in a manner that is consistent with earlier patron-portraits and presentation scenes appearing in manuscripts she patronized.¹¹⁰ She is receiving the book from a kneeling Caxton, who is portrayed as a young man. As the resemblance of Margaret of York here to other known portraits of her is clear, scholars feel justified in assuming that this, the only known portrait of Caxton, is meant to be a real representation of him as well (Hellinga, 2). His act of dedication in the engraving is aped by a pet monkey, who poses between the figures of Caxton and Margaret. In medieval art, as Sandra Penketh reminds us, monkeys were commonly used in marginalia to

¹¹⁰ Hellinga notes that this “sartorial representation” of Margaret is also observed in a series of patron-portraits appearing in manuscripts associated with the duchess which show a consistency in her depiction: she is almost exclusively shown wearing “a close-fitting dress of undecorated material, a V-necked bodice with a wide belt, a train bordered with ermine, a hennin with a wimple” (5).

Following Hellinga’s identification of similarities in the representation of the duchess in patron-portraits, the Caxton engraving is especially like the dedication scene in the Jena Boethius, a translation into French of the *Consolation of Philosophy* commissioned by Margaret of York in 1476 from the scribe David Aubert (figure 3.2). The scene shows Margaret in similar dress, surrounded by (the same?) five ladies as she is in the *Recuyell* engraving, receiving the book from the kneeling figure of the scribe David Aubert. The similarity gives an indication of the borrowings in form, which characterize an early print trade that co-existed with manuscript production.

deride human behaviour (276). Hellinga notes that the emptiness of the animal's gesture only serves to highlight the "spiritual depth" of Caxton's dedication by comparison; his dedication, the portrait seems to imply, is "anything but empty" (7). Hellinga also contrasts the presence of the monkey with the presence of a small dog held by one of Margaret's ladies.¹¹¹ She suggests that the engraver's use of the dog, a familiar symbol of faith, subtly praises the loyalty of the English princess who has so enthusiastically taken up the patronage tradition of the Burgundian court (7, 11-12). The engraving captures both the real-world players in the presentation scene and the symbolic emblems that work to comment upon the significance of the relationship and the exchange being depicted.

My own interpretation of the image builds on Hellinga's attentive reading of it, though I read it through Caxton's own prose as well. At the centre of the engraving the key figures are both holding the book. Like the image with which I began this study, of Mary at the Annunciation looking down upon the upturned gaze of the patron Margaret Beauchamp, the locus of influence can be interpreted as moving in two opposing directions. Caxton is kneeling and presenting the book to Margaret and his deferential posture is reflected in the language he uses to

¹¹¹ Hellinga draws a parallel between the dog in the portrait and the phrase "your loyal friend", a term used in several of the Duchess's autograph inscriptions (7). I am hard-pressed to disagree with Hellinga, given the richness of detail in the portrait and the artistic language of medieval art that must have carried symbolic currency in a culture of different types of literacies. I would also add, however, that the dog is a marker of the leisured class of these particular women (much like Chaucer's Prioress with her dogs) and contributes to the conspicuous display of wealth in the scene. Mary of Burgundy, for example, is depicted in the patron-portrait in her book of hours with a small dog on her lap while she reads (see chapter two for my discussion of this image).

address her in his prologue. Margaret's status as the patron of the text is signaled not only by her physical proximity to him, as she stands above him, but also by the accoutrements of wealth on display, including the luxury of pet dogs and monkeys. The static position of the book, however, poised as it is between the two figures, also calls attention to the blurring of the roles of the two figures. Margaret may just as easily be handing the book to Caxton, and this posture is also borne out in his prologue as he describes her insistence on his completing the work under her tutelage. On the one hand the engraving depicts the language of courtly largesse and obligation that Caxton uses in his prologue as he positions himself as the gentleman-lover paying tribute to his lady; on the other hand, the engraving also depicts their apparent collaboration on the text with the ambiguity of who is giving and who is receiving the book reflecting the concomitant ambiguity of the literary authority behind the text.

The ambiguity of this image is also (anachronistically) representative of recent scholarly attention to the workings of the developing marketplace for printed books in England. Of particular interest has been the work of assessing and tracking the shifting fortunes of the patron's role and how that role is troubled by Caxton's courtly gestures. Because manuscript production was a bespoke trade there was less concern for establishing a market for the book than there was for producing a valuable object. Caxton's prologues that include allusions to the court – a mark of the influence of aristocratic culture on his literary tastes— demonstrate that he was operating within manuscript-oriented patronage

conventions even as he was producing a new kind of book. Hellinga surmises that “patrons, royal or otherwise, were a matter of opportunity [for printers] and not a basis for business” (*Caxton*, 101); A.S.G. Edwards and Carol Meale further suggest that the concept of “patronage” as it relates to the early printed book trade operates under the umbrella of “endorsement” and that the producer-patron relationship becomes less directly economic and more “talismanic” (96). In other words, the patron in the age of print carries social as well as economic capital.

These representations of patronage assume, however, that the “opportunity” and the “endorsement” benefit the printer, in large part because it often remains unclear how involved, either financially or otherwise, a patron was in the making of the printed book. Printers like Caxton’s successor, Wynkyn de Worde, when he became the printer for Lady Margaret Beaufort in 1508, was careful to title himself as “prynter unto my lady the kynges graundame,” even in those works which she did not commission and to which she had no connection (qtd. in Powell, 225). Association of a work with Lady Margaret—a woman renowned for her piety and patronage of learning as well as for her familial relationship with the first two Tudor kings—however fictitious, must have lent de Worde’s books a legitimacy that was associated with her influence, so much so that both de Worde and his contemporary Richard Pynson signaled their relationship with Lady Margaret with dedicated heraldic woodcuts that appeared

in their editions.¹¹² Edwards and Meale suggest that Lady Margaret's dealings with the early printers established a market for religious texts in the vernacular that had been previously untapped, a market that included a large proportion of female readers (115-117). Lady Margaret's household accounts show, however, that she did indeed pay Pynson for one hundred books from his press in 1505 and fifty books in 1506 (Jones and Underwood, 183). While I do not dispute that Margaret Beaufort's endorsement of certain religious works helped to augment new commercial possibilities for the early printers, in this chapter and the next I take up the ways in which the printers may have also represented "opportunity" and "endorsement" for the patron, for Margaret Beaufort and her own reading activities.

Like Margaret of York before her, Margaret Beaufort was also a patron of Caxton. In addition to a translation of a French romance, *Blanchardyn and Eglantine*,¹¹³ she, along with her daughter-in-law the Princess Elizabeth, directed Caxton to print his prose translation of the popular medieval prayer the *Fifteen Oes*. In his epilogue, he writes,

¹¹² See Edwards and Meale for detailed descriptions of the appearance and use of woodcuts to display noble endorsement in printed books, 101-102, n. 24-25.

¹¹³ See my brief discussion of *Blanchardyn and Eglantine* in chapter 4.

These prayers tofore wreton ben inprinted bi the
 commaundementes of the moste hye & vertuous pryncesse our
 liege ladi Elizabeth by the grace of god Quene of Englonde & of
 Fraunce & also of the right hye & moste noble pryncesse
 Margarete moder unto our soverayn lorde the kyng, etc.
 By their most humble subget and servaunt William Caxton. (83)¹¹⁴

As he does in the paratextual material in the *Recuyell*, Caxton here invokes the language of chivalry and positions himself as the courtier paying tribute to his lady (or in this case, ladies). The perception of royal favour that comes with named royal patrons, like a celebrity endorsement, presumably helped Caxton to sell more books. Jennifer Summit, in “The Romance of Female Patronage”, has convincingly argued that this posture also casts the printer-patron relationship in sexualised and strictly gendered terms. While I agree with Summit that Caxton is imagining a “romance of female patronage” that has the potential to silence his female patrons, I also think it is possible, and indeed productive, to interrogate the ways in which Margaret Beaufort is using a similar mode of patronage to give voice to, rather than silence, her own public image. I will do this first by examining the ways in which Margaret Beaufort was able to cultivate her own public reputation for piety and second by looking more closely at the *Fifteen Oes* and its function in print.

Margaret Beaufort is well-known to scholars for two things: astute political savvy and austere personal piety, both of which seem to have been carefully cultivated by her with an eye to public performance and social expectation. In the next chapter I will treat her investment in her son Henry VII’s

¹¹⁴ STC 20195. The text is cited from N.F. Blake’s *Caxton’s Own Prose*.

place on the English throne, a place he owed to her political machinations and her Lancastrian provenance, and her investment in religious devotions connected to literacy and learning through her own translation work. In this chapter I am focusing on the way in which she was able to cultivate a noble, even royal, public persona that relied on her religious and intellectual austerity. Susan Powell has already observed similarities between Lady Margaret's public performances of piety, and those of her female contemporaries.¹¹⁵ Regular devotions observed in personal chapels, with special attention to saints, Christ and the Virgin; ownership of devotional books in the vernacular; records of private and communal reading; association with personal confessors and religious houses; a vow of chastity in later life—all of these shows of piety, Powell has found, are common for women of Lady Margaret's class and position (198-199). Her piety was, it seems, at least in part dictated by what was deemed socially acceptable for her gender.

In seeming contrast to Margaret's personal sobriety and alignment with attitudes rejecting worldly luxuries, was her predilection for "shimmering display" in the form of lavish religious items including a piece of the holy cross set in gold with pearls and precious stones, a "bede" of gold displaying the arms of the Passion, four pearls with tokens of the Passion on the backside, and a rose decorated with Christ's image displaying a diamond in every nail of the cross (Jones and Underwood, 190). As Jones and Underwood point out, these items

¹¹⁵ Powell mentions specifically Lady Margaret's grandmother Margaret Holland, Margaret Lady Hungerford and Lady Margaret's cousin Cecily Neville, Duchess of York.

reveal something of her personal preoccupations, kept close as they were in her chambers or with her gentlewoman and not stored in her jewel house (190). A more immediate illustration of the contact between austerity and luxury that characterized Lady Margaret's devotional practice is apparent in Roland Lockey's 1597 (and so posthumous) portrait of her, which hangs today in the hall of St. John's College, Cambridge, one of two colleges she founded at the university (figure 3.3). Jones and Underwood note that it may be based on a second portrait, now lost, of her "sitting upon her knees" which is listed in the 1549-50 inventory of the royal collection (295). In it she is pictured reading from an open book while kneeling at a prie-dieu that is covered in luxurious gold cloth. She is depicted as a vowess in solemn, unadorned dress with her be-ringed hands clasped in prayer. Hanging behind her is a second gold cloth displaying the Beaufort coat of arms with a chained portcullis beneath it—these badges also appear in the stained glass window in the background—and hanging above her is a tapestry displaying the Tudor rose.¹¹⁶ It is a scene that articulates a number of conflicting ideas: Margaret seems to be at private prayer, yet the portrait makes the act public, and the sobriety of her dress and demeanour is belied by the sumptuous excess of her surroundings and her jewellery. The deliberate use of the familiar emblems of the Tudor line also indicate the careful association of Margaret with the political and religious authority of the royal dynasty, which was

¹¹⁶ Margaret's personal coat of arms, which appears only in books and not in heraldry records, incorporated a crowned portcullis (the Beaufort badge) Tudor roses and the initials "IhC" (figure 3.4).

a significant part of her social identity. It must be remembered that this is a memorial portrait and so a composite of what Lady Margaret was known for, and what the artist wanted to recall. Nonetheless, the focus on piety, luxury, reading and prayer tells us something about the longevity of the public persona of Lady Margaret and the kind of image she was able to publicize.

Jones and Underwood caution, however, that the divide between pious austerity and worldly excess was not so “sharply antagonistic” in Margaret Beaufort’s century as it is in our own (190). They note that “her age displayed a fondness for the exotic and the austere in close conjunction: in romances the court and castle were never far from the forest and hermitage” (190). This “fondness” was perhaps more of a necessity than a choice. The demands of maintaining publicly the splendour of the court and the stability that such splendour promised co-existed with the practicing of devotions that recommended contempt for the world and its material wealth. The theory of living an ideal Christian life put forth in devotional texts was often at odds with the practice, though some texts had provisos built in. The readers of Bokenham’s life of St. Elizabeth, for example, particularly its patron Elizabeth de Vere, are not encouraged to live the life of extreme asceticism that the royal Elizabeth of Hungary chooses in the legend; rather they are encouraged to imitate the virtues that allow for her self-deprivation, such as patience and humility. This is not a problem that is solely the preserve of the nobility, however. Kathleen Ashley notes in her examination of the fifteenth-century bourgeoisie that the newly-affluent merchant class

negotiated the boundaries between the spiritual and the practical in a way that closely resembles Margaret's own strategy. Ashley points out that they solved the predicament of "how to achieve spiritual validation while remaining an active member of mercantile society" by acquiring devotional books and objects that worked to mitigate the spiritual stigma of living a life that was socially concerned with wealth and status (374). The idea of a mixed life was one that lay readers, be they noble or middle-class, needed to navigate wisely.

As mother to the king, Lady Margaret took great pains to create an "aura of regality" (Jones and Underwood, 69). Her son's claim to the throne was through her Lancastrian lineage and she is understood to have negotiated the marriage between Elizabeth of York and her son, uniting the two houses in a new Tudor rule. Her interest, therefore, in displaying the majesty of kingship had a stake in legitimizing a new dynasty and demonstrating political allegiance. When Elizabeth of York was crowned queen in 1487, Margaret attended her in the procession and "sat at her right hand in the parliament chamber" where she was described wearing a mantle and surcoat "*as the quene*, with a rich corrownall on her hede" (qtd. in Jones and Underwood, 69; emphasis mine). In 1488, she and Elizabeth "were issued with the liveries of the Order of the Garter, as sign of special standing, and a song was composed for the feast to celebrate their wearing of the robes together" (Jones and Underwood, 69). In fact, Margaret and Elizabeth were dressed identically at the feast in "robes of sanguine cloth furred with minever and woven with garter letters of gold" (Jones and Underwood, 69).

Similarly, a window commissioned for the church of Grey Friars, Greenwich in 1503 shows Margaret “with robes *like a pryncesse*, corynell on head and rodde of gold in her hand” (qtd. in Jones and Underwood, 70; emphasis mine). Margaret had no claim to royal titles as the mother of the king, but contemporary accounts note that she appeared at official events and was portrayed “as a quene”.

Caxton’s epilogue to the *Fifteen Oes* acknowledges in print what Margaret displayed in person. He refers to Elizabeth of York as his “liege ladi”, assigning her the role of the heroine in a chivalric romance before he identifies her as the “Quene of Englonde & of Fraunce”. Lady Margaret is described as the “most noble pryncesse” and in this way Caxton dresses her metaphorically “like a princess” and seats her at the Queen’s right hand.

The display of regal wealth, counter as it might seem to Lady Margaret’s reputation for piety, served to maintain her status and her authority. Like the precious objects in Margaret’s closet, and the public acts of piety listed by Powell, regal display works to establish her social identity. As Christopher Tilley reminds us about material culture:

Material forms do not simply mirror pre-existing social distinctions, sets of ideas or symbolic systems. They are instead the very medium through which these values, ideas and social distinctions are constantly reproduced and legitimized, or transformed. (61)

Taken in the context of displays of material wealth, whether they be in the form of dress or in the ownership of religious objects, especially books, Tilley’s analysis is useful for understanding the way that such a display not only cements social

position but also shifts perceptions of the power attached to a position. I suggest that Margaret Beaufort consciously managed her image to shore up not only the power of her son the king, but also her own. The printed book, with its promise of reaching a broader audience, must have offered Lady Margaret an opportunity to represent herself and the literature that was important to her in a “fixed” manner; that is, her name appearing in print as the originator of a collection of prayers of protection could transfer, in Tilley’s terms, her “values, ideas, and social distinctions” to more diverse social spheres than was possible within the narrow confines of a manuscript culture. The spread of books and literacy was always limited by the labour involved in copying a text by hand, but the new “material form” of the book made the audience more accessible as well.

That the textualization of her public persona was already something Lady Margaret was aware of is clear in the significant redesign of her signature. In the fifteenth century, aristocratic signatures consisted of the abbreviated Christian name followed by the full title. Jones and Underwood observe that until 1499, Margaret, Countess of Richmond and Derby, signed her name “M Richmond”; after 1499, she changed her signature to “Margaret R” (86). The signature is ambiguous, perhaps deliberately so as she had no right to the royal signature, but it is distinctly regal recalling Henry’s “HR” and Elizabeth’s “Elizabeth R” (Jones and Underwood, 86).¹¹⁷ She also added the Tudor crown to her personal seal and the title “*et mater Henrici septimi regis Anglie et Hibernie*” [and mother of Henry

¹¹⁷ For an alternate view see also Retha Warnicke, “The Lady Margaret, Countess of Richmond,” who does not see her signature making any royal claims.

VII, king of England and Ireland], linking her identity, in writing, to the king.

Krug observes that this move is part of “women’s growing awareness of the power of written documentation” and suggests that the textualization of Margaret’s relationship to the king in this way gave her the “advantages of royal support both in terms of social status and institutional backing” (85-86). I agree with Krug that the signature must have operated as a powerful reminder of Margaret’s royal connections, but I also see it working in tandem with other demonstrations of authority, including public appearances in royal dress. It is my contention that she was able to use the air of royal authority to support the production of works of religious devotion that reflected back her own tastes and promoted her own preoccupations with leading a pious life, in spite of, or perhaps even because of, her responsibilities as a royal persona. Books and reading, then, become important visible markers of both public status and personal identity. Like the important objects that Lady Margaret kept close by in her closet—objects that recall Christ’s Passion—the *Fifteen Oes* is a collection of prayers that rehearse the history of the Passion for the supplicant. The remainder of this chapter will examine the *Fifteen Oes* through the lens of Margaret Beaufort’s investment in her own public reputation for piety, which will move the focus from her association with royalty to her association with Christ.

