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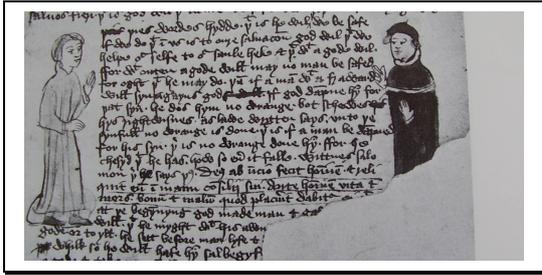
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*“ALTUM SAPERE”: THE RISKS OF THE AUTHORITY AND RESPONSIBILITY OF KNOWLEDGE IN
LATE MEDIEVAL ENGLISH “EXTRAMURAL” LITERARY TEXTS
(PhD Dissertation)*

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“Mykil folkes wait and hopes þat God wil dempne no man bot þat al sal be safed þorow his mercy.” (BL Add. 37049, f. 96)

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Lectori salutem!

INTRODUCTION

The sparkle of my inspiration for this work, and interest in this ambitious topic, was ignited by Carlo Ginzburg's article, "High and Low: The Theme of Forbidden Knowledge in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries."¹ Although the "theme" of his article was shifted rather towards the consideration of boundaries and authorities in this dissertation, the subject did not become much narrower. Ginzburg starts his study with a self-cautioning sentence, which I also respect as – perhaps – the only viable path to embrace such a voluminous inquiry: "The subject of this [Ginzburg's] essay is a very broad one and it would be better perhaps to start with a specific text."² Specific texts and their interpretations constitute the chapters of my dissertation as well to emphasise that they do not illustrate the problems raised in connection with the taboos of knowledge (or the restrictions upon the intellectual freedom of the inquiring mind), but they themselves outline the problem; moreover, in some cases, they become the problem itself.

Therefore, this introduction will not anticipate the analyses of the selected texts with carefully elaborated theories concerning the dilemmas of "high and low" in late medieval England so that I can avoid the imposition of prefabricated concepts upon the works. Hereafter, I quote Ginzburg's words to illustrate what underlies, and what is common in, our approaches:

In his Epistle to the Romans xi. 20, St. Paul cautioned those Romans who embraced Christianity not to despise the Jews. Christ's message, he implied, is a universal one. And he concluded the Epistle with the words [...] translated in the Authorized Version of the Bible as "be not high-minded, but fear." In Jerome's Vulgate the corresponding passage is given as: "noli altum sapere, sed time."

Jerome's Vulgate often appears as a strictly literal translation: and in this case also "altum sapere" is more a reflection into Latin than a proper translation of the Greek word [...]. But after the fourth century the whole passage in the Latin West was often misunderstood: "sapere" was taken not as a verb with a moral meaning ("to be wise") but as a verb with an intellectual meaning ("to know"); and the adverbial expression "altum" was taken as a noun denoting "highness." "Non enim

¹ The article was published in *Past and Present* 73 (1976), pp. 28-41.

² *Ibid.*, p. 28.

prodest scire,” Ambrosius wrote, “sed metuere, quod futurum est; scriptum est enim, Noli alta sapere...³

While Ambrosius already appears to usher in the new paradigm in this exegetical problem, the early patristic interpretations of Rom. 11:20, including Origen, John Chrysostom and Augustine, discuss the passage in its relations to salvation. Origen’s commentary on the Epistle to the Romans, “the first to deal seriously with the epistle,”⁴ interprets the context of Rom. 11:20, i.e. the parable of the olive trees, as an image expressing the universal nature of people inasmuch as all humans are “essentially rational and thus free, thus able to be redeemed through the exercise of free will in response to a divine goodness.”⁵ To focus on Paul’s warning, we see that Origen contrasts haughtiness to wisdom:

The upshot [of the olive branches] is that the Gentiles are warned not to be haughty, since their fall always remains a possibility. This warning continues into 11.25, where Paul discourages the “wisdom” that would set limits on God’s mercy, since it is by an “ineffable dispensation” that the Jews are saved, not by their merits.⁶

Both John Chrysostom and Augustine treat the warning ultimately as an exhortation to humility. John is inclined to see the parable in Rom. 11 as an “either-or” salvation story, in which the fall of either the Jews or the Gentiles would automatically result in a new opportunity for the other.⁷ In Augustine’s commentary the parable of the olive branches (Rom. 11:17-24) is used “primarily to exhort Gentile believers to humility.”⁸

In most later (high and late medieval) biblical commentaries, Saint Paul’s caution to the Romans became synonymous with a warning against pursuing intellectual activities.⁹ In the exegetical tradition, the interpretation of “altum sapere” replaced an originally moral imperative, binding all Christians, by a prohibition laid on intellectual endeavours that wanted to find out more about the divine essence, and that aimed at bridging the gap between the full possession of knowledge and the limited human share of it.¹⁰ The collective “slip” in the Pauline exegesis was reflected by many parallel discourses on related issues. The aversion to

³ Ibid.

⁴ Peter Gorday, *Principles of Patristic Exegesis: Romans 9-11 in Origen, John Chrysostom, and Augustine*. Studies in the Bible and Early Christianity. Vol. 4. (New York and Toronto: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1983), p. 45.

⁵ Ibid., p. 81.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid., p. 125.

⁸ Ibid., p. 171.

⁹ Cf. Ginzburg, op. cit., pp. 28-9.

¹⁰ Cf. the authoritative gloss by Peter Lombard: “[...] *noli altum sapere*, id est superbe sapere, ne et tu frangaris per superbiam ut ille per incredulitatem [...]” in *Petri Lombardi [magistri Sententiarum] Parisiensis quodam episcopi Collectanea in omnes D. Pauli apostoli epistolas*. PL 191, col. 1487, which apparently struggles with uniting the intellectual and moral connotations in “sapere” and “superbia.”

intellectual quests was also translated into the discourse on curiosity. St. Isidore warns in his *Synonimae*:

[A]void excessive curiosity, leave off your care for another's life, put an end to the care which does not pertain to your own situation. Let no excessive curiosity seize your soul, no desire of hateful curiosity run off with you; nor should you look into the character of another, unmindful of your own. [...] Let there be in you no excessive curiosity for knowing hidden things. Beware of investigating things remote from human sense. Leave as a secret what you have not learned from Scriptures. Do not desire to know what you are not allowed to know: excessive curiosity is a dangerous presumption, it is a destructive experience; it provokes one to heresy, it topples the mind into sacrilegious fables, it makes men audacious in obscure matters, it causes men to rush headlong into things unknown.¹¹

In a similar vein, texts dismissing intellectual audacity in the literature of the late Middle Ages usually label the “fruit” of intellectual quests as “deceivable” or “unprofitable” knowledge. They link the attempts to broaden the horizon of knowledge with questions of morality and salvation. The discourse on the limits of knowledge and the unlimited, but rationally unattainable, divine wisdom is inherently linked with the theological concepts of human nature and intellect; furthermore, it is inseparable from the recurring debates on the relationship between reason and faith.

The understanding of the late medieval stage of these discourses would be impossible without an awareness of the preliminary developments, whose presentation, however, will be omitted in the dissertation because of several reasons. First of all, considering the scope of this thesis, such a concise introduction into the background of the works discussed could only lead to a superficial summary of some theological aspects of the problematic. Such a summary could neither fulfill its purpose nor offer a more thorough outline of the available critical literature.¹² Secondly, though the discourses on knowledge were mostly theological in nature, their bearings can also be analyzed in other frameworks, as reflected by the title of this dissertation, from the perspective of authority and responsibility.