The *Fifteen Oes* is a series of fifteen devotional prayers of salvation, petition and praise that borrows its title from the fact that each prayer begins with

the vocative “O” addressed to Christ. The prayers take the devotee through the history of the Passion with a vividness of imagery that reflects the centrality of meditation on the crucifixion to late medieval religious practice. As Eamon Duffy puts it: “the Bernardine tradition of affective meditation on the Passion, enriched and extended by the Franciscans, had become without any rival the central devotional activity of all seriously minded Christians” (*Stripping of the Altars*, 234-35).¹¹⁸ Because Passion meditations are focused on the humanity rather than the divinity of Christ, they were thought ideal for the growing numbers of lay readers, including women, engaged in private devotions in the late Middle Ages. In fact, following Caroline Walker Bynum, women were considered to have a particular affinity with the corporal body of Christ because they too were identified by and associated especially with their corporeality.¹¹⁹ Bynum notes that

[i]f anything, women drew from the traditional notion of the female as physical an emphasis on their own redemption by a Christ who was supremely physical because supremely human. Influenced by the growing concern with Christ’s humanity as bodiliness, they sometimes even extrapolated from the notion that male is to female as spirit is to flesh the notion that, in Christ, divinity is to humanity as male is to female. (*Holy Feast*, 263)

¹¹⁸ The devotions to the Holy Name and the cults of the Wounds that proliferated in late medieval England also attest to this. See Miri Rubin, *Corpus Christi: the Eucharist in Late Medieval Culture* and the essays in *The Broken Body: Passion Devotion in Late Medieval Culture* (Macdonald et al., eds.)

¹¹⁹ For the symbolism of Christ’s body in relation to gender and social identity see also Bynum, *Jesus as Mother* and Sarah Beckwith, *Christ’s Body: Identity, Culture and Society in Late Medieval Writings*.

The *Fifteen Oes* insists that readers attend to the physical events of the Passion, to “have minde” of them by visually recalling them as they read. Structured around the Seven Words of Christ, that is, the final moments of speech uttered by Christ during his Passion, each “O” focuses on an aspect of Christ’s suffering (both physical and emotional) and asks for mercy, salvation and redemption, thus offering a devotional elaboration and contextualization of Christ’s suffering on the cross. Rebecca Krug suggests that “the Seven Words remind the reader that the agony of crucifixion is rooted in physical torment but magnified by the psychological trauma of betrayal and separation” (“The *Fifteen Oes*”, 109). The reader overhears Christ speak the Seven Words (at least insofar as a reader can hear speech in the context of solitary reading) and is presumably able to visualize the Passion more clearly, reminded as she is of his acutely human suffering. Each “O” closes with “Amen. Pater Noster, Ave Maria.” (or variations thereof), anticipating the tendency for devotions appearing in early sixteenth-century primers to have attached to them a prescribed number of Paters and Aves.

The prayers circulated in both Latin and Middle English from the end of the fourteenth and throughout the fifteenth century in England, appearing in books of hours and devotional compilations in both manuscript and print. They were long ascribed to the fourteenth-century mystical writer Saint Bridget of Sweden but scholars now believe that the *Oes* were composed in England “either in the devotional world of the Yorkshire hermitages associated with Richard Rolle and his disciples, or in the circle of English Brigittines”, whose order at Syon Abbey

formed a centre of devotional literary culture (Duffy, 249). Krug notes that the “dialectal variety” in the Middle English versions of the prayers—including southern and northern dialects—indicates that the prayers’ influence was “geographically as well as socially far-reaching” (“The *Fifteen Oes*”, 108).¹²⁰ Among the Middle English versions are two in poetry, one by John Lydgate, and two in prose, in addition to Caxton’s prose translation, the first version to be printed in 1491. This was reprinted in a book of hours by Wynkyn de Worde in 1494, again at the behest of Lady Margaret, and seems to have circulated widely up until the Reformation and beyond. Helen White describes the prayers as “thoroughly orthodox classics of the traditional Primer belonging to the late development of medieval devotion which concentrates especially on the humanity of Christ” (216). Most of the scholarship on the *Fifteen Oes* has focused either on the variety and provenance of the different versions of the prayers in English, or on the ways in which the popularity of the prayers continued into the Reformation, including interest in the rhetorical changes sustained by the prayers due to changes in religious orientation.¹²¹ I am interested here in how they

¹²⁰ For discussions of the individual versions of the prayers, including speculations as to Latin sources, see Claies Gejrot, “The *Fifteen Oes*: Latin and Vernacular Versions”; John C. Hirsch, “A Middle English Metrical Version of the *Fifteen Oes* from Bodleian Library MA Add. B 66”; and Charity Meier-Ewert, “A Middle English Version of the *Fifteen Oes*.”

As Meier-Ewert’s article makes clear, the *Oes* were most widely read in England though there is evidence that they circulated on the Continent as well.

¹²¹ See especially Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars* (249-56); John C. Hirsch, “A Middle English Metrical Version of the *Fifteen Oes* from Bodleian Library MA Add. B 66.”; Jennifer Summit, *Lost Property* (115-126); and Helen C. White’s *The Tudor Books of Private Devotion* (230-250).

operate to represent Lady Margaret Beaufort's piety and how her involvement in literate culture afforded her a social prestige that made reading and providing books a spiritually edifying act.

The book that Lady Margaret commissioned from Caxton is an individual book printed together with a small gathering of Latin prayers, though the *Fifteen Oes*, in English, dominates the collection. Thematically, each of the prayers in the collection is concerned with physical and spiritual protection, including prayers that seek the help of guardian angels, prayers seeking defence against the plague, prayers for the Holy Trinity to safeguard the believer from evil and prayers that Jesus's Holy name protect the suppliant from damnation. It is similar in content to another prayer collection associated with Lady Margaret, a prayer book probably commissioned for her third husband Thomas Stanley, now Westminster Abbey MS 39; N.R. Ker makes this attribution based on the appearance of Lady Margaret's arms on the first folio and Stanley's throughout (411-415). Westminster 39 as a whole is devoted to an appreciation of the effects of the Passion and includes prayers, in Latin and English, to the Holy Cross and to Jesus's name. Both books share a number of identical texts, including the prayers "*Infirmittatum nostrum*", "*Deus propicius esto michi*" and "*Domini Jhesu christe fili die vivi deus omnipotens rex.*"¹²²

¹²² In John Fisher's memorial sermon about Lady Margaret he notes that "ful often she complayned that in her youthe she had not gyven her to the understonnyng of latyn" (292). Eamon Duffy, in his discussion of Latin prayers in printed books of hours, suggests that the prayers were recited for the virtue of the words themselves and that "virtue inhered in these passages quite apart from

The prayers of both books reflect Margaret's investment in and popularization of the cult of the Holy Name of Jesus, a characteristically English affective devotion; Lady Margaret was acknowledged as patron of the feast of the Holy Name of Jesus by the pope in 1494. That same year, Wynkyn de Worde printed a copy of Walter Hilton's *Scale of Perfection* and *Epistle on the Mixed Life* for Margaret, as the verse envoy makes clear:

This hevenly boke, more precyous than golde,
Was late dyrect, with great humylyte,
For godly plesur thereon to beholde,
Unto the right noble Margaret, as ye see,
The kyngis moder of excellent bounte
Henry the seventh that Jhesu hym preserve
This myghty prynesse hath commaunded me
Temprynt this boke her grace for to deserve. (v)¹²³

Margaret used her most "excellent bounte" to produce a book that not only publicized the feast for which she had been named patron, but that also provided a treatise on the mixed life, as though demonstrating by example the benefit of wordly wealth for the promotion of living a spiritual life through books "more precyous than golde". This act becomes a charitable gesture akin to distributing

the actual comprehension of their message" (*Stripping of the Alters*, 217). See also Rebecca Krug, *Reading Families* (101-102).

¹²³ STC 14042. Quoted material is from Thomas Bestul's edition, published by Medieval Institute Publications.

Margaret was also interested in helping the dissemination of the text. A copy of the 1494 print was a gift-volume, now at Yale, which contains the autographs of Elizabeth of York and Margaret who have inscribed it to Mary Roos, a lady-in-waiting to the Queen whose first husband bequeathed property to Sheen and Syon. See P.J. Croft, *Lady Margaret Beaufort, Countess of Richmond* and George R. Keiser, "The Mystics and the Early English Printers".

alms to the poor.¹²⁴ Jones and Underwood note that the version on which de Worde's printed book was based probably came of Carthusian and Bridgetine provenance "which included a long passage about the Name of Jesus" and "various interpolations elsewhere which dwelt upon and invoked the Name" (182-3). The appearance of this text in print shows the interplay between monastic editors, the print trade and the personal tastes of a noble patron.

Margaret's taste for devotions to Christ is also apparent in her own translation of Book IV of the influential devotional text *The Imitation of Christ*, a treatise that is an exposition of the ideal of Christ's human life as a model for life on earth, including reminders for the spiritual life, suggestions for drawing toward the inner life, inner consolation, and the proper approach to holy communion. It takes the form of a dialogue between Christ and a disciple (the reader/sinner) who reflects on Christ's words and makes them her own: "they be thy wordes and thou hast proffered them. And they be now myn, for thou hast sayd them for my helthe" (262).¹²⁵ What is inscribed in the text as a metaphorical understanding based on the exchange of words becomes a reality when Margaret circulates her translation, now *her* words, in print. She commissioned a translation of the first three books from William Atkynson, which was then printed at her behest by Richard Pynson in 1503. In 1504, Pynson issued a second edition of Atkynson's translation together with Lady Margaret's translation of Book IV. Prior to

¹²⁴ Lady Margaret's household accounts are a witness to her daily expenditure on her almsfolk (Jones and Underwood, 179).

¹²⁵ STC 23954.7. Quoted material is from John K. Ingram's edition.

Margaret's printed edition, the first English version of the *Imitation*, sans Book IV, had circulated in manuscript form "amongst an exclusive and tightly-knit spiritual aristocracy" from about the middle of the fifteenth century (Lovatt, 100). Largely unknown to readers before it was more widely available in print, Margaret's *Imitation* seems to have been a popular text; it was printed again in 1519 by de Worde and circulated until 1531, when a new translation was undertaken.

Margaret Beaufort's influence and favour regarding the cult of the Holy Name of Jesus is also evident in the dedicatory material inscribed in a manuscript gifted to her by John de Gigli, bishop of Worcester. Now British Library Additional MS 33772, the manuscript contains the office and proper of the mass attached to the feast, including prayers and hymns, dedicated to Margaret "*tanti dignissima mater regis*" [most noble mother of the king]. De Gigli asks her to accept the book as a testament to her devotions, even though it is not properly bound in jewels and gold, as it should be ("*dignus erat gemmis et multo condier auro*") (fol.1r).¹²⁶ Margaret is asked to remember de Gigli, she and her son are wished long life and success, and Jesus who gives his name to this little book ("*preste qui nomen Jesus dedit ipse libello*") is asked to give especial consideration to Margaret's prayers (fol.1r).¹²⁷ Indeed, Margaret's efforts to

¹²⁶ Regardless of its decorative shortcomings, the prayer book is a well-planned manuscript of 65 folios on vellum in a single hand, with illuminations on almost every page, certainly an up-market book.

¹²⁷ See Jones and Underwood who also mention Margaret's prayer book (176-7).

promote the cult of the Holy Name of Jesus and its feast and mass were successful. Duffy notes that it was “one of the most popular of all the votive Masses” and that its observance was taken up “by elites in every community as a convenient expression, and perhaps an instrument, of their social dominance” emulating as they were the court’s patronage of the cult (115).

That Margaret Beaufort’s reading and devotional tastes had an impact on the production and circulation of texts important to her, and even, it seems, on the liturgy, gives some indication of the impact of popular piety on devotional activities. I reviewed here Margaret’s interest in and promotion of devotions to Christ in order to put my reading of the *Fifteen Oes* into a wider context of her reading and devotional practices and how they came to represent a public, pious persona. It is often assumed that the books that Margaret sponsored and translated were chosen for her by a confessor, or even that the printer chose them himself and simply attached her name to their production (which still implies something about the value of her public image). I suggest that we give Margaret more credit for her own taste. As we have already seen, she was able to engineer for herself a public image that set her on a par with the Queen, and, as we shall see in the next chapter, after her son’s accession to the throne she was able to negotiate for herself a position of personal independence that many contemporary women did not enjoy. Rather than assume that Margaret’s sponsorship of the *Fifteen Oes* was due to her confessor John Fisher, or that it was Caxton’s own

idea,¹²⁸ my reading of the prayers assumes that Margaret herself wanted them translated and printed and associated with her and the Queen. The *Fifteen Oes* requires its readers to partake in a kind of reading that engages the imaginative faculty and that asks them to use the book as an object of salvific power. I suggest that Margaret's own participation in the book trade, particularly the printed book trade, gave her an opportunity to promote the use of books for religious edification, such that her subjects (or to be more accurate, the subjects of her son and grandson, Henry VII and VIII) could receive spiritual guidance and redemption through reading.

The Christ of the *Fifteen Oes*, as is typical of the affective tradition in general, is loving and tender with an understanding of the human condition because he has shared in its suffering. The supplicant can seek mercy from a Saviour who shares the bond of human weakness:

O jhesu helthey & tendre lover of al repentaunt sinners that likest to dwelle as thou saydest thy selfe with the children of men. For that was the cause why thou were incarnate and made man in the ende of the World. Have mynde blessed Jhesu of all the sorowes that thou suffredest in thy manhode drawynge nyhe to thy blessed Passion, In the whiche most holsom passion was ordeyned to be in thy devyne herte by counseyl of all the hole trynityte for the raunsom of al mankynde. (sig. A.ii^r)¹²⁹

¹²⁸ In fact, Caxton did not make a habit of publishing religious works and, in the prologue to *Blanchardyn and Eglantine* he states that women in particular did not read enough romances because they studied "overmoche in bokes of contemplacion".

¹²⁹ References are to page numbers in a medieval hand. The orthography has been lightly modernized; punctuation is mine.

Involving imaginative contemplation of Christ's suffering on the cross, for which the supplicant understands that she is to blame, the *Fifteen Oes* invites the reader to confront and meditate on Christ's Passion by presenting grisly portrayals of scenes of torment. The manifestations of physical suffering seek to elicit affective responses to the agony of crucifixion from the reader. This is achieved through the theological understanding that Christ is the incarnation of God. As Duffy reminds us of the Anselmian origin of this idea, the Passion was not only the "product [...] primarily of human evil but [...] eternally preordained in the heart of God" (250). Christ is described as the "mirror of divine clarity or omniscience" (*speculum claris divine*) in which he sees both those who will be saved and those who will be damned (Duffy, 250). The Oes explore the opposition between the limitations of humanity and the divinity, who knows all and sees all; the manner of Christ's suffering, as Duffy puts it, "exactly inverts some divine attribute" as Christ is greeted by titles that suggest his divinity juxtaposed with graphic images of his Passion (251). Not only is the divine inverted in Christ's suffering but his epithet predetermines and calls into being the precise terms of his suffering, recalling Christ as a mirror of clarity in which all is pre-ordained. For example, "Jhesu [the] very fredom of aungellys, paradys of all gostly delites" is surrounded by "all his enemyes & clipped as wode lions smytyng" him (sig. A.iii^r). "Blessed Jhesu loveable kyng and frende in all thyng" hangs naked before all his friends, in whom he finds "noo comforte" (sig. A.iv^v). He who is the "welle of endles pyte" cries out "I thirst" and he who is the

“swetnes of hertes and gostly hony of soules” drinks the “bytternes of the [...] galle” (sig. A.v^{r-v}). Consistently presented with conflicting metaphors that embody the divine-human saviour, the suppliant seeks redemption as resolution. The reader/narrator states “For mynde of this blessed passion, I beseeche the benygne Jhesu graunte me afore my deth very contriciyon, trew confessyon and worthy satysfaccion” (sig. A.ii^v-A.iii^r).

My own reading of the *Fifteen Oes* will focus on the idea of Christ as mirror, and the simultaneous presence of the divine and the human that the mirror clarifies for both Christ and the reader in these prayers. Recalling Anselm’s figuration of Christ as “*speculum claris divine*”, in the fifth prayer the reader faces Christ as reflection:

Jhesu blessyd myrroure of endles clerenes, have mynde of thy
blessyd memoryall words whan thou beheldest in the myrroure of
thy ryght clere magiste in predestynacion of all thy chosen soules
that sholde be saved by the merite of thy passyon. (sig. A.iv^v)

Alongside gruesome images of torture—Christ is “torne in alle [his] limmes soo that there was noo limme abydyng in his right joynte” (sig. A.iii^v)—the reader is reminded that Christ is a mirror image for herself. Just as Christ can see the reader in the mirror with his divine sight, the reader can see herself in Christ who is a “myrroure of endles clerenes”. Indeed, he is “made man”, that is, he is made in the image of the reader and in witnessing his suffering, the reader is forced to “see” her own; that is, the twinned image of reader and Christ allows the reader to understand both his sacrifice and her own culpability in his suffering. In the twelfth prayer the understanding of the mirror as a witness is expanded and

deepened when Christ is again figured as a mirror:

O Blessed myrrour of trouth token of unyte & lovsome bonde of charite, have mynde of thyne innumerable peynes and woundes wyth the whiche fro the toppe of thy hede to the sole of thy fote thou were wounded. [...] What myghtest thou do more for us than thou dydest. (sig. A.vi^v)

As occurs throughout all of the devotions, the reader-speaker asks the mirror-Christ to “have mynde” of his suffering for humanity; that is, to remember it by keeping it as an image in the mind. In order for the reader to hold it in her own memory, “for the mynde of this passion”, she asks that Christ write his suffering into her own heart: “Therefore benygne Jhesu for the mynde of this passion wryte al thy woundes in myn herte wyth thy precyous blode that I may bothe rede in theym thy dede and thy love” (sig. A.vi^v). Seeing herself, or rather, her own human shortcomings, reflected in Christ is not enough; instead she must have the image inscribed so that she may read it. In this way, the centrality of reading and books to late medieval devotion enters into the prayers themselves and works to underscore the importance of reading well, that is, with care and attention to the text that stands in for Christ. The supplicant becomes a kind of book of Christ’s Passion, and a mirror image for the book from which she is reading.

This process of seeing and imprinting owes much to the medieval concept of sight, both physical and spiritual. As Jennifer Bryan reminds us, “throughout the Middle Ages, vision was considered the strongest possible access to objects of devotion [and] an important factor in later medieval theories of the image and affective piety” (124). Bryan’s discussion of the medieval understanding of vision

as a powerful vehicle of knowledge and transformation is useful here. As she explains, according to the Neoplatonic model, the physics of seeing involved a ray, “an emanation of the body’s strongest life force”, that would seek out and physically touch an object and then return it to the viewer by imprinting its image on the memory (123). From the perspective of devotional reading and prayer, metaphors of seeing referenced a means of transforming the soul by physically imprinting an image of Christ’s suffering upon the reader. This idea is further expounded by Augustine who posited a spiritual vision in which the inner eye of the soul could reflect and imprint a transformative image of God; the more intensely it sees, the more clearly is the image fixed in the memory (Bryan, 123-124). For Augustine, the act of “seeing” the image made more of an impression if it evoked a powerful emotion:

[the will] moves the sense to be formed to the thing which is seen, and keeps it fixed on it when it has been formed. And if it is so violent that it can be called love, or desire, or passion, it likewise exerts a powerful influence on the rest of the body of this living being. (*On the Trinity*, 66; qtd. in Bryan, 126)

Bryan notes that Passion meditations seem to take up Augustine’s guidelines for violent imagery and that “Passion writers made their images as intimate, intense, shocking, and strange as possible” in order to impact their readers through the sense of spiritual vision (126). In this way, “seeing” becomes a path to salvation.

This understanding of the physics of spiritual vision informs my reading of the *Fifteen Oes* and the work it asks its readers to do. In the twelfth devotion discussed above, in which the reader asks Christ to write his wounds into her

heart that she may better recall his sacrifice, sight is linked with an image that is, in fact, distinctly textual because it is being read. As I stated earlier in my discussion of the epigraph to this chapter, Fillastre favours the sense of sight for medieval readers and notes that it is “much firmer than hearing and makes man much more certain” because it is through sight that the written word “impresses itself in the understanding of the reader” (qtd. and trans. in Saenger, “Books of Hours”, 167-68 n. 76). The only way to achieve this sight was through reading and meditating on that reading to recreate the Passion in vivid and personal terms; textual images needed to astonish the reader, to cause a visceral reaction, in order for the reader to effectively behold and retain them.

Of the more extreme iconographic representations of Christ in the late medieval period was the image of Christ as a cluster of grapes being pressed into wine. John C. Hirsch notes that, though this image occurred frequently on the continent, it was not often found in England (101). The *Fifteen Oes* gives verbal expression to this image in the fifteenth and final prayer:

O Blessed Jhesu verai and true plenteuous vyne, have mynde of thy passion & habundaunt shedyng of blode that thou sheddest most plenteuously as yf it had be threst out of a rype clustre of grapes. Whan they pressed thy blessid body as a ripe clustre upon the pressour of the crosse and yave us drynke both blode and water out of thy body, perced with a knyghtes spere soo that in thy blessed body was not lefte a drope of blood ne of water. Thene at last as a bundell of myrr thou hengest on the crosse on high where thy tendre flesshe chaunged his colour, by cause the licour of thy bowells and the mary of thy bones was dryed up. For mynde of this bytter passion, swete Jhesu, wounde my herte and that my soule may be fedde swetely wyth water of penaunce and terres of love bothe nyght and daye. (sig. A.vii^v-viii^r)

If English readers needed a strange or shocking image of Christ to help them to visualize the events of the Passion, Christ as a “plenteuous” vine that quenches the suppliant’s thirst with both blood and water is perhaps just strange, but also just familiar, enough to elicit an affective response. Duffy points out that the image is drawn from John 15 and Isaiah 63, which envisions a Christ in garments dyed red “like him that treadeth in the winevat” who states, “I have trodden the wine-press alone” (Isaiah 63:2-3; Duffy, 252). The wounding of Christ by the press, however, is voiced and mirrored by the suppliant/reader when she asks that Christ similarly wound her that she may keep in “mynde” his “bytter passion”. The reader then sees herself reflected in the image of Christ and finds herself lacking; where he is spent and dry without “a drope of blood ne of water”, she is “fedde swetely” by his sacrifice. The Eucharistic metaphor acts as a reminder of Christ’s humanity, of his ability to suffer, and of his divinity, because his suffering gives succour to the suppliant. The reader’s reflection is both like and unlike Christ, capturing the paradox of the conditions for remission of sin: only a being who is both God and man can save humanity because only God is without sin, yet salvation for the human race must come through one of its members. Faced with an image, however extraordinary, of Christ’s human perfection, the reader is made only more aware of her own imperfections and her own need for salvation through his image.

The practice of reading the *Fifteen Oes* and its participation in the devotional economy as a book is clarified, and complicated, when considered

alongside the indulgences that the prayers carried. The imperative for the reader to “see” the self in relation to Christ and to read his suffering in place of her own is augmented when we appraise the *Fifteen Oes* in terms of its function as an indulgenced prayer, which makes the book into a material object with powers of salvation. Jennifer Summit notes that “such uses of prayer promoted the notion of books and reading as carrying talismanic significance” that made books vehicles of the miraculous (115). She recognizes that devotional texts derived their currency through “the belief that the act of reading was an efficacious form of prayer” (114).¹³⁰ This overlap of reading and prayer that made reading into a pious activity informs the “talismanic” use of medieval books, especially in the late Middle Ages which saw the gradual but substantial expansion of lay literacy and the concomitant rise in book ownership, as well as increased lay engagement with forms of spirituality that had origins in a clerical milieu. As Felicity Riddy has observed, the reading habits of lay and religious audiences in late medieval England were becoming impossible to differentiate (110). The increased access to books for lay people in late fifteenth-century England gave rise to anxieties about careless reading, and readers were often encouraged to concentrate on each word (and so to have access to the material book), lest they read wrong.¹³¹

¹³⁰ Summit points out, for example, that the *Ancrene Riwe* informs its readers that “reading is good prayer” (114).

¹³¹ This anxiety is often evident in the texts themselves. See for example the prologue to *The Cloud of Unknowing* in which the author goes to some length to impress upon the reader not to read, write or speak of the text to anyone who has not in the reader’s “supposing [...] a trewe wille and [...] an hole entent purposed him to be a parfite follower of Criste” lest it “acordeth nothing to him”

References to writing, impression and the book throughout the *Fifteen Oes* serve to focus the reader's attention on the act of reading itself, such that it becomes a self-conscious exercise. The promise of indulgences only made it more important to read "right", which focuses on the quality of devotional activities like reading.

Introductory legends that highlight the beneficial effects to be gained from reading the *Fifteen Oes* correctly hint at the growing importance of literacy to devotions in the late Middle Ages. Though it varies in the details and degree of particularity among sources, the legend tells of a woman "solytarye and a recluse" (who became identified, probably apocryphally, with St. Bridget of Sweden) who desired to know the exact number of Christ's wounds in the course of his Passion. Christ tells her that if she recites each day fifteen Paters and fifteen Aves, at the end of the year she shall "have worshippede every wounde and fulfilledde the nombre of the same" (Harley 172, fol. 3^v). Then Christ reveals to her the *Fifteen Oes* promising that if they are recited every day for a full year, various indulgences will be granted to those who do so. London, British Library MS Harley 172, a manuscript that has been dated to the last quarter of the fifteenth century,¹³² contains a version of the legend that demonstrates the way in which

(*The Idea of the Vernacular*, 231). As well, Krug calls attention to the devil Titivullus who appears in fifteenth-century books as a warning: his job was "to gather up all the words that readers of devotional and liturgical texts misread or skipped [and] the weight of those words would be balanced against the soul of each reader at his or her death" ("The *Fifteen Oes*", 111). In the next chapter I will discuss the ways that prefaces in vernacular devotional literature offer instructions in the proper ways of reading.

¹³² The manuscript is described in Edward Wilson's edition, *The Winchester Manuscript*.

the reading of devotional texts demands solitary concentration and consideration of each word. Christ states that “where so ever these Orysones be seyde or where ever he be that hem seythe I am present” and asks that “every lettryde mane rede every day these Orysones of my bytter passyon for hys owne medycyne” (fol. 4^v). The emphasis on reading as a form of prayer is a salient point that is expanded as the legend continues with a warning against the hasty or mechanical reading of the prayers:

Be syde thys holy woman wondered an holy mane to whome she shewyde this revelacyone and he shewyde to an Abbes & she to hyr systres and badde hem everyday sey these Oryzones & some seyde thm with grete devocyon. And some for thei wold not trespase receyvede here comandement and seyde hem not devoutly. After that thys holy mane on a day as he restyde hym he was ravishide in a visyon in to a fayre felde in the whiche was a fayre streme and delectabull fulle of precyose flowres and at the same streme were the same systres. and some of hem hit wyllbe white with fulle grete vertue. And some lesse and some more. (fol. 4^v)

The association of devout reading with cleanliness demonstrates an uneasiness surrounding the nature of prayer and reading in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries when readers were not exclusively monastic or clerical. There is an implication here that some readers do not heed the injunction to read “with grete devocyon” and those readers are sullied in the holy man’s vision for their carelessness. What is suggested by this (though not made explicit) is that saying the prayers carefully—which are neither brief nor simple—requires access to the written text; Krug observes that the Oes “seem to require that the supplicant possess a copy of the physical text so that he or she may *read* each complex

verse” (111). The reading of prayer that necessitates access to books delineates a relationship between the reader and subject that produces the kind of intimate connection with books that only takes place through actual reading and comprehension. Like the supplicant in the twelfth devotion who asks that Christ’s passion be inscribed on her heart, the presence of the book maintains access to the prayers and their promised powers of salvation. The advent of the printing press made available, through books and book ownership, access to forms of religious experience that had previously been the preserve of the clergy and this shift in audience necessarily requires a re-evaluation of the practices of reading as literacy becomes, gradually, more widespread outside of the institutions. Crucially this adjustment begins with the book and a set of prayers in which the constant repetition of “have mynde” brings to the fore questions, ideas and speculations about the cultural practices of reading and the value of books at the end of the fifteenth century.

To return the *Fifteen Oes* to the context of its printed incarnation means a return to Lady Margaret Beaufort and her interest in and promotion of devotions to Christ and his name. The printing of the *Fifteen Oes* seems to have presented her with the opportunity to link her name to Christ’s in the promotion of reading and prayer for an increasingly literate lay audience. As we have seen, the book impresses on the reader not simply the doctrine of redemption through Christ’s

sacrifice but it also foregrounds the importance of experiencing that redemption through reading. Meditations on Christ's Passion provided for readers a fundamentally rhetorical devotion to and identification with Christ that is established in the material book. Earlier in this chapter I noted that the advent of printing posed a threat to the prestige value of books in the late Middle Ages because print rendered what was individual and personal about the medieval manuscript, multiple and commercial in an industry that now traded in cheaper copies available for the masses. Considering printed copies within the context of disseminating moralized subject matter, however, shifts the perception of print and its purpose away from the commercial and toward the spiritual.

Margaret Beaufort already understood the ways in which her involvement in literate culture could accrue social and political capital and, as we have already seen, neither reading nor religion is apolitical. Her collection of religious artefacts, the promotion of religious cults, and her ownership and patronage of devotional books all worked to build for her a reputation for pious austerity and royal authority that print made public to a wider audience. Her wealth and influence, seemingly at odds with devotional texts that advise against the getting and spending of worldly goods, allowed her to support the early printers and make available literature to readers whose ethical lives could benefit from the spiritual guidance the texts provided. In the next chapter, we shall see that Lady Margaret did not limit her role as benefactor to simply purchasing and commissioning religious texts from the early printers; indeed, she also contributed to vernacular

religious culture by undertaking her own translations of devotional texts that were made available in English for the first time to an expanding community of lay readers. Going beyond the spiritual needs of her readers, though not discounting them either, we shall see that religious books also represented for Margaret an investment in her son's kingdom and the education of its subjects.

CHAPTER FOUR

Reflecting Reading:**Lady Margaret Beaufort and *The Mirroure of Golde to the Synfull Soule***

All Englonde for her dethe had cause of wepynge, [...] All the noble men and women to whom she was a myrroure and examplar of honoure.

—John Fisher, Month's Mind of the Lady Margaret

It is to knowe it shalbe devided in vii chapitours after the vii dayes of the weke. To thentent that the synfulle soule solyed and defowlyd by synne maye in every chapitoure have a newe mirroure wherin he maye be holde and consyder the face of his soule.

—The Mirroure of Golde to the Synfull Soule

Throughout this study I have been reading for the reflections of readers and owners in their books; portraits, inscriptions, dedications and dialogues all work to mark the presence and personal identity of readers whose devotional activities are enacted and recorded in the pages of their books. In the last chapter I examined the metaphor of Christ as a mirror of truth for the reader of *The Fifteen Oes* which productively expands on the idea of the book as a reflective surface for the reader in which to see herself and I suggested that the trope of a mirror-Christ works to emphasize the importance of reading to late medieval devotions because the book stands in for Christ himself. In this chapter I begin with the device of the mirror to examine the ways in which the book, like Christ, came to be understood as a mirror for late medieval readers, a mirror that reflected an image of the reader back, not only of what she should be, but also of

what she was.

Bryan usefully observes that the trope of the mirror-Christ coincides with, on the one hand, the frequent appearance of mirrors and mirror-titles in Middle English literature from about the mid-fourteenth century onward and, on the other hand, an attention to mirrors as “domestic objects” during the same period (80-1).¹³³ She notes that the use of the mirror to “examine one’s own exterior, either to make sure it is properly composed, or to assist in making it that way” is an apt metaphor for the nature of devotional writing and its emphasis on questions of use and practice because it introduced “discourses of sight” into devotional writing that made readers better able to perceive themselves (81, 76). She understands this to have manifested in a series of “self-reflective tasks” that invited readers to evaluate their own spiritual development daily, to choose the reading material that would best advance their development and, importantly, to recognize their own shortcomings in the attempt to reform their own souls (81-3). While I agree with Bryan that books that acted like mirrors were becoming crucial to the task of examining and “properly composing” the self in late medieval England and that

¹³³ For comprehensive studies on mirror-texts and mirrors as material objects see especially Herbert Grabes, *The Mutable Glass* and Frederick Goldin, *The Mirror of Narcissus*; see Sarah Beckwith, “A Very Material Mysticism” for a discussion of the mirror as a symbol of spiritual development in *The Book of Margery Kempe*.

Bryan helpfully notes that medieval mirrors were not often made of glass, and so not crystal clear, and not flat but convex, with a surface that both reflected and reduced the images therein (81). While I do not pursue in any detail the relationship between the material object and the mirror-text in this discussion, it is nevertheless important to keep in mind the kind of muddled reflection that the mirror-text is referencing for the medieval reader.

often devotional writing would reflect back the spiritual failings of the reader—indeed I argue in chapter 3 that this is precisely how the mirror-Christ works in *The Fifteen Oes*—I also contend that the book as a mirror works, as mirrors also can, to flatter the reader and to return an image of spiritual practice expressly constructed by the book. I rely on Bryan’s identification of the book as a tool for self-examination to guide my understanding of the function of the largely neglected devotional treatise *The Mirrour of Golde to the Synfull Soule* though my focus in this chapter will go beyond her work in order to consider not only the ways in which the book initiates self-knowledge, but also the ways in which it represents, reflects and remembers its producer. The metaphor of the mirror has a doubled capacity to flatter virtue and to expose vice simultaneously and I am interested in exploring the symbolism of the mirror as a surface not only for self-reflection but also for self-representation.

As the first epigraph to this chapter demonstrates, the trope of the mirror also worked to illustrate the exemplary behaviour of an individual, providing a didactic model through the metaphor of seeing and reflection that invited viewers to emulate what the mirror showed them. When John Fisher in his funeral sermon for Lady Margaret Beaufort calls her “a myrroure and exemplar of honoure” for all noble men and women he is relying on the general currency of the mirror as a metaphor that evokes an image of perfection as inspiration. In the following discussion I explore the functioning of a little-known mirror-titled text, *The Mirrour of Golde to the Synfull Soule*, that is explicitly linked to Margaret

Beaufort, mother of Henry VII, whose influence I began to examine in the previous chapter. I build on my argument for her influence in order to examine further the ways in which books that provided moral and spiritual education also reflected the carefully managed public identities of their aristocratic noblewomen readers. Margaret Beaufort is especially identified with *The Mirrour of Golde* not only because she read it but also because she made the first English translation of it, working from an anonymous French version of the Latin text *Speculum aurem animae peccatricis*, which was then printed at her request by Richard Pynson around 1506.¹³⁴ It is a text that has been of interest to literary scholars primarily, and perhaps only, because it can claim a female author in a period when there were scant few, though its contemporary popularity is attested to by its multiple printings: after Margaret's death in 1509 it was reprinted three times by Wynkyn de Worde, twice in 1522 and once again in 1526. *The Mirrour of Golde* is divided into seven chapters, each a meditation for a day of the week, and compiles

¹³⁴The Latin text has been ascribed to Dionysius Carthusianus and Jacobus de Gruitroedius though scholars seem to agree that it was probably written by the latter, a Carthusian and prior at the charterhouse at Liège who died in 1475. Barratt pronounces him “a prolific but unoriginal writer out of touch with contemporary theological and spiritual thought” (302). As for the French text, *Le miroir d'or de l'ame pecheressa*, from which Beaufort made her translation, there are two possibilities, both late fifteenth-century imprints published by Nicolas Bonfons or Jean Trepapel in Paris copies of which are held at the Bibliotheque Nationale, shelfmarks FRBNF30324406 and F1A4 respectively.