The first visible concern about the exegesis of Rom. 11:20 in Middle English texts appears with the translations and glosses of the Pauline letters, which necessarily had to cope with the problem of translating, and consequently interpreting, the phrase of “Noli altum

¹¹ Isidore's *Synonimae* II, lii and II, lxxi quoted by Richard Newhauser, “Towards a History of Human Curiosity: A Prolegomenon to Its Medieval Phase,” *Deutsche Vierteljahrschrift* 56 (1982), p. 562.

¹² Cf.: the first section under secondary sources, “High and Low: Challenges of Late Medieval Intellectual Quests,” in the bibliography.

sapere.” Translations were not only encouraged by the Wycliffite zeal for the vernacular renderings of the Scripture. The Northern Pauline Epistles of North East Midlands origin, conserved in MS Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, Parker 32 written by a 15th-century hand, seem, according to their editor Margaret Joyce Powell, “orthodox in origin,” showing “no evidence of Wycliffite learnings,” and probably intended “for the private study of educated persons.” As she suggests, it may well have been used by a teacher in school such as that attended by the chaplains of the Carnary Chapel at Worcester, whose audience was capable to follow the Latin text while he read it.”¹³ The translator-glossator of the text is consistent in rendering the word “sapere” – in both, closely related Pauline verses, containing the expression, Rom. 11:20 and Rom. 12:3 - with the Middle English “sauowre/sauoure” which abounds in numerous semantic connotations:

Tu autem fide stas, noli altum sapere sed time [Rom 11:20]. Þerfore þou standys thurgh þe feith; þerfore ne wille þou sauowre to heghe but drede. [...] Dico enim per gratiam que data est michi in omnibus qui sunt inter vos non plus sapere quam oportet sapere sed sapere ad sobrietatem; et unicuique sicut deus diuisit mensuram fidei [Rom. 12:3]. Þerfore I sey thurgh þe grace þat is gifen me to alle þe whilke ben a mong 3ou; no more for to sauoure but to sauoure to sobrenesse; and to vche one I bidee to sauoure as god has deuysed þe mesure of þe feyth.¹⁴

The *Northern Pauline Epistles* belongs to a larger group of late 14th and early 15th-century renderings of the New Testament into English, which attest to a growing interest in providing also a vernacular access to the Bible. Out of the extant versions, four originate from the North, and one (the *Southern Pauline Epistles*) from the South.¹⁵ Anne Paues studied five related manuscripts, containing a version of the Acts and Catholic Epistles with parts of St. Matthew’s Gospel in the Southern dialect (with a slightly different content in MS Cambridge, Selwyn College 108. L. I., containing the Pauline Epistles and the Epistles of James, Peter and John).¹⁶ Since the Roman Epistle is fragmentary, Rom. 11:20 is not available in the MSS, but the extant passage of Rom. 12:3 reads as follows: “I seye, þoro3 þe grace of God þat is y-3efe me, to alle þilke þat beþ among 3ow, þat 3e ne safereþ no more þan it byhofeþ 3ow to saferen; bote þat 3e saferen to sobernesse, & eferych man as God haþ departed to hym þe mesure of

¹³ *The Pauline Epistles Contained in MS Parker 32, Corpus Christi College, Cambridge*. Edited by Margaret Joyce Powell for the EETS. (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner and Co., Ltd., 1916), pp. liii, lvi and lxvi.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 34-5 and 37.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. liii.

¹⁶ Cf. the account of MSS for her edition in *A Fourteenth-Century English Biblical Version*. Edited by Anna Carolina Paues. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1904), pp. xi-xxiii.

bylife.”¹⁷ Both Northern and Southern translations of the respective passages seem to be based on the same established practice of rendering “sapere” with “sauoure.”