The Pynson text to which I refer in this study is identified by STC 6894.5 and is held by the Bodleian Library. Three complete copies are recorded at the Cambridge University Library, the British Library and the Bodleian Library. These are deluxe copies printed on vellum with woodcuts at the start of each chapter and decorative borders on each page, attesting to the value of the books and the expense to which Beaufort went to have them printed.

the teachings of the Bible and the Church fathers into a litany of instructions intended to guide its readers to salvation. It advises readers to eschew wealth and material objects, contemplate their own death and turn away from the transitory and contemptible earthly world to prepare themselves for heaven. It is precisely the kind of text with which the medieval woman reader was most closely associated in the fifteenth century and a typical example of what Mary Erler describes as “female texts of formation, with their emphases on routine, on seclusion, on self-abnegation” (137). It asks vernacular readers to consider how they can lead an exemplary life and provides a mirror for both reflection and imitation in order to model reading with a spiritual purpose.

Unfortunately, this kind of literature has not proved as popular with present-day readers as it did with readers in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. *The Mirrour of Golde* is generally dismissed as an unremarkable text typical of conservative religious attitudes, perhaps most effectively by Alexandra Barratt who calls it “a tissue of commonplaces” by an “unoriginal writer” (302). Her description exemplifies the critical reception of English devotional literature more generally, which has suffered from comparisons to the golden age of English spirituality—those years before Archbishop Arundel’s *Constitutions* of 1409 banned biblical translation—when writers did not apologise for their work and were not limited by a hostile political climate. As Nicholas Watson puts it, the “vibrant tradition” of the “brilliant years” before 1410 that produced writers such as Julian of Norwich, Richard Rolle and Walter Hilton (to name but a few) was

censored “almost out of existence” leaving English spiritual writing lifeless and, to borrow a phrase from David Lawton, “dull” (“Middle English Mystics” 561-2).¹³⁵ Indeed, Andrew Taylor notes that English devotional texts are “neither high literature nor high theology” (48) and as such, texts like *The Mirrour of Golde* have largely been ignored by literary critics influenced by the perceived greater value of mystical and theological writing. It cannot be, however, that the growing popularity of English devotional literature in the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries meant that late medieval English readers were dull, or that they considered these works conservative or outmoded. As Anne Clarke Bartlett helpfully points out, “the devotional text could not have been either as simply boring and didactic or as comprehensively misogynistic as it might initially appear” (3). Indeed, as I will show, however prescriptive or misogynistic (or dull) the text of *The Mirrour of Golde* appears to be, it is not separate from, but deeply imbricated with, the social world of its readers, particularly Margaret Beaufort as its closest reader, herself a formidable and influential noblewoman who, with her translation and publication of Book IV of the popular treatise *The Imitation of Christ* in 1503, was one of only four known women who wrote in English during the Middle Ages and the first English woman in print.

On the subject of the perceived dullness of the medieval devotional (woman) reader, it is wise to recall Rowena Archer’s caution against relying on

¹³⁵ On Arundel’s *Constitutions* and the paucity of fifteenth-century writing, see especially Nicholas Watson, “Censorship and Cultural Change.” For fifteenth-century writers’ claims of inadequacy, see David Lawton, “Dullness and the Fifteenth Century.”

publicly constructed historical identities. Of Margaret Beaufort's popular reputation for religious austerity, she observes that it owes much to the "stereotype of the medieval noblewoman [that] presumes that she was devout and had time on her hands to devote to her prayers" (118).¹³⁶ This evidence often comes from their confessors, ecclesiastics with a vested interest in upholding the tenets of the Church and, as Archer puts it, in inculcating in women those "essential qualities of subordination, virtue, obedience and silence" (119). Margaret Beaufort, for example, is remembered by her confessor Bishop John Fisher as an exemplum of active piety who used her

eyes in wepynges & teares somtyme of devocion somtyme of repentaunce, her eares herynge the worde of god & the dyvyne service whiche dayly was kept in her chapel [...] to her grete charge & cost, her tongue occupied in prayer moche parte of the daye, her legges and fete in vysytynge the aulters and other holy places [...] her handes in gyvyng almes unto the poore and nedye and dressyng them also whan they were syke and mynstryng unto them mete and drynke. (300)¹³⁷

Given that the aristocratic medieval woman also had to be a shrewd player in a politically unstable landscape who occupied herself in making socially and

¹³⁶ Archer refers here to the "famous five": Elizabeth de Burgh, Lady of Clare (d.1360), Marie St Pol, Countess of Pembroke (d.1377), Margaret, Lady Hungerford (d.1378), Cecily Neville, Duchess of York (d. 1495), and Margaret Beaufort (d. 1509). These are the most thoroughly researched of religious noblewomen but Archer correctly notes that drawing conclusions about the religious lives of all medieval noblewomen from such a small sample is ill-advised (118).

¹³⁷ Quotations from Fisher's sermon are taken from J.E.B. Mayor's printed edition in *The English Works of John Fisher*. References are to page numbers in Mayor's edition.

On Fisher's use of Margaret's tears in his funeral sermon see Margery E. Lange, *Telling Tears in the English Renaissance* (118-20).

economically advantageous marriages, amassing (and keeping) wealth and land, managing substantial estates, and currying favour from the right king at the right time, one wonders when she had the time to devote to her devotions. Archer reminds us to be aware of “the gap between the theories of women’s lives and the records of how they conducted themselves in practice” (119). Minding the gap brings to the fore the tension between the austere religious piety most often associated with the aristocratic lay woman reader, on the one hand, and her pragmatic, worldly concerns, on the other; this is an especially productive tension and one that is particularly relevant to the women readers who are the subject of this study and this chapter.

Concentrating on the rhetorical methods that force the reader to remember and to internalize the lessons of *The Mirroure of Golde*, I will explore how the text’s didacticism manifests itself on the level of the reader, remaining especially cognizant of Margaret Beaufort and her role as its translator and author. A public figure as well-known for her political acumen as for her public piety and literary influence, Margaret Beaufort was also notable for patronage activities with a strong emphasis on learning: she patronized writers, printers, and clerics; established lectureships in Divinity at Oxford and Cambridge; and was in contact with the Carthusian and Bridgettine orders in England, houses that have come to be associated with the production of religious works in English. Invested in establishing the economic and political strength of the medieval nobility, I want to suggest that Margaret Beaufort’s provision of moral and religious instruction to a

broader audience aims to create both ideal readers and ideal subjects under a new and vulnerable dynasty, which, by historical accounts, she had an active part in creating. Her twinned concerns for the success of the Tudor realm and the religious education of its subjects, especially those barred from access to a traditional education, can be read in her choice to translate and disseminate a text that asks its readers to pay attention to the way they are reading. In what follows, I first examine the pragmatism with which Margaret Beaufort translated her own power into a position from which she could participate in the political and literate culture of late medieval England, before turning to the *The Mirrour of Golde* itself, which I use as a critical lens through which to read her influence, as both a political player and a literary patron of learning. Hence, I posit that Margaret Beaufort is herself reflected in the text for readers who are seeking their own reflection in it, a text that promises that in each “chapitoure” the reader will have a “newe mirrour wherin he maye be holde and consyder the face of his soule” (sig. A.ii^v). This process creates a cultural cachet around the figure of the aristocratic lay woman reader who manages to engineer in this text a subtle, but important, shift from reader to author. As we have seen throughout this study, the interplay between medieval noblewomen and the works they have sponsored (and read) manifests textually in their “appearance” in the pages of the book, whether it be as idealized versions of popular saints, as a solitary interlocutor with Christ, or as the generous heroine in a romance of patronage. The visibility of these women and their association with literatures that participate in programmes of self-

improvement through religious devotion, I have been arguing, models literate practice for a growing literate audience. In a period when literary authority is malleable and subject to the physical conditions of text production, the public reading-as-endorsement that aristocratic women are partaking in becomes a kind of authorship. In this chapter I show that Lady Margaret's role as a translator allows her a unique control over the representation of her influence, which demonstrates in a more direct way than I have previously discussed how the aristocratic lay woman reader was able to shape devotional texts and female textual culture.

Considerable scholarly attention has been accorded the figure of Lady Margaret Beaufort especially regarding her reputation as a shrewd player within the Tudor polity and the assiduous maneuvering that placed her son, Henry VII, on the English throne.¹³⁸ It is widely accepted that she was instrumental in the overthrow of Richard III and that it was she who negotiated the marriage between Elizabeth of York and her son that united the houses of York and Lancaster under

¹³⁸ See Jones and Underwood's *The King's Mother* for the most recent biography. See also C.H. Cooper, *The Lady Margaret: A Memoir of Margaret, Countess of Richmond and Derby*; E.M.G. Routh, *A Memoir of Lady Margaret Beaufort, Countess of Richmond and Derby, Mother of Henry VII*; Malcolm G. Underwood, "Politics and Piety in the Household of Lady Margaret Beaufort"; R.M. Warnicke, "The Lady Margaret Beaufort, Countess of Richmond (d. 1509), as seen by John Fisher and by Lord Morley." and "The Lady Margaret, Countess of Richmond: a noblewoman of independent wealth and status."

newly-minted Tudor rule; Henry's claim to the throne was based on his mother's Lancastrian heritage. In fact, it was Margaret who was the rightful heir to the throne. She was the great-granddaughter of John of Gaunt, duke of Lancaster, via his adulterous relationship with Katherine Swynford. The legitimacy of the Beaufort family line was constantly in doubt, even after Gaunt married Katherine and successfully petitioned the pope to secure its confirmation by declaring the offspring legitimate. An act of parliament augmented the spiritual legitimisation of the papal bull by ensuring protection of property rights and titles, which guaranteed that the Beauforts would be admitted into the ranks of society. According to Jones and Underwood, Margaret's most recent biographers, however, "their bastardy was never completely forgotten" (20).¹³⁹ John Beaufort, Lady Margaret's great-grandfather, was one of England's most impoverished earls owing to Gaunt's unwillingness to raid the legacy of his first-born (and unquestionably legitimate) male heir Henry Bolingbroke. What made Margaret Beaufort a rich woman were the properties she inherited from her grandmother, Margaret Holland, who boosted the family's landed status when she became a coheiress of the earldom of Kent, "one of the greatest of the fourteenth century" (Jones and Underwood 23).

As a wealthy heiress, Margaret Beaufort was a valuable commodity on the marriage market and her wardship and marriage were distributed by King Henry

¹³⁹ This is owing to the fact that John Beaufort, Margaret's great-grandfather, was probably born of a double adultery because John of Gaunt and Katherine Swynford were both married to different partners when the affair began; see Jones and Underwood (21).

VI to his brothers Jasper and Edmund. After a brief marriage to Edmund Tudor, during which her son Henry was born, a young Margaret took an active part in securing subsequent (and shrewdly negotiated) marriages to Henry Stafford and Thomas Lord Stanley which successfully augmented her wealth and established political alliances that protected her and her son during the Yorkist regime. According to several accounts¹⁴⁰, Margaret was fiercely ambitious for the throne on her son's behalf and it was her political maneuvering that eventually led to her son's accession. Jones and Underwood characterize Margaret Beaufort's political acumen as "astonishing" and ascribe her actions in the conspiracy to overthrow Richard III not to "blind adherence to dynastic loyalty" but to "the ruthless practice of realpolitik" gained during a "long period of political education" (65). Her husband Stanley's Yorkist connections gave her the leverage to propose a York-Tudor marriage for her son to Elizabeth of York and it was she who welcomed the bride and made arrangements for the marriage that cemented Henry's claim to the throne.

This political prowess, considered uncommon if not anomalous in a woman by her near-contemporary biographers, also applied to the conduct of Lady Margaret's own affairs such that at the time of the production and dissemination of her translations, she had also shrewdly gained control of her

¹⁴⁰ Principally court historian Polydore Vergil and Tudor historian and court poet Bernard André but see Jones and Underwood for a more detailed account of her historical reputation. Jones and Underwood point out the omissions in the historical record that make her seem more ruthless than she may have been.

social and economic status and exercised a healthy degree of political power over her own estate.¹⁴¹ By an act in her son's first Parliament in 1485, Lady Margaret was granted the status of *femme sole* which defined her as a single person under the law able to control her own finances and properties, which were extensive. This status was sometimes used by married women who wanted to run a business, but until this time it had not been used by a married woman of the aristocracy.¹⁴² In 1499, Lady Margaret, who was still married to Thomas Stanley, achieved further autonomy with a vow of chastity, normally taken by widows. Erler has observed that both pious and economic motives might lead women to become vowesses as it granted them control over their own resources "safeguarded from male intrusion in the form of pressure to remarry" ("English Vowed Women," 157).¹⁴³ The vow allowed Lady Margaret to establish her own household and council on her own estate at Collyweston that was separate from her husband's,

¹⁴¹ For a useful summary of the earlier biographies that focus on her political machinations, see Jones and Underwood, *The King's Mother* (1-16).

¹⁴² Jones and Underwood note that "for a married aristocratic woman to declare herself *femme sole* was quite unprecedented" and suggest it was arranged to keep crown lands away from the Stanley family, who had Yorkist connections (99).

On the law of *femme sole*, see C.M. Barron, *Medieval London Widows, 1300-1500*.

¹⁴³ Widowhood was a positive situation for women in the Middle Ages because they were no longer under the control of a husband or a father and so were in a better position to define their own state. Their chastity was seen as an expression of piety and devotion to God after the holy state of matrimony. Texts on widowhood by St. Jerome and St. Ambrose and, later, Christine de Pizan emphasize that, because of their moral strength of character, widows were exceptionally virtuous and could enjoy a degree of social prestige. See Dagmar Eichberger and Yvonne Blevervel, *Women of Distinction: Margaret of York, Margaret of Austria*.

which she managed efficiently if sometimes ruthlessly.¹⁴⁴ Barred from traditional positions of power due to her gender, Lady Margaret was able to manipulate existing legal devices, usually exploited by women of a different social and economic status than she, to gain control of her person and her wealth and by extension her public identity which was to be increasingly associated with piety, devotional reading and book ownership.

I want to suggest that Lady Margaret exercises a similar symbolic power in her translation work. Until now, her translations have most often been understood as extensions of her devotional rituals with the labour of writing counting as a spiritual exercise commensurate with devotional reading. Alexandra Barratt has deemed them “conscientious and fairly accurate, though sometimes over-literal” (301-2) and Laurie A. Finke finds that her translations “finally tell us very little that is personal about the woman herself” (151). Nonetheless, it must be understood that translators choose the texts they will translate and disseminate, including the form in which the translated text will appear and the means by which it will be circulated, and that even deference to a source text indicates something of the translator’s critical approach. Barratt notes that a translator “may profess extreme subservience to, and reverence for” the text while still being fully cognizant of the fact that she is the one in control of it (13). Lady Margaret’s translation of *The Mirrour of Golde*, in fact, has much to tell us about its translator (*pace* Finke): it suggests something about the importance of

¹⁴⁴ On this, see especially M.K. Jones, “Collyweston—an early Tudor palace.”

vernacular traditions to her own and others' access to and understanding of theological writings; it reveals something about her personal devotions and about her interest in a literature focused on privacy and self-knowledge; and it also demonstrates her desire and willingness to share texts of spiritual guidance with a community of readers whose status and education are similar to her own.

Rescuing *The Mirrour of Golde* from the realm of spiritual busy work, I contend that Margaret's choice to translate and disseminate this particular text in English in print reflects and augments her political and patronage activities because she is able to ventriloquize moral and religious instruction to a broader audience.

Turning now to *The Mirrour of Golde*, I concentrate on the way in which the text consistently vilifies wealth and ambition, in tandem with celebrating the wealth and ambition of its readers, particularly Margaret Beaufort and her son. I want to suggest, somewhat counter-intuitively, that the text not only works to legitimize the wealth and social standing of its patron and translator, but also the new Tudor dynasty with Margaret Beaufort's son, Henry VII at its head. In doing so I hope to demonstrate that the dominant discourse in devotional texts may not always tell us the most about its readers. I contend that the arguments against wealth and social status in *The Mirrour of Golde* are tempered by a secondary discourse that acknowledges and advises on the uses of wealth and status, a use that is mirrored by Margaret's own activities in the world.

That Margaret Beaufort was concerned with the virtue of nobility is evident in Fisher's "Mornyng Remembraunce", a sermon delivered on the one-

month anniversary of her death in 1509 during which he devotes a substantial discussion (about 30 lines), to the memory of her noble lineage. He states that “she came of noble blode lyneally descendynge of kynge Edward the .iiij. within the .iiij. degree of the same” and that her mother was called “margarete ryghte noble as well in maneres as in bloode. To whom she was a veray doughter in all noble manners” (290). He also carefully traces the “encreasement” of her “ryght noble” lineage “by maryage, & adjoynnyng of other blode” (292). By lineage and by affinity, he calculates, “she had .xxx. kinges & quenes within the .iiii. degree of maryage unto her,” as well as “erles, markyses, dukes, and princes” (293). Olga Horner rightly observes that this may well be formulaic praise appropriate to the occasion and the person though she notes that in his funeral sermon for Henry VII Fisher makes no mention of nobility as one of the king’s many virtues (76).¹⁴⁵ Nobleness seems to have been the special preserve of Lady Margaret and it is the first of her virtues that Fisher itemizes in his sermon, suggesting that it was particularly important to her and to her public image.

The Mirrour of Golde, not unsurprisingly, usually sets little stock in the ability to claim kinship with kings and princes. In a familiar *ubi sunt* passage comes the question, “Where be they kynges, the princis, the Emperours with the Riches and the powers of the worlde?” which is swiftly and predictably answered:

¹⁴⁵ Horner points out that Henry VII was praised by Fisher for “his wit, wisdom, reason, memory, experience, and fortunate counsels; for the way he ruled the kingdom; and for his faith and piety” (76). Fisher’s funereal sermon for Henry VII is in J.E.B. Mayor’s *The English Works of John Fisher*.

“They be as the shadowe vanisshed” (sig. B.vi^v).¹⁴⁶ At the same time, however, Margaret’s worldly concerns with her own class status, and that of her potential audience, are hinted at when the text asks the reader

Wherefore settis thou at nought thy soule and lett(s) and suffers thy cursid flesshe have senyorie and governaunce? Know it suerly that it is a greate foule abusion to make a Chamberer a maistress and a maistres a Chamberer and servaunt. O soule thou haste an evill household of Enmies! (sig. B.v.^v)

Personifying the soul as the mistress of a noble household works to legitimise the position of the aristocratic reader of the text, a position that comes with the requisite accoutrements of land, estates and worldly goods, those things the text often warns against amassing. Couching the relationship between the soul and the body in these terms however means aligning the mistress with the soul and allowing for her “senyorie and governaunce”; in other words, if she already understands the proper running of her household, which means paying attention to and enforcing the status achieved through noble lineage, she can successfully master the management of her “cursid flesshe”.¹⁴⁷ Crucially, this is a knowledge

¹⁴⁶ References are to page numbers in a medieval hand. The orthography has been lightly modernized; punctuation is mine.

¹⁴⁷ We might compare this to a similar analogy for the body and soul in the introduction to the *Ancrene Wisse*, a thirteenth-century book of religious instruction for enclosed women which outlines the outer and inner rules: the outer rule briefly addresses the anchoress’s material existence while the inner rule more extensively treats her spiritual life. The author states that the outer rule “exists only to serve the other [the heart or soul]. The other is like a lady, this [the body and bodily actions] like her handmaid” (48). The *Ancrene Wisse* represents a revision of an earlier work, the *Ancren Riwle*, which was written for three laywomen of noble birth who had themselves enclosed as anchoresses. The similarity in the audience for these texts may account for the currency of the metaphor that compares the soul to a noblewoman.

that is only available to those with access to power and status, or to those who seek it. Margaret's own anxieties are reflected back to the reader under the rubric of spiritual edification.

This metaphor resurfaces in the text in the familiar guise of the divine right of kings; just as the soul is to the body as is the mistress to her household, so is God to his kingdom in heaven as is the king to his kingdom on earth. This investment in human hierarchies, despite its rejection of wealth and material goods, locates the text within a milieu of lay culture and is emblematic of the concept of the mixed life. As lay readers began to assume the texts and habits of the religious, the idea of the mixed life helped to mitigate the monastic standards for readers who were also daily engaged in worldly activities. Walter Hilton's *Epistle on the Mixed Life*, for example, which was written for a wealthy landowner, advises his reader to maintain a balance between the spiritual and the worldly and not to spend time in contemplation as though he were "a frere or a monk" (112).¹⁴⁸ The *Mirroure of Golde* takes this reminder of worldly responsibility a step further by invoking the common medieval political thought, which conceived of the king as fulfilling the role of Christ on earth and thereby defending his position. Trespassing against the "temporall prince" is also trespassing against the "hevenly kinge" and as such the analogous relationship between the king on earth and the king in heaven not only confers divinity on the

¹⁴⁸ For the support of Margaret Beaufort and her group for Hilton see Michael Sargent, "The Transmission by the English Carthusians of Some Late Medieval Spiritual Writings."

king as man, but it also grants him authority over all other men. The *Mirroure of Golde* makes clear that any offence against the king on earth is analogous to an offence against God:

Nowe then it behoveth the to knowe and understond that by a more stronge reason he that comyteth faulte or synne against the soverayne & debonayre all mighty god ought well to be reputed and of al holden abhomynable. Fourthely it is to knowe that by synne the synner is Jugged to the Jebet of hell & for so moche as the lawe of god is not farre different fro the lawe of man. Therfore in lyke maner al the brekers of the lawe of man whiche dothe trespase againste the kingis Royall magestie be worthy to deth and ought to be punysshed corporally. So in sembliable wyse the pore and miserable synners: whiche have offended not oonly the temporall prince: but to the hevenly kinge: ought well to be condempned & to be hanged in hell perpetually (sig.B.iv.^v)

[...]

So mayste thou se that the lawe of man doth bodely & the lawe of god doth spiritually (sig.B.vi.^f)

The conflation of the king and God in this text has particular resonances with Henry VII and his not uncomplicated accession to the throne. The emphasis on the finality of the law of the king is one that manages to underscore possible doubts surrounding the legitimacy of this particular king in the early years of the Tudor dynasty. When Henry came to the throne he was, as W.C. Richardson notes, a “landless, penniless refugee, after fourteen years’ exile with no resources of his own and little clothing even, no experience of government and administration and no training as a prince” (3-4). In fact, Henry gained the crown by right of conquest and so, constitutionally, he was a usurper until he was officially recognized in his first Parliament. After such a long period of social

unrest a king whose claims were based largely on his mother's suspect lineage must have been shaky indeed. Margaret's translation and dissemination of *The Mirrour of Golde* can be considered in light of her desire to stabilise the validity of her son's claim and to remind her audience that however ill-prepared or unsuitable he may have seemed when he acquired the throne, his word, like God's, is law.

Indeed, Henry's laws had immediate consequences for those who gave him offence, not simply corporal consequences, but decidedly material ones in the form of harsh fines. In an effort to keep his nobles in check, Henry endeavoured to punish them by their wealth with the idea that, according to court historian Polydore Virgil, they would be "less able to undertake any upheaval and to discourage at the same time, all offences" (129). Furthermore, he remained impervious to the influence of familial or political ties in his meting out of justice. It did not matter, for example, that James Stanley, who was indicted for illegal retaining and severely fined¹⁴⁹, was the son of Margaret's husband Thomas Stanley. Horner has suggested that because the royal Treasury was nearly bankrupt when Henry came to the throne, the strategic collection of such fines enriched the Crown's reserves which were then invested in objects that would

¹⁴⁹ As Horner relates, wealthy nobles would keep what amounted to private armies to enforce their own laws over the local community; a lord could use his retainers "in illegal armed assaults and then [swear] great oaths in court that the men were innocent of the crimes" initiated by the lord himself. Henry's parliamentary Act of 1487 made it illegal for any lord to maintain large numbers of retainers, who were often soldiers disbanded after the Wars of the Roses, to prevent them from "ruling their estates like principalities" and subverting the power of the monarchy (52-4).

increase in value such as jewellery, plate and cloth of gold (55); these are objects *The Mirrour of Golde* specifically warns against coveting or owning outright. For a king, however, the exhibition of wealth was (is) necessary to his power as is alluded to in the preamble to Henry's Act of Resumption in 1485 which declares that

Your Honorable Houshold must be kept and borne Worshipfully and Honorably, as it accordeth to the Honour of your Estate and said Realme, by the whiche your Adversaries and Enemyes shall fall into the drede wherin heretofore they have byne. (qtd. in Horner, 56)

Thus the extravagant display of luxury and ceremony was a useful means by which to demonstrate the power and honour of the kingdom to its subjects and foreign visitors alike. Culling his wealth from his own nobles meant that Henry could simultaneously prevent them from raising private armies and from aping the splendour of the court in their households (Horner, 54); that is, he saw to it that his nobles were unable to keep a household beyond the estate of the king.

The Mirrour of Golde supports this singular entitlement to wealth and status when it notes that of the apostles, there was only one noble and one rich:

our saviour and redemer Jhu criste chase in this world xii
Appostell(s) of the whiche there was of noble lynage but only one
whiche was saint Barthelmewe and one riche: that was Mathewe
and al the other were pore fisshers levyng in payne and travell of
their body. [...] veraily I thinke with gret payne amonge alle the
nobles and Riche of this worlde oon might be founde convenable
and worthy to helthfull election but enough maye be founde: that
be prope and convenable to the service of dampnacion. (sig.
F.iii.^v)

Just as the apostles were chosen by “helthfull election” so too, by divine right, is the king chosen to be the representative of the divine on earth. He that is “convenable and worthy” of his riches and nobility may maintain them for the proper running of the state, to the exclusion of all others. In fact, according to the text it follows that the wealth appropriated from the nobles by the king is a mark of their unworthiness and only operates, in their hands, in the service of the devil. To be worthy of salvation, the truly noble soul must live in poverty. I cannot go so far as to suggest that such a passage would work as an apt consolation to the noble reader whose funds were confiscated for violation of the king’s law, but it is certainly likely that Margaret Beaufort was well aware of the hostilities against the king that such rigorous punishments might breed (particularly because her step-son was on the receiving end of them). This passage works as a reminder of the unique and powerful position the king holds and represents, and that the truly penitent subject must be willing to forfeit his wealth to gain favour, on earth as well as in heaven.

Of course, the king was not the only one with riches or nobility in England. Margaret Beaufort herself is as well known for her wealth as she is for her religious and charitable benefactions; we know she was wealthy because we know that she gave much of her wealth away. “Her household accounts bear witness to daily expenditure on her almsfolk,” Jones and Underwood explain, “with characteristic personal touches such as primers bought for two poor children, and arrangements made for boarding out and caring for the children of

poor women” (179). The obvious route to Paradise for a noblewoman of Margaret Beaufort’s earthly worth was to be generous to the poor. It is a commonplace reflected in *The Mirrour of Golde* which notes that “Elimosina” is sometimes written “by E and sometimes they write Elemosina by J; that is as much to say as the commandment of god for he himself commanded it to be done with his own proper mouth” (sig. C.vi^v); in other words, eleemosynary is so elementary to the communion with Christ that it is inscribed with his own initial. This distinctly literal and linguistic description of the necessity of charitable works depends entirely on the “soul’s” ability to read and recognize the difference between the letters “E” and “J”, which implies an audience for this text with the wherewithal and the leisure to buy books and read them. Margaret Beaufort translates the act of alms-giving into her own literal metaphor by letting *The Mirrour of Golde*, that is the text and the physical book that she has produced under her aegis through her patronage of its printing, stand in as a testament to her generosity. The text goes on to state that the giving of alms are “said to increase and multiply temporall goods whereby almes are more profitable to them that fedeth the poore, than to the poore that receyveth it” (sig. d.i.ⁱ). Likewise, the multiple printed copies of *The Mirrour of Golde*, as opposed to the manuscript, not only represent multiple possible readers who will benefit from the act of devotional reading and possibly go on to help the poor, but also represent Margaret’s largesse..¹⁵⁰ Moreover, as I have shown, they work to support and

¹⁵⁰ As I will discuss shortly below, books Lady Margaret bought or

maintain the position of those with wealth and status (here, the king and Margaret herself) in such a way that the book itself metaphorically may be more profitable to those who “feed the poor” than to the “poor who receyveth it”....

A notation mentioned by Powell that appears in one of Margaret’s chapel inventories involving alms-giving goes far to demonstrate the negotiations that aristocratic laywomen—women who led competitive and worldly lives—must have had to make between the conflicting pressures of this world and the next. One item “a lyttyll olde mesboke off parchment sumtyme kyvered with clothe off golde and clasped with ij claspstaff sylver and gylted” has been cancelled and amended with a note that reads: “My ladys grace hath the kyveryng and the claspes and bade the Dean to gyff the boke to sum poor church” (qtd. in Powell, 208). In other words, Lady Margaret altered the book she gifted to “some pore church” by keeping the luxurious and decorative covering, presumably for her own use. It is at once a gesture that is cognizant of the importance of alms-giving, both for her spiritual health and for her community, and practical about items of value that display her class and standing. As we saw in the last chapter, Lady Margaret was well aware of the importance of a “decorative cover” for the maintenance of her public image; whether it was working as a reminder of her royal status or as a reminder of her pious austerity, she was ever pragmatic about her public image. *The Mirrour of Golde*, I have argued, works in a similar

commissioned from the English printers seems to have circulated in her own household, including 50 copies of what was probably *The Mirrour of Golde* purchased from Richard Pynson in 1506. See Jones and Underwood, 183 and Erler, *Women, Reading and Piety*, 124-5.

manner by providing instruction to readers on how to fashion their souls in preparation for the next world while also maintaining small attentions to the social hierarchies and values of worldly wealth that are the concerns of this one, and that are the particular concerns of Lady Margaret who authors and disseminates the text. In the next section, I take up another set of concerns that were important to Lady Margaret and that show up in the pages of *The Mirrour of Golde*; the promotion of devotional texts as the basis for a practical education in reading, memory and the care of the soul.

Until recently, Lady Margaret's reputation as a political tour-de-force has eclipsed her remarkable reputation as a producer—in her capacity as patron, translator and reader—of devotional literature.¹⁵¹ Her literary activities are coloured by her cultivation of an austere orthodox piety, publicly managed, that manifested itself through such practices as dedicated devotional rituals in personal chapels, ownership of devotional books in English and French, and the gifting of pious books.¹⁵² Much of what is known of Lady Margaret's reading habits comes

¹⁵¹ For Lady Margaret's literary activities see also A.S.G Edwards and Carol M. Meale, "The Marketing of Printed Books in Late Medieval England"; Susan Powell, "Lady Margaret Beaufort and her Books"; and Rebecca Krug, *Reading Families: Women's Literate Practice in Late Medieval England*.

¹⁵² Susan Powell notes that scholarly interest in the piety of medieval women reveals that these and other public "manifestations of piety" are common among women of Beaufort's class; articles on Margaret Holland (her

from Fisher whose post-mortem eulogy recalls the “orderynge of her soule to god”, which involved a rigorous series of meditations and prayers centered around private and communal reading:

Fryst in prayer every daye at her uprysynge whiche comynly was not longe after v of the klok she began certayne devocyons, & so after theym with one of her gentylwomen the matynes of our lady, whiche kepte her to then she came in to her closet, where then with her chapeleyne she sayd also matyns of the daye. And after that dayly herde iij or v masses upon her knees, soo contynuyng in her prayers & devocions unto the hour of dyner, [...] After dyner ful truely she wolde go her stacyons to thre aulters dayly. Dayly her dyryges & commendacyons she wolde saye. and her evensonges before souper bothe of the daye & of our lady, besyde many other prayers & psalters of Davyd thugh out the yere. And at nyght before she wente to bedde she faylled not to resorte unto her chapell, & there a large quarter of an hour to occupye her in devocyons. (294-5)

Andrew Taylor has noted that such accounts of the lives of pious women show a “cultural practice in which bookishness, privacy and piety were intimately connected” though alongside Lady Margaret’s private practice we must also consider the very public nature of her “bookishness” and the cultural cachet this held for contemporary readers (48). William Caxton, in the mode of bookseller, recognizes Lady Margaret’s predilection for devotional works when he writes in the prologue to the secular romance *Blanchardyn and Eglantine*, translated and printed by him at the “commaundement [of] the right noble, puyssaunt and

grandmother), Margaret, Lady Hungerford, and Cecily Neville, Duchess of York demonstrate that these women exhibit similar pious practices. See Powell, “Lady Margaret Beaufort” (198-99).

Rowena Archer in “Piety in Question: Noblewomen and Religion in the Later Middle Ages” examines these reported shows of piety alongside other (less lofty) aspects of medieval women’s lives.

excellent pryncesse [...] Lady Margaret” that “gentyl yonge ladyes and damoyseyllys” can just as easily learn to be “stedfaste and constaunt” from reading in ancient histories as they can in occupying themselves and studying “overmoche in bokes of contemplacion,” Caxton is trading on his powerful patron’s well-known enthusiasm for devotional texts and seems to be making a veiled request that she broaden her reading horizons by finding the same lessons in different genres, so that he might open up his market to those readers who are emulating her taste in books (1). Indeed, the devotional texts that Caxton resisted publishing were taken up by the perhaps more commercially-minded printers Richard Pynson and Wynkyn de Worde who regularly identified themselves as Lady Margaret’s printer in their prologues.¹⁵³ Studies show that devotional works comprise the largest subject category in the surviving output of the English printers from the time of Caxton’s first editions up until the 1540s and, as Susan Powell effectively demonstrates, books that Lady Margaret “commissioned, promoted, bought, gave, and translated are almost exclusively religious works (199-200).”¹⁵⁴ Her household accounts show that she paid Richard Pynson for fifty books in 1506, very likely copies of her translation of *The Mirrour of Golde*, which, like other books she bought or commissioned from the English printers, were circulated in her household (Jones and Underwood, 183; Erler, 124-25). Providing edifying literature to the people in her retinue demonstrates the extent to which the public

¹⁵³ See Alexandra Gillespie, *Print Culture and the Medieval Author* for a comprehensive study of printing a century after its arrival in England, and after Caxton.

¹⁵⁴ See also Erler, *Women, Reading, and Piety* (4).

and devotional strands of Lady Margaret's life overlapped and verifies, in a concrete way, the influence she had over reading material to which Caxton alludes.

Accounts of reading and records of book ownership, however, can only take us so far in determining modes of reading. The key to determining how a book may have been used, and to understand, to some extent, the experience of reading it, is to turn to the book itself. I will contextualise my analysis of *The Mirroure of Golde* with reference first to an early set of prayers by Anselm and then to Nicholas Love's medieval bestseller *The Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ* in order to locate *The Mirroure of Golde* within a spectrum of books produced for lay readers with careful instructions on how reading was meant to take place. A set of edited prayers by Anselm of Canterbury produced in 1104 for Matilda, countess of Tuscany who, like Lady Margaret, was a laywoman with ecclesiastical ties, shows that the clergy were invested in providing specific instructions to lay readers for how a book was meant to be read following monastic examples.¹⁵⁵ Anselm's preface to the collection begins:

It has seemed good to your highness that I should send you these prayers, which I edited at the request of several brothers. Some of them are not appropriate to you, but I want to send them all, so that if you like them you may be able to compose others after their example. They are arranged so that by reading them the mind may be stirred up either to the love or fear of God, or to a consideration of both; so they should not be read cursorily or quickly, but little by little, with attention to meditation. It is not intended that a reader should feel impelled to read the whole, but only as much as

¹⁵⁵ On this collection of prayers see Andre Wilmart, "Le recueil de prieres adresse par Saint Anselme a la comtesse Mathilde."

will stir up the affections to prayer; so as much as does that, think it be sufficient to you. (Ward, 90)

Two important ideas emerge from these instructions: first, that the reader is able to discern “appropriate” passages for herself (and even, it seems, by herself), those she likes, and to use them as a model for further composition; and second, that reading be conducted slowly, as a form of meditation, including the invitation to stop when “stirred up” to thoughts of God in order to pray. From the early Middle Ages, then, reading is considered an autonomous creative act. The reading experience seems to operate as a means of inducing meditation, which is composed by the reader according to her own spiritual needs and signaled by the words on the page. Mary Carruthers, in her extensive and instrumental work on the art and craft of memory,¹⁵⁶ suggests that literary composition starts with memory; that is, it is the recollection of images read, as Anselm says, “little by little” with attention to accuracy as a means for meditation and rumination that inspires further composition (*The Craft of Thought*, 2). For Carruthers, the art of memory made knowledge into useful experience and enabled one to combine these experiences to form ideas or judgements and so she posits a strong connection between the rhetorical and the compositional art of memory (*The Craft of Thought*, 2).

A similar connection between memory and meditation (itself a form of composition) crops up centuries later in Nicholas Love’s *Mirror of the Blessed*

¹⁵⁶ See Mary Carruthers, *The Book of Memory* and *The Craft of Thought*.

Life of Jesus Christ, a translation of the *Meditationes Vitae Christi* made in 1410.

Instructions to the reader ask that she make present that which she reads:

Wherefore thou that coueytest to fele treuly the fruyte of this boke, thou moste with al thi thought & alle thin entent, in that manere make the in thi soule present to thoo thinges that ben here written seyde or done of oure lord Jesu, & and that bisily, likyngly, & abidingly, as thei thou herdest hem with thi bodily eres, or sey thaim with thin eyen don, puttyng away for the tyme, & leuyng alle other occupacions and bisynesses. (12-13)

It is, perhaps, obvious to note that the necessary faculty that will draw the reader toward the extreme affective piety that the text demands is memory as a form of composition. The reader must recreate in her mind the scenes she is reading by building on familiar, sensual images. Taylor, who discusses this same passage, suggests that readers would “meticulously visualize familiar places, people them with those they knew” in order to create an “internal topography” to revisit each time they took up the text (46). This imagined presence required the use of memory: signs and images that evoke what is absent. As pioneering memory scholar Frances Yates observes, scholastic precepts for the work of memory, following Thomas Aquinas, required students to assume “corporeal similitudes” with the text so that “spiritual intentions are prevented from slipping from the soul” because things are “better remembered in the soul in corporeal forms” (75); that is, memory is strengthened by linking it to the body and bodily metaphors. As we saw in the previous chapter, readers are more likely to imprint an understanding of something if the image is especially physical or graphic, an idea that is the basis of classical memory-training. The *Ad Herennium*, the treatise on

rhetoric which Yates examines in depth, states that “things petty, ordinary, and banal” will not be remembered because they do not stir the mind but if something is “exceptionally base, dishonourable, unusual, great, unbelievable, or ridiculous” then there is a likelihood that it will be remembered “for a long time” (qtd. and trans. in Yates, 9). Similar techniques of a mind-body association with the text are required of the reader of *The Mirror of the Blessed Life* such that reading becomes not only a form of memorization (of both word and meaning) but also a form of invention because the reader is asked to perform for herself scenes from the text each time she reads it. The reader must make present in her mind events like the Passion to which she must bear witness and “with the innere eye of [her] soule beholde” (174). This is reading as a physicalised act that takes advantage of what we might call the muscle memory of the senses to maintain its currency when the text is not in front of the reader.¹⁵⁷ As we have already seen, readers were expected to be able to gain an understanding of Christ by empathizing with his physical pain at the Passion. Texts like the *Mirror of the Blessed Life* seem to capitalize on this practice of meditation for the purposes of affective piety with

¹⁵⁷ It is important to note that the physicalisation of the act of reading in the *Mirror of the Blessed Life* is indicative of the Church’s uneasiness with vernacular religious texts for lay readers. Love wrote the *Mirror of the Blessed Life* in reply to Wycliffe’s translation of the Bible to help lay readers understand theological abstractions in bodily terms and, as Nicholas Watson has suggested, to underscore their unpreparedness for the study of such abstractions. For Love’s ventriloquizing of the clerical suspicion of religious vernacular translations, see Watson, “Conceptions of the Word: The Mother Tongue and the Incarnation of God”, (93-95).

explicit instructions to their readers to use their senses as they read in order to keep the lessons of the text in mind.¹⁵⁸

Carruthers makes an important distinction between remembering something in its exact reproduction, or rote memorization, and remembering its reconstruction in the memory, or its substance, and puts these into context in respect to medieval education.¹⁵⁹ In medieval schools, students were taught foundational texts twice by rote; the first time, students learned only the sounds of the words and a second time they learned to attach meaning and commentary to those sounds. Rote learning laid “a firm foundation for all further education” by providing the student/reader with “mnemonically secure inventory ‘bins’ into which additional matter could be stored and thence recovered” (“Poet as Master Builder”, 887-8). In other words, a memorial foundation of learned material gave readers a basis from which to read, understand, and store further information. The advantage to mnemonic learning, Carruthers teaches us, is that it provides a “collecting and recollecting mechanism with which to construct one’s own education” (“Poet as Master Builder,” 888).

The point that one can build a foundational education for oneself through the act of reading is one I want to pursue with respect to *The Mirroure of Golde*. Unlike the reader of Anselm’s prayers or *The Mirror of the Blessed Life*, the

¹⁵⁸ In late medieval England, the Carthusians seem to have played a role in developing this practice with their patrons. See George R. Keiser, “Noght How Lang Man Lifs” and Vincent Gillespie, “*Cura pastoralis in deserto*” in Michael Sargent, *De cella in seculum*.

¹⁵⁹ See especially “The Poet as Master Builder: Composition and Locational Memory in the Middle Ages.”

reader of *The Mirrour of Golde* is not given explicit instructions for reading or ruminating on the text. Instead, the reader is shown how a text can train the memory through repetition of its lessons and constructions of physical similitudes such that memory training becomes an act of reading, and less an act of creative visualization. That a good memory was a mark of a learned mind is evident in Fisher's "remembraunce" of Lady Margaret. He describes her as a woman

of singuler wysedome ferre passynge the comyn rate of women, she was good in remembraunce & of holdyng memorye. A redy wytte she had also to conceyve all thynges. Albeit they were ryght derke, right studyous she was in bokes whiche she hadde in grete nombre both in Englysshe & in Frensshe, & for her exercyse & for the prouffyte of other she dyde translate dyvers maters of devocyon out of Frensshe into Englysshe. (291-2)

Margaret's memory, or her ability to memorize a text, marks her as educated, even "studyous", though her "wysedome" is connected only with her private reading; her education is one she receives solely from books. Her patronage activities, which included establishing lectureships in divinity at both Oxford and Cambridge and the founding of two new colleges, demonstrates her investment in formal education and the structures of scholasticism at the universities. Fisher includes in the list of those who mourn her death "the studyentes of bothe the unyversytees to whome she was a moder" and "all the *lerned* men of Englonde to whome she was a very patronesse" (301, emphasis mine). While the focus of *The Mirrour of Golde* remains spiritual instruction, the way in which it functions as an "exercyse" for memory also marks it as a tool, in Carruthers's terms, for constructing one's own education. What Margaret undertook for her "exercyse"

becomes an exercise for her readers, a faculty that improves the memory and develops “a redy wytte [...] to conceyve all thynges” (291) such that her readers can “prouffyte” from lessons in both spiritual guidance and in reading. *The Mirrour of Golde* resembles books that emerged to better serve the scholastic model of reading, starting after the twelfth century, when reading spread out from the monasteries and into the universities. Its resemblance to books used in formal medieval education is worth examining further given that its likely audience is made up of readers who were, like Lady Margaret, barred from educational institutions.

In order to gain a better understanding of the approach to reading that *The Mirrour of Golde*, for lack of a better term, mirrors,¹⁶⁰ it is useful to review the origins of the scholastic model of reading and its effect on book production. As Jacqueline Hamesse reminds us, during the early Middle Ages reading had taken place within the monastery and had focused on a slow and meticulous comprehension of Scripture—what LeClerq has called the “mastication” of the text (18)—as monks were taught to read, meditate and contemplate (*legere, meditari, contemplari*) (103-4). Reading slowly aided memorization for the purpose of meditation and this was achieved by reading passages aloud both collectively and in private. Hamesse observes that scholasticism’s emphasis on teaching and discussion brought the greatest change to reading because medieval pedagogy was based on explication and commentary (*legere, disputare*,

¹⁶⁰ For important works on reading in the Middle Ages, see, as mentioned earlier, Carruthers, Leclercq, Saenger, and Yates.

praedicare) and so initiated a shift from reading for “wisdom” to reading for “knowledge” (110-12). This shift also had an effect on the form of the book. Scholastic readers required a means for finding particular passages and, as Richard Rouse has shown, books began to be organised into sections with highlighted passages, tables of contents, concordances, summaries and abridgements.¹⁶¹ *The Mirroure of Golde* is organised in such a way that readers are similarly able to navigate their way easily through the book. It provides a table of contents (figure 4.1), chapter headings and section headings, and the occasional woodcut to guide the reader through its lessons, as well as making it easier to retrieve them as needed.¹⁶² This is not a feature of all printed books. Caxton’s *Recuyell*, which was discussed in the previous chapter, for example, is over 300 pages but does not provide a table of contents, only prologues for each of its two books (STC 15375).

In addition, as Hamesse observes, literary production escalated from the twelfth century onward and the need for intellectuals to familiarize themselves

¹⁶¹ See especially Richard H. Rouse “Cistercian aids to the study in the thirteenth century” and Mary A. Rouse, “*Statim invenire*: schools, preachers and new attitudes to the page” for a comprehensive overview of the efforts of the Cistercians to organize the contents of manuscripts. See also, Malcolm B. Parkes, “The influence of the concepts of *ordinatio* and *compilatio* on the development of the book.”

¹⁶² Printed books especially provided a new way of thinking about the book and the possibilities of the printed page. Caxton’s successor, Wynkyn de Worde, was especially invested in experimenting with the visual aspects of the book, such as page layout, borders, initials and illustrations. See especially Martha W. Driver, “Ideas of Order: Wykyn de Worde and the Title Page” for a discussion of his development of the title page and the promotion of the printed book.

with increasing numbers of works necessitated quicker access to their ideas (106).

She notes that

An uninterrupted reading of an entire work, one that took time and permitted assimilation of the whole (or at least the whole gist), was gradually replaced by a more fragmented, piecemeal reading style that had the advantage of providing a quick grasp of selections but no longer encouraged any deep contact with the text or any genuine assimilation of the doctrine it contained. (107)

Florilegia, anthologies of classical authors, summaries, glossaries and lexicons began to proliferate, which responded to the needs of their users by providing “what was essential in a work or topic” in “short, easily memorized sentences” (Hamesse, 107). Indeed, the practised memories of medieval scholars meant that they could enter into discussions of texts having consulted only passages rather than the whole work. Summaries acted as medieval crib notes for doctrines that were difficult to grasp, reducing them to manageable pieces that acted as introductions for young students to an author’s thought. By the fourteenth century, inventories show that florilegia and concordances were abundant in the libraries of the religious orders as well as in the universities, and these compilations, even though they constituted what Hamesse calls “second-tier” literature, played a sizable role in medieval education (110). Hamesse notes that “meditation gave way to utility in a profound shift of emphasis that completely changed the impact of reading” such that “acquisition of knowledge became more important than the spiritual dimension of reading” (110). She suggests that several factors in the late fourteenth century, such as “the development of cities and the democratization of teaching”, as well as the eventual advent of the

printing press, changed the reader's relationship to the book and readers were as likely to be "burghers or merchants as intellectuals" (119). This coincided, perhaps not surprisingly as the tools for intellectual debate were made available to a broader spectrum of readers, with a renewed interest in the meditative reading that had been practiced in the monastic age and which sought to replace the spiritual dimension for readers new to using and owning books.

In what follows, I suggest that *The Mirrour of Golde* straddles these two approaches to reading: that is, acquiring bite-sized passages for breadth of knowledge and easy memorization, and performing a slow, steady rumination on the text for an intimate understanding of the doctrine. As I mentioned above, *The Mirrour of Golde* is a compilation of (abridged) patristic and biblical writings organised into a volume that behaves like a spiritual self-improvement manual. Its self-conscious bookishness, its resemblance to scholastic florilegia, and its origins at the hand of a public figure well-known for her pious reading, suggest that this self-improvement is firmly rooted in an education that is dependent on the owning and reading of books.

Throughout the text there are constant exhortations to the reader to "remembre" and to "rede", which locates the work of memory within a milieu of learning and literacy, a milieu that is gestured to at the outset of the book. It begins,

This present boke is called the Mirrour of golde to the sinfull soule, the whiche hath ben translated at parice oute of laten in to frenshe. And after the translacion seen and corrected at length of many clarkis, Doctours and maisters in divinite, and nowe of late

translated oute of frenche in to Englisshe by the right exellent
princesse Margaret, moder to our soverain lorde kinge Henry the
vii, and Countess of Richmond & derby. (sig. A.ii^r)¹⁶³

The text includes Lady Margaret's role in its provenance alongside "many clarkis, Doctours and maisters in divinite", conferring upon her a similar authority as the mediator of a learned work. In fact, she is able to inhabit an authoritative "I" in laying claim to the work as a named author with her (translated) words:

I have willed to make and accomplishe this present trefy,
gathering and assembling many diverse auctorites of holy
doctours of the churche, to thentent that the pore synfull soule,
troubled by the fraude of enymey and oft overcome, may by holy
monicions and auctorites be addressed to the light of justice and
trouth. (sig. A.ii^v)

In the manner of the academic prologue (the introductory lecture to the work of an *auctor* that operated as a preface to the commentary on a text when the lectures were published) Lady Margaret casts herself as the master surveying the text in its entirety and passing judgment on its doctrinal and literary tenets.¹⁶⁴ Louise Durning, in her work on the architectural aspects of Lady Margaret's patronage, has noted that the college buildings she commissioned for Christ's College, Cambridge exhibit atypical features in spatial arrangement and sculptural decoration that work to "reverse the gendering of spaces in the collegiate institution and to dispose it as a stage for the representation of her authority", thus establishing her presence and her influence in a lasting, concrete way (59). The

¹⁶³References are to page numbers in a medieval hand. The orthography has been lightly modernized; punctuation is mine.

¹⁶⁴For the formal aspects of medieval academic lectures and prologues see A.J. Minnis, *Medieval Theory of Authorship: Scholastic Literary Attitudes in the Middle Ages*.

prologue of *The Mirrour of Golde* operates in a similar fashion to locate Lady Margaret—a public persona known for her bookishness—as a learned authority in control of material that is bookish in nature and that works to create a connection between reading and the care of the soul under her aegis.

Indeed, the prologue instructs readers on the correct approach to the book by setting up an affinity between its chapters, reading practice, and the reader's soul when it articulates how the reader should "procede in this lytell boke" (sig. A.ii^v). As the second epigraph to *this* chapter tells us, the *Mirrour of Golde* is meant to be read daily as a reminder that the soul needs to be daily considered. Reading and spiritual education are intrinsically linked through the mechanism of the book; chapter divisions literally dictate a reading schedule and metaphorically reflect back to the reader the lessons of the text. These instructions are echoed throughout the book as readers are continually being directed to read other authorities, and other books, as a means of supporting the lessons at hand. The lesson on "Howe lechery causeth many evelles to come to man" reminds readers that

We *rede* also of many [who] were slayne by cause of the lechery comytte with the womon of levite as it apperith in the xx Chapitour of the booke of Jugis. And a man was slayne for the lechery of absolon his brother forsomoche that he had defouled Thamar his suster, as it apperith in the secounde boke of kingis in the x chaptour. (sig. B.i^v, emphasis mine)

Biblical references to chapters in other books work to underscore the central place of reading and/or hearing the scriptures in spiritual health, such that *The Mirrour of Golde* acts as a kind of omnibus edition of the teachings of the Bible and the

Church Fathers for its readers. If each chapter of *The Mirrour of Golde* is intended to illuminate an aspect of the reader's soul, the imbedded guidance toward other books where the lessons are repeated both invites the reader to read further and assumes that she does already, locating her within a learned community. Although earlier and contemporary devotional texts often asked the reader to visualize episodes of Christ's life, for example, or to meditate on images created from her own experience, *The Mirrour of Golde* asks the reader to read and re-read lessons from other authorities, encouraging her to recall those authorities as she reads: "*Remembre* the that thou arte man and that thonour of the worlde is the veray lettynge of grace and that, worse is, it is the losse of eternall helth where have we *rede* of any puttynge their delit(s) in the worlde here" (sig. G.i^{r-v}, emphasis mine). Reading and recalling lessons in books, then, becomes a practical way of emulating a spiritual life. The reader is intended to put into practice the lessons of the text but doing so requires that she read, understand, and memorize those lessons. The intellectual breadth that the text assumes and provides for its readers locates it within a scholarly milieu. The fact that Lady Margaret not only translated this particular work, but had it printed suggests that she must have conceived of it in terms of a reading public who were in need of spiritual guidance and who were capable of developing the intellectual tools to access that guidance through this text.

Throughout this chapter I have posited a female reader for *The Mirrour of Golde* and I suggest that Lady Margaret had in mind a female audience for the

work. In fact, the imagined female reader of the English text is identified (obliquely) with its translator and patron in the first chapter. “Of the vilenes and myserie of man” uses a familiar motif to locate the origins of sin firmly in the lap of women, reminding readers that women’s bodies engendered humanity’s misery. The chapter begins,

The prophete Jeremie consideringe the freylte and myserie of mankynde by maner of lamentacion in writying saith thus: Alas I poore creature wherefore was I borne *out of the wombe of my moder* to se the labour & sorowe of this world & to consume my dayes in confusion. Alas if this holy man Jeremie, the whiche almighty god sanctified *in the wombe of his moder*, he him self said & profered so piteous words: What may I say that am engendred & conceyved *in the wombe of my moder by synne* (sig.B.iii^v, emphasis mine).

And the text goes on to state that man is

A thyng vile, stinkyng, detestable and abhomyneable conceyved in the fylthe rottennes of flesshe & stynkyng fylthy concupiscence and in theimbracement of stinkyng lechery & that worse is conceyved in the unclene sport of synne. & yf thou beholde & consyder well what mete thou art norisshed *within thy moders wombe*, truly noon other but with corrupt & infect blod as well is knowen by many phylosophers & other great clerk(s). & after thy nativite thou that haste ben norisshed of so foule & vile nature *in thy moders wombe as before is said*: thou art also ordeined to weping(s) & crying(s) & to many other misries in the exile of this sorowfull worlde. (sig. B.iv^r, emphasis mine).

These passages ascribe to a model that is especially important in English devotional discourse, that of the reader setting before her eye in the mirror-text the image of herself in all of her literalist, bodily, “vile, stinkyng” glory. In a chapter that begins with an imperative to “knowe thyself” (sig.B.iii^v), readers are presented with the knowledge, articulated in vivid terms that evoke the physical,

that they are conceived via original sin and are nourished by corruption within the rottenness of their mother's flesh and so are unable to escape the pollution and degradation of their human body that will rot in death. Bryan has recognized in this tendency toward literalism in devotional texts a "rhetoric of humility and world renunciation" that asks the reader to understand her body (indeed her self) as a space of the profane and the abject outside of which spiritual worth exists at a remove (63). This idea of the reader as a visceral space that must be schooled in salvation from the outside by spiritual means is especially prevalent for women readers who were traditionally associated with the flesh and the body.

The stated purpose of the text is to address the soul "troubled by the fraude of envye" to the "light of justice and trouth" (sig. A.ii^{r-v}) and here women, as the progenitors of sin and linked explicitly with images of the material body, are acknowledged as particularly in need of the text's salvific power. The repetition of "moders womb" not only encompasses potential female readers but it also singles out Margaret Beaufort especially who is identified in the prologue as "Margaret moder to oure soverain lorde kinge Henry the vii" (sig. A.ii^r). In fact, her public identity revolved around ideals of motherhood, both metaphorical and literal: as a patron, Fisher describes her as a "moder" to the "studyentes of bothe the unyversytees" (301) and her customary title in the realm, "Our Lady the King's Mother", celebrated her as a matriarch. Contemporary readers of the text would not fail to make these connections between Lady Margaret as mother of the king, woman as mother of sin, the vexed position Margaret inhabits as the reader

and translator of this text, and indeed the vexed position that all women inhabit under these tenets. If the reader is invited to compare herself with the patron of the text—a noblewoman known for her austere orthodox piety—her own shortcomings are highlighted as is her need to take up the book; in other words, if Lady Margaret read *The Mirrour of Golde* for the care of her soul, certainly those readers whose daily lives did not involve a strict program of devotional rituals should do so as well. The textualization of women's inferiority in religious writing has been a topic of some concern for many scholars, and understandably so, given the apparent disconnect between the misogyny of the texts and their popularity with women readers, though I suggest that the perceived inferiority of the reader may not always operate along gendered lines.¹⁶⁵ Here the readers' inferiority is based on a class disparity, rather than a gender disparity, and reading becomes a way to emulate the nobility. As we have seen throughout this study, reading and the acquisition of fine books was becoming an important measure of social status. In this context, *The Mirrour of Golde* in English includes women as readers especially in need of the ministrations of the text not because their bodies necessarily mark them as *more* sinful than men, but because their bodies identify them with the king's mother, who is herself susceptible to sin.¹⁶⁶ That *The*

¹⁶⁵ See especially Anne Clark Bartlett, *Male Authors, Female Readers* and Elizabeth Robertson, *Early English Devotional Prose* for useful discussions on the ways in which readers may have circumvented the intrinsic misogyny in devotional texts.

¹⁶⁶ It must be noted that the male readers of *The Mirrour of Golde* are also considered in need of the salvation the text provides, i.e. as susceptible to sin as women. In fact, the address is usually made to a perceived male reader. I do not

Mirroure of Golde requires its readers to read broadly in learned works suggests that women are capable of conceiving its lessons and participating in developing wisdom akin to Lady Margaret's, which, in Fisher's terms, far passed the common rate of women.

It has been my aim in this chapter to restore our consideration of the intellectual component to the exercise of devotional reading, an aspect that can get lost especially as we consider the participation of a female audience with restricted access to literacy and education. Devotional reading is most often considered in terms of the reader's ability to visualize and dramatize for herself the events in the text. Taylor notes that this kind of reading is not unlike erotic reading, "since both cultivate the habit of extensive fantasizing on short passages, and encourage readers to visualize the events in vivid and intimate terms" (44). This is reading as a kind of physicalized act, one that can account for differing levels of literacy since the reader can meditate on passages read, passages read to her or even an image that reflects a passage in a text.¹⁶⁷ *The Mirroure of Golde*,

mean to imply that the text addresses men and women differently in terms of their need for the spiritual aid of the text, simply that the text's mandate allows for an audience that includes, perhaps even invites, readers of both genders.

¹⁶⁷ This text has five woodcuts that are interspersed intermittently throughout the text, usually at chapter headings. It is not clear that they are intended to operate for the illiterate hearer of the text in the way that thirteenth-century writer Guillaume Durand has observed about images:

For what writing supplieth to him which can read, that doth a picture supply to him which is unlearned, and can only look. Because they who are uninstructed thus see what they ought to follow: and *things* are read, though letters be unknown. (qtd. in Neale and Webb, 53)

however, is a text that depends on levels of literacy that require a familiarity with written authorities and the apparatus of the book. At the same time that the reader is being asked to consider the health of her soul, she is also being asked to consider other books, other readings, and other authorities and to structure the understanding of her soul in terms of chapters in a book. The work of memory that began as an educational discipline in monastic and cathedral schools is, after all, a memory for texts, not events. The process of repetition and corporeal identification that seem to mark the experience of reading *The Mirrour of Golde* identifies a program of training aimed to steep the reader's mind in the text. In this way, women readers can partake in training their intellectual faculties, fashioned after scholastic precepts for reading and memory training, while also developing their own spiritual formation. That this is achieved under the aegis of a formidable reader and patron, Lady Margaret Beaufort, further underscores the important presence and prevalence of the medieval woman reader during a period of substantial expansion in lay literacy and book ownership.

Because there does not seem to be a transparent or even instructive connection between the image and the text—often the woodcut is of the saint or church father whose advice is repeated in the chapter—I am inclined to think that they may act as bookmarks for the reader or symbols of authority, rather than as instructional illustrations. See Martha W. Driver, “Pictures in Print: Late Fifteenth- and Early Sixteenth-Century English Religious Books for Lay Readers.” for a detailed discussion of the use of woodcuts in pre-Reformation English translations.

I began this chapter with a discussion of the trope of the mirror in medieval devotional writing and I return to it now as a means of revisiting its specific function in *The Mirroure of Golde*. I suggested that the mirror trope in the text, unlike the Christ-as-mirror trope that we encountered in the previous chapter, reflected back an image of the reader as she already was, rather than simply what she should be. The text-as-mirror operates as a guide to the reader to examine herself and, according to her own understanding through her reading, to properly compose herself. *The Mirroure of Golde*, like a growing number of devotional texts in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, encourages the reader to assess her own progress on a day-to-day basis and to recognize and implement models of behaviour based on the perception of God's will. What sets *The Mirroure of Golde* apart from other mirror texts of the late Middle Ages, however, is that its program of self-improvement is authored, at least in English, by a woman who translated it for and introduced it to an audience of English readers. Lady Margaret Beaufort maintained a public reputation for pious devotion, as we have already seen in the previous chapter, but she was also a woman with incredible wealth, resources and social standing. In subtle ways, *The Mirroure of Golde* is inflected by her own reflection; that is, it demonstrates an awareness of the concerns, both worldly and spiritual, of an aristocratic reader.

In addition, her translation of *The Mirroure of Golde* indicates her cultivation of a brand of devotional study that appealed to a select group of religious luminaries that included, as Michael Sargent notes, "some of the

Carthusians, some of the Bridgettines” and a coterie of religious and literary scholars that included bishop John Fisher (“Transmission”, 239). Her translation of both *The Mirroure of Golde* and Book IV of the *Imitation of Christ*, continental works that were not well known in England, is probably owing to the influence of Fisher and his circle and, because Fisher notes that they were undertaken “for her exercyse” (221) they are often considered just devotional busy work. In fact, as Krug points out, Margaret is following the example of male religious writers who viewed the “exercyse” of writing as a “personal, penitential experience” and an act of charity; very often this also included translation (106-7). In the *Scale of Perfection*, for example, a text that Margaret Beaufort commissioned from de Worde, Walter Hilton states that his reason for writing is to “first stire myn owen necgligence for to doon betere than I have doon” as well as to “stire” his readers to take up contemplation (2614-16). Like Hilton’s, Margaret’s writing did as much to shape English literary and religious culture as it did her own spiritual betterment.

Recently, Krug has suggested that, while Margaret may have been the centre of a culturally elite community via her association with advanced scholars and clerics, her centrality was “largely economic, social and personal, not intellectual” because she was not a scholar herself (*Reading Families*, 110). Krug observes that because she had only a passing knowledge of Latin—evident in her reliance on translations—she was always at a remove from the intellectual culture of the university, despite her presence and proximity as a benefactress of several

colleges and as a patron of several scholars including John Fisher (110-11). I do not disagree with Krug that Margaret must have been something of an outsider in such a circle. I suggest that her choice to publish and disseminate her translation work via print, however, is a direct response to her outsider status because it allows her to bring her intellectual “excercyse” to an audience that, like Margaret herself, exists outside of the formal educational institutions. As we have seen, her translation of *The Mirroure of Golde* makes available a text that expects readers to participate in the knowledge economy of reading, memory and books by taking on the intellectual work, no longer the preserve of a few advanced scholars, of caring for their own souls. Throughout this study I have been arguing for women’s influence over the English devotional and literary culture in the late Middle Ages, which is here reflected in the translation of Margaret Beaufort’s *The Mirroure of Golde to the Synfulle Soule*. Her translation is a testament to the ways that reading provides an entry point for women into literate culture not only because it allows for participation in monastic and scholastic modes of reading but also, and perhaps more importantly, because it is a salient example of the way that reading can give rise to writing. It provides a suitable note on which to conclude this study which asked at its beginning why women did not, in the Wife of Bath’s terms, paint more lions. Reading carefully into women’s reading habits suggests that there is more than one way to paint a lion.

CONCLUSION

Reading women reading: from text to image

*I charge thee and I beseche thee bi the autorite of charite that yf
any soche schal rede it, write it or speke it, or elles here it be red
or spokin, that thou charge hem as I do thee for to take hem tyme
to rede it, speke it, write it, or here it al over.*

—The Cloud of Unknowing

At some point before 1533 Robert Wyer published *A Dyurnall for Devoute Soules* with what seems to have been a public of beginning readers in mind. The *Dyurnall* is a prayer book with three separate prayers: one for the “mournynge”, one for before “meate”, and a third for before “nyght.” To guide readers, each Latin prayer is set in a larger typeface with a translation following immediately after. Despite the occasional nature of the prayers, the supplicant is encouraged to say the prayer, not just in the morning but “so oft as ye fele any ghostly, or elles corporall, delectacyon of god or of his creatures; that is to say, whensoever ye be touched with inwarde devocyon or your tyme at every houre to the moste profyte of youre soule” (sig. A.iii^{r-v}). The *Dyurnall* belongs to a genre of prayer books designed especially to fit the work of prayer and private devotion into the busy lives of middle class lay readers and in doing so it prescribes prayer “whensoever” it makes sense to do so. The reader is urged to “se that your mynde be occupyed in the prayse of god” when donning clothes in the morning “thankynge hym that he hath so plentuously provydid for you al necessaryes” (sig. A.iii^v); everyday tasks are presented as opportunities to practice devotions

that would otherwise be scuttled for lack of time. In this process of adaptation, readers are encouraged to practice contemplation of the thing that comes handily to mind immediately upon waking:

As soon as ye be ful wakyng marke well what thyng cometh fyrst to your mynde and yf ye have ben wakyng at any tyme of the nyght past what remembraunce ye have had of god. And yf ye fynde that any thyng that occupied your hert then the rule of perfeccyon requyreth the whiche is that our herte be at altymes unyte and knytte unto god eyther by actuall love and contemplacyon of his goodnes with dewe thankes gyvyng for his benefyttes or elles by contynuall prayer & confessyon of our owne evylles. (sig. A.ii^v)

The author of the *Dyurnall* seems to make a particular effort to offer the reader prayers and objects for meditation with an eye for the practical, the simple and the efficient even though readers were working through the complex exercise of understanding through daily prayer the relationship between the self and the divine.

The impulse to teach reading through prayer is certainly not new to the sixteenth century; earlier the primer had grown out of an effort to train readers in the regular reading of prayer that was modeled on monastic habits of reading but tempered for the lay person's education. Taken against the demanding devotional schedules of the noblewomen like Cecily Neville or Margaret Beaufort of the previous century, as we have seen in this study, the *Dyurnal*'s moderate approach to a program of prayer seems decidedly tame by comparison. Nonetheless, I introduce the *Dyurnal* here, at this late juncture, as an approach to reading that bears a trace of the aristocratic laywoman reader and her far-reaching influence.

As I stated at the outset of this project, my aim was to read women back into the leaves of the books they read and commissioned and I propose that it is possible to read women out of their books again and into the next generation of readers interacting with prayer books and guides to the devout life on a model that these women first explored. As we have seen, the negotiations that elite women readers needed to make in their devotions between public and private identities, social and religious obligations and secular and spiritual concerns made for a sometimes fraught relationship with the texts they were reading. In order to fit into the lived lives of their readers, texts are transformed; treatises on contemplative reading are also reminders of dynastic traditions and devotional manuals become intellectual exercises. The concessions to the busy life of the middle class reader in the sixteenth century, I suggest, begin in the fifteenth century when readers were just beginning to manage reading as an integral part of their mixed lives.

Early modern devout guides gained currency in the sixteenth century at a time when the printing press made texts accessible to a broader spectrum of readers who were literate in the vernacular and aware of the social prestige of the book, but also at a time when devotional reading was an especially vexed activity. Bryan notes that during the religious turmoil of the sixteenth century, the number of English readers expanded “beyond anything medieval devotional writers would have expected” and Protestant and Recusant readers alike had more reason than ever to turn to private devotions that allowed them to examine their inner selves against their social identities (205). She suggests that the rise in popularity of the

Imitation of Christ and other texts that employed devices of *imitatio* and exemplarity during this period means that these strategies for private reading held an appeal for readers for whom the definitions of inward and outward devotion were particularly critical, and even dangerous (206). I have suggested that the medieval noblewomen in my study seemed to recognize that their social identities were bound up in the books they read and that their devotions, however private they might be in practice, were always on public display. In the late Middle Ages, devotional reading was associated almost exclusively with women and I posit that this association becomes, in the sixteenth century, a way of aligning the inner self with the feminine and the private at a time when social identities were under threat of persecution. I suggest that early modern devout guides invited readers to read like a woman.

I do not consider late medieval forms of reading as merely a staging area for the drama of early modern devotions, nor am I interested in positing any sort of developmental tradition of devotional literature. I do think it is worth noting that themes of late medieval devotions “resonate”, to use Bryan’s term, “across the medieval/early modern divide” in ways that are worth exploring further (32). I suggest that late medieval devotional literature emerges in different and related forms, like the *Dyurnall*, in later centuries, in different religious traditions and in different forms of reading that owe much to the patronage and promotion of these texts that women initially undertook. What I have tried to do here is to offer an analysis of the forms of reading expressly associated with elite women readers of

the late Middle Ages, in order to try to understand how they draw on and re-imagine monastic, clerical and lay cultures and to observe how they operate practically in private and in public spaces, both real and imagined. These forms are varied and complex and cast women's reading in a milieu of competing and cooperating ideologies that are never "dull."

This study concludes with an image. The verso of folio 43 of Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek MS 1857 (commonly known as *The Hours of Mary of Burgundy*) is a companion piece of sorts to the patron-portrait of Mary of Burgundy in the same manuscript; I have discussed this image in some detail in chapter 2 where I noted the way that Mary is captured in the act of reading, while through the gothic window behind her she reappears to pay worship to the Virgin and child, in a scene that is widely understood to be a representation of the interior visualization of contemplation. In folio 43, Mary has left her place by the window and through it the depiction of the adoration of the Virgin and child has been replaced by the crucifixion of Christ, though there is no reader to envision herself into its narrative (figure 5.1). Instead, Mary's prayer book, discarded among other luxury objects, lies open and faces the viewer of the image; from outside the window, two women who are witnesses to the crucifixion gaze through the room and out at the reader. Without Mary available to mediate and display the imaginative work of reading prayer, the crucifixion narrative is left

unanchored and uninterpreted. The viewer now sitting before an open book (in reality and in the illumination) takes up Mary's position as reader and is invited to participate in making meaning. As if in response to the various images of women reading in the late Middle Ages, here there is a space left blank, and the spectator is silently enjoined to take up that space and participate in sacramental history, literary history and her own history by entering the leaves of her book.

ILLUSTRATIONS



Figure 1.1. The Annunciation, whole folio illustration. *The Beaufort Hours*. London, British Library MS Royal 2 a.xvii, fol. 34r.



Figure 1.2. The Annunciation, whole folio illustration. *The Beaufort Hours*. London, British Library MS Royal 2 a.xvii, fol. 23v.



Figure 1.3. Saint Anne teaching the Virgin to read from an ABC. Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Douce 231, fol. 3r.

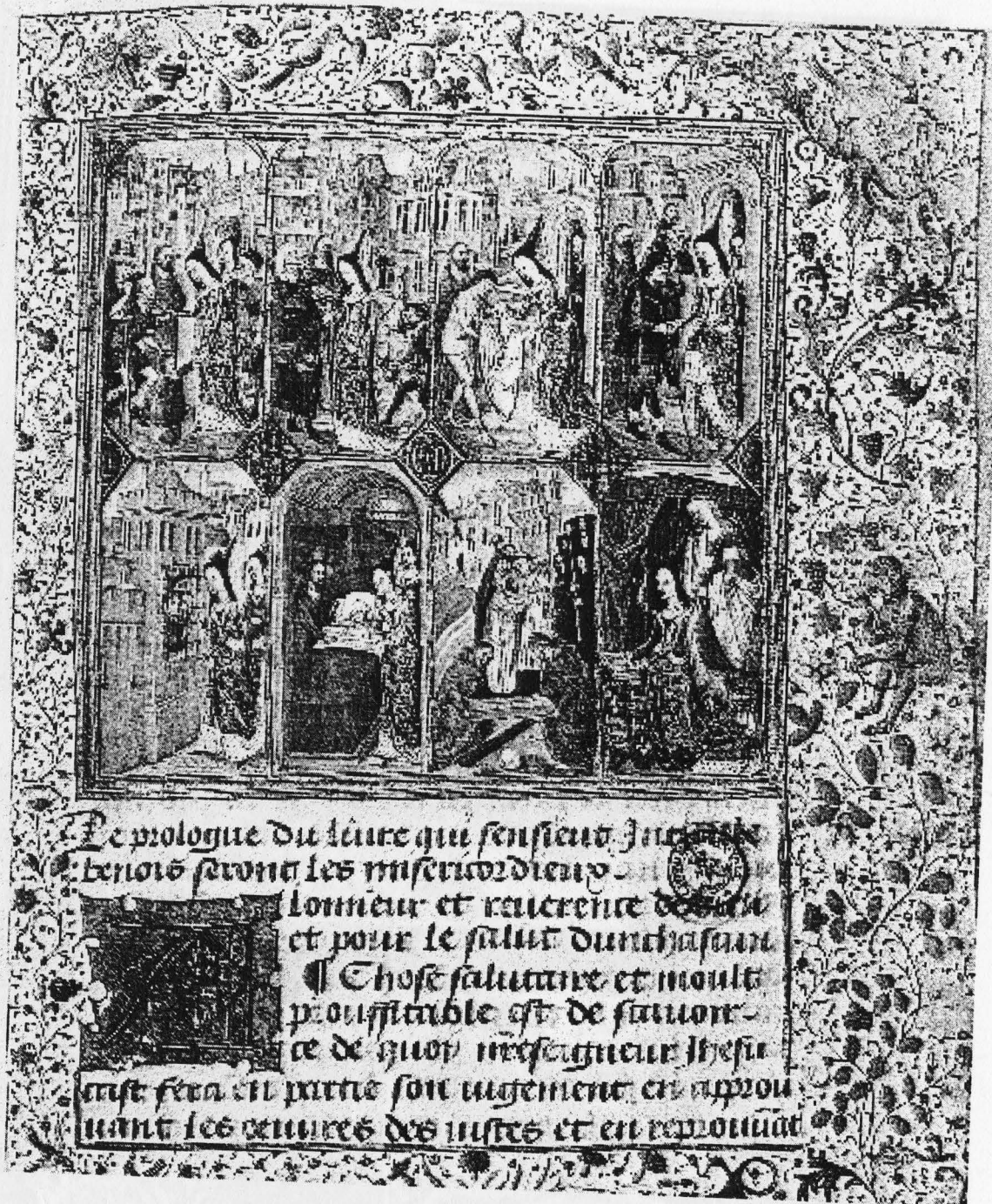


Figure 2.1. Seven Corporal Works of Mercy and Margaret of York in the presence of her patron saint, whole folio illustration. Nicholas Finet, *Benois seront les misericordieux*. Brussels, Bibliotheque royale de Belgique, MS 9296, fol. 1v.



Figure 2.2. Mary of Burgundy reading, whole folio illustration. *The Hours of Mary of Burgundy*. Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek MS 1857, fol. 94v.

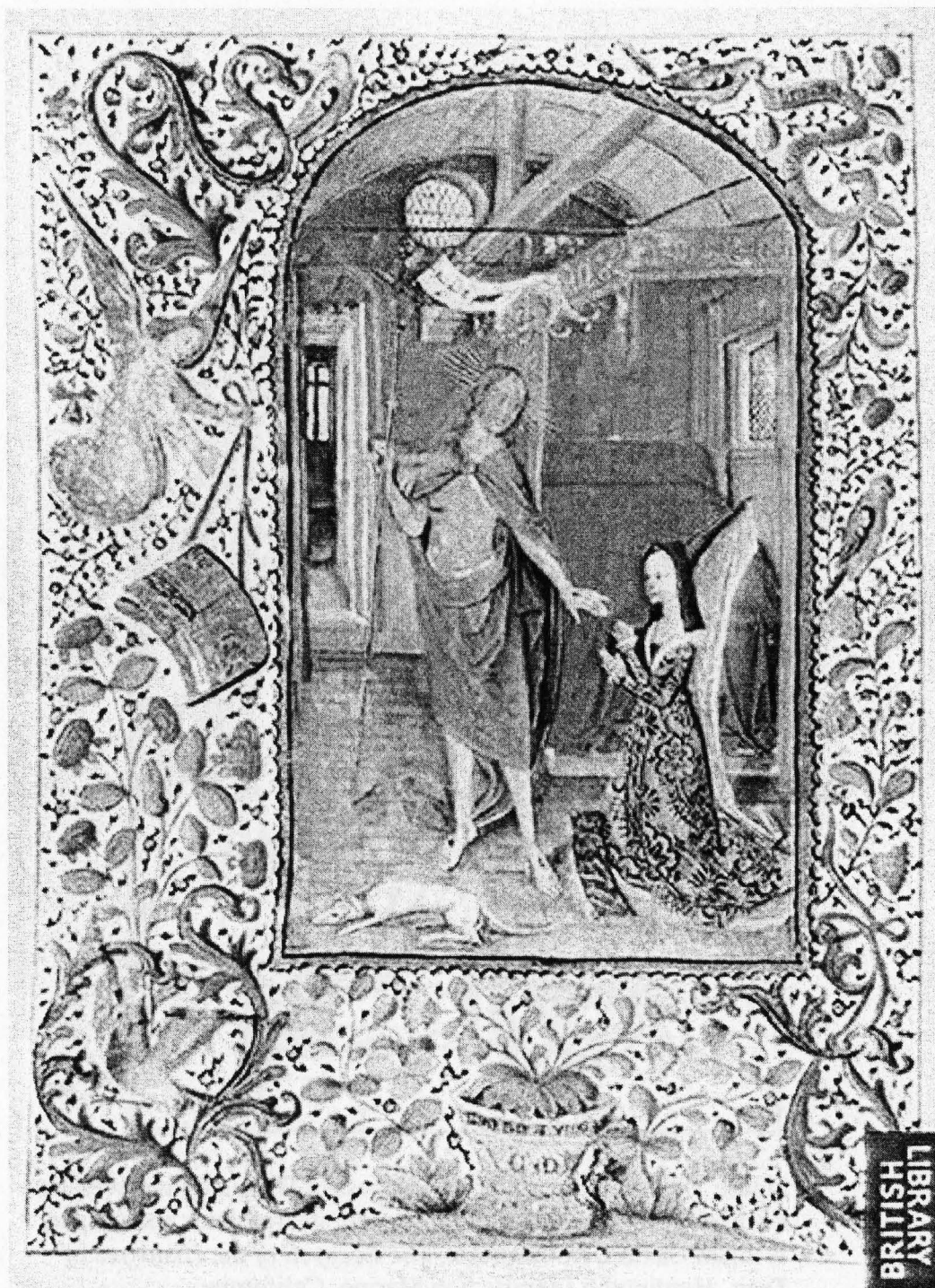


Figure. 2.3. Christ with Margaret of York, whole folio illustration. Nicholas Finet, *Le dyalogue de la duchesse de bourgogne a ihu christ*. London, British Library MS Additional 7970, fol. 1v.



Figure 3.1. Margaret of York, Duchess of Burgundy receives *The Recuyell of the Historyes of Troye* from its translator and printer, William Caxton, frontispiece. *The Recuyell of the Historyes of Troye*. Huntington Library, San Marino, California.



Figure 3.2. Scribe David Aubert presenting a completed manuscript to Margaret of York, miniature. Boethius, *Consolatione*. Universitätsbibliothek, Jena, MS El. f. 85, fol. 13v.



Figure 3.3. Portrait of Lady Margaret Beaufort by Roland Lockey, c. 1597, in the hall at St. John's College, Cambridge.

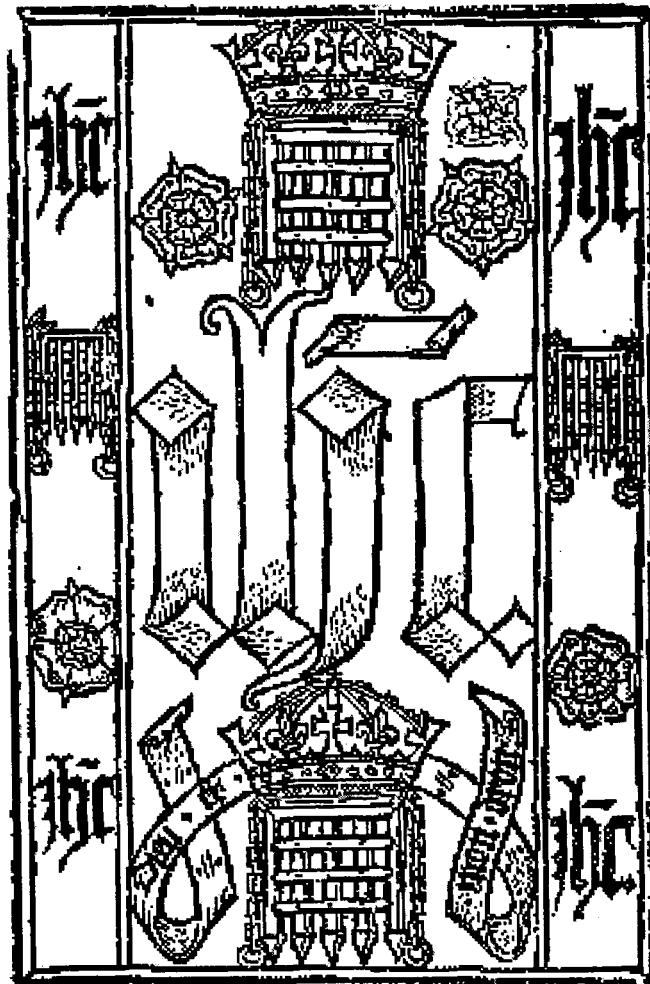


Figure 3.4. The arms of Lady Margaret Beaufort. *The Mirroure of Golde to the Synfulle Soule*, STC 6894.5. Bodleian Library, Oxford.

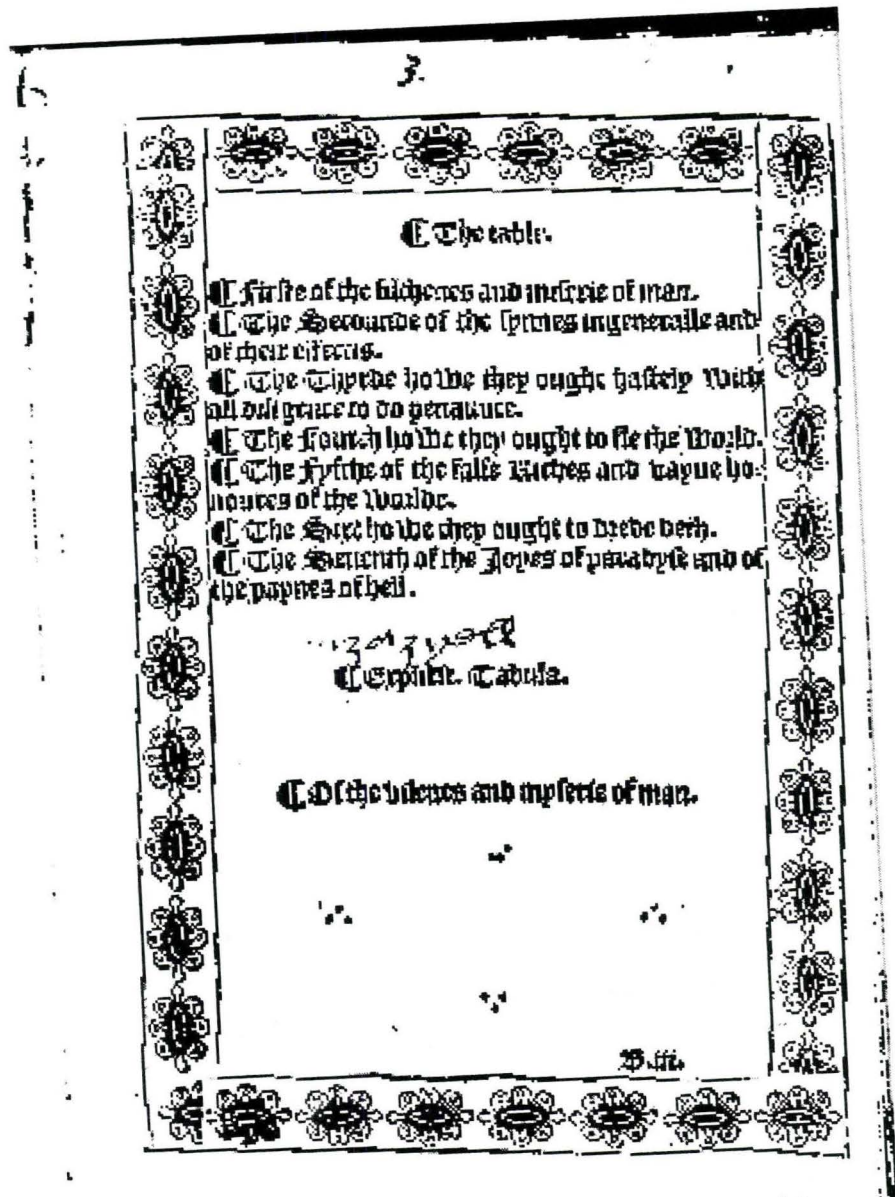


Figure 4.1. Table of Contents. *The Mirrour of Golde to the Synfulle Soule*, STC. 6894.5, sig. A.iii^r. Bodleian Library, Oxford.

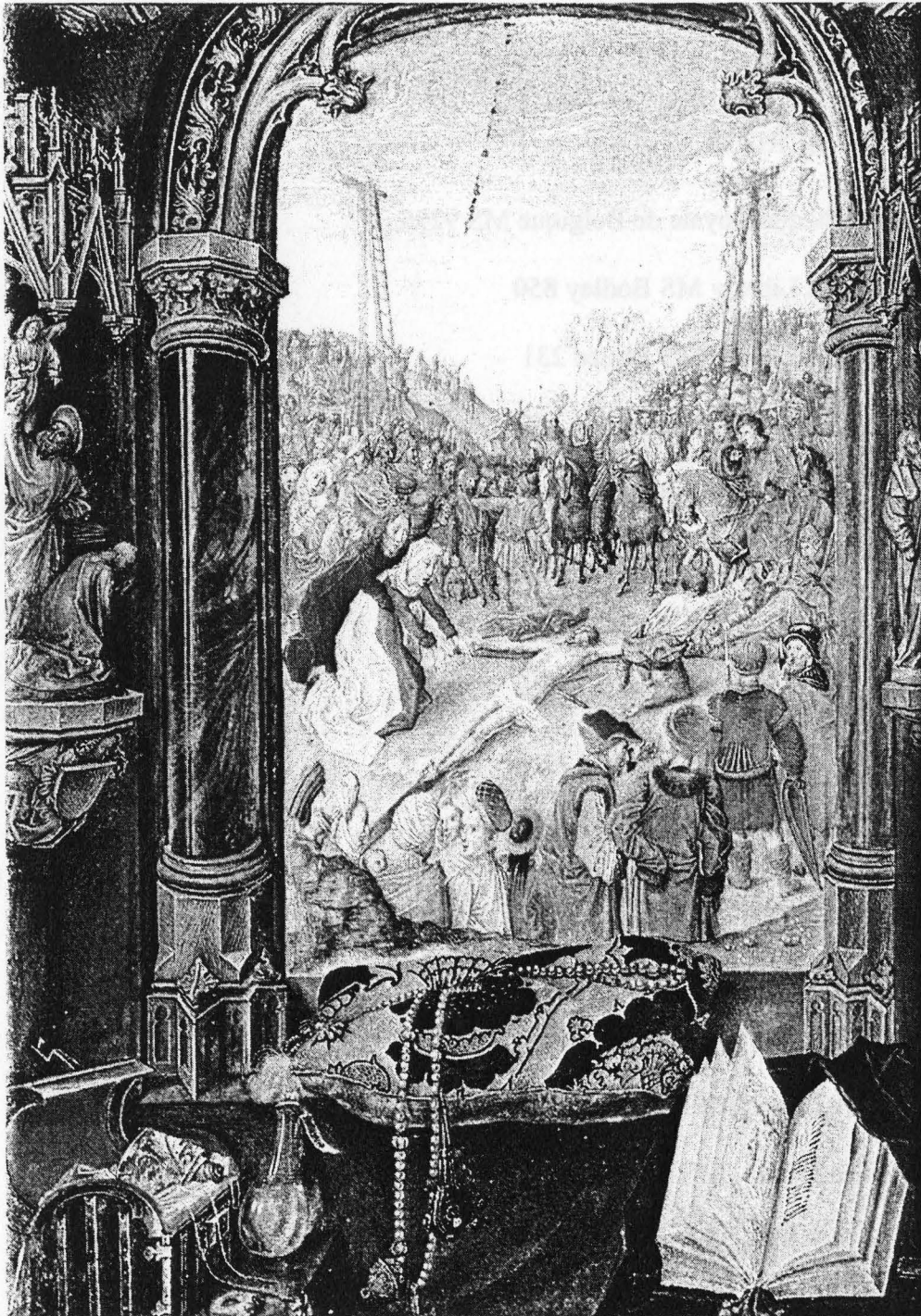


Figure 5.1. Mary of Burgundy's abandoned prayer book. *The Hours of Mary of Burgundy*. Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek MS 1857, fol. 43v.

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Bodleian Library MS Rawlinson B. 102

British Library MS Additional 36983

British Library MS Arundel 327

British Library MS Harley 172

British Library MS Arundel 396

British Library MS Harley 4012

British Library MS Additional 7970

British Library MS Additional 33772

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