The translation of the lexeme and its interpretation with an English word that was associated both with the intellectual and spiritual spheres transplanted the problem, lingering originally over the ambiguity of the Latin phrase, into vernacular literary and exegetical works. The use of “sauoure,” accredited by the Wycliffite Bible, seems to be an accepted translational practice by the 15th century. The Wycliffite Bible exactly anticipates the phrasing of the *Northern Pauline Epistles* as well as of the Southern version of the New Testament renderings:

*[Rom. 11:20] Wel, for vnbileue the braunchis ben brokun; but thou stondist bi feith. Nyle thou sauere hize thing, but drede thou, for if God sparide not the kyndli braunchis, lest perauenture he spare not thee. [Rom. 12:3] For Y seie, bi the grace that is zouun to me, to alle that ben among zou, that ze sauere no^r more than it bihoueth to sauere, but for to sauere to sobrenesse; and to ech man, as God hath departid the mesure of feith.*¹⁸

But, as witnessed by the early 15th-century Lollard tract, entitled *The Lanterne of List*, the Wycliffite translation was not at all authoritative within the same cultural and spiritual tradition either. The *Lanterne* quotes Rom. 11:20 in an unusual context, in the exposition on the third Commandment. The evocation of St. Paul’s caution is inserted into the elaboration on the idea of the necessary fear of God, which can be manifest in several forms: keeping the Sabbath or God’s biddings:

Loo hou streiztli þe Iewis kepten Goddis bidding and hou God smot hem wiþ bodili peyne whanne þat þei dide forfet. But cristen men maken her boost þat þei ben more perfist in seruyse of her Lord God. Þan euer were þe Iewis. Who þat euer mekeli prouep his word in dede þanne mai he seie boldli þat þis tyme of grace is of more perfeccioun per vertu of þe sacramentis and fredom of þe gospel þan was Moises lawe and þou a more perfite man in keping þis perfeccioun. But and þou be apostataa in breking of Goddis heestis þanne is peyne so miche þe more. As Poul seide to þe Romayns /Ro. xi^o/ ‘Tu autem fide stas. Noli altum sapere sed time. Si enim deus naturalibus ramis non pepercit, ne forte nec tibi parcat.’ Þat is to seye, forsoþe þou

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 54.

¹⁸ *The New Testament in English according to the Version by John Wycliffe about AD 1380 and Revised by John Purvey about AD 1388*. Edited by Josiah Forshall and Frederic Madden. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1879), pp. 324 and 328.

*stondist in þe feiþ. Nyle þou be proude, ne beere þee neuere þe hizer, but abide þou mekeli in þe holi drede of þe Lord.*¹⁹

The alternative, given to “noli altum sapere,” evidently attaches to the tradition that interpreted the Christian attitude criticized by St. Paul as haughtiness and pride. In the context, the author of the tract does not rely at all on the burdened intellectual associations of this passage, but clearly indicates that Paul’s message is valid for the moral part of human behaviour.

The emerging mode of interpreting Paul’s caution in Rom. 11:20 and Rom. 12:3 in frames of moral considerations is, by far, not dominant in 15th-century English literary texts. Besides the *Lanterne*-author’s risky attempt to argue with a non-conventional reading of Rom. 11:20, Bishop Reginald Pecock’s *Reule of Crysten Religioun* attests to another experiment with removing the notion of intellectual taboo, attached to the exegesis of Rom. 11:20 (and 12:3). The quote of Rom. 12:3, in chapter 14 of the book, appears as a parallel argument with the immediately preceding references to the Gospel parables of “the lilies of the field” and “the fowls of the air” (Mt. 6:26 / Lk. 12:24 and Mt. 6:28-30 / Lk. 12:27-8). Pecock applies the Roman passage to illustrate the idea that it inherently cautions humans not to transgress their natural deeds. Surprisingly, this indirect comment on Rom. 12:3 almost pushes the interpretation to the context of the dangers of grudging against material discomfort:

*Dis bisynes aboute mete and cloop here defedi[d], and bi hem in lijk skile al bisynes aboute al opere þingis of oure ese and profijt, is to be vndirstonde of bisynes to haue þingis whiche oure naturalis for þe while stretchen not to or in maner in which oure naturalis for þe while mowe not stretchen hem to, as þin apostil poul forfendiþ þe same in his epistle to romayns þe xij^e chapiter where he seiþ þus: “ffor y seie by þe grace which is zouen to me alle þat ben among zou, þat þat ze sauere not more þan it bihouyþ to sauere but forto sauere to sobirnes.”*²⁰

Nevertheless, it becomes clear from a continuous reading of chapters 13 and 14 that Pecock intended to apply Rom. 12:3 as an illustration to an argument treated in ambitious lengths. Paul’s caution together with the preceding Gospel passages elaborate on the idea that humans “should not rely upon God’s help except to win spiritual goods or to escape peril”²¹:

¹⁹ *The Lanterne of Lizte*. Edited from MS Harl. 2324 by Lilian M. Swinburn. EETS. (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner and Co., Ltd., 1917), pp. 91-2.

²⁰ *The Reule of Crysten Religioun by Reginald Pecock*. Edited from Pierpont Morgan MS 519 by William Cabell Greet. EETS. (London: Oxford University Press, 1927), p. 440.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 436. (Greet’s marginal note)

[...] *it folewip herof þat we ouzten not neiþer we entende eny werke or eny eend natural – þat is to seie being wiþynne þe bondis of kynde – to be brouzt forþ bi vs, which werk or eend passip oure natural power and þe power of þe meenys whiche we mowe bringe þerto bi kinde.*²²

Compared to most literary evocations of Rom. 11:20 in the 15th century, Pecoock's transformation of St. Paul's warning into cautioning his reader that humans have to live with the moral imperative of shaping their own individual religious attitudes was, no wonder, an audacious step in interpreting the verse.

The texts under the scope of this dissertation are all heirs to the intellectually oriented exegesis of Rom. 11:20. The main question of this group of 15th-century Middle English works is not really what constitutes the right moral behaviour of man in order to be saved, nor do they question what theological truths have to be believed and interiorized for the same end. They rather focus on how to reach the certainty of having attained such truths; whether these are transmittable from person to person; whether there exists any authority which necessarily coincides with the possession of some kind of knowledge; whether knowledge and morality can be separated (if all knowledge is to seek the means of salvation); whether the works of the human intellect can also be justified on their own; or if the quests based on reason and on divine revelation are *ab ovo* following different paths, never to be reconciled within the same paradigm. All of the texts analyzed reflect on teaching, on the transmission of knowledge and the dissemination of truths in various forms. These inevitable questions as, e.g., the role of divine illumination in the acquisition of knowledge, the mystical emphasis on the burning love and the inner fire as opposed to the scholastic approach, or the conventional criticism of vain clerics and of *vana curiositas*, so, in general, the clash of "intellectual" and "anti-intellectual" (or anti-speculative)²³ currents, all resonate in the selected materials. They represent a common stock of academic arguments that left their original "intramural" setting and filtered into the world of literary texts.

In spite of the academically oriented nature of the literary texts of my choice and their indebtedness to the "intellectual" reinterpretation of Rom. 11:20, they are not representatives of what we could identify as a vast intellectual tradition. Except for some of Reginald Pecoock's proposals, they are not at all innovative in their arguments. Yet, they surprise the reader with dislocating the arguments to unusual contexts. The insistence on images of

²² Ibid.

²³ Heiko A. Oberman points out in his analysis of 14th-century religious thought that "anti-speculatism should not be confused with anti-intellectualism or intellectual tiredness." Cf.: Heiko A. Oberman, "Fourteenth-Century Religious Thought: A Premature Profile," *Speculum* 53 (1978), p. 86.

teaching, moreover on the institutional forms of teaching, by mystical texts or works closely associated with the mystical tradition seems just as striking as the enumeration of academic hierarchy at the beginning of a mystery episode. At a closer look, it becomes evident that the out-of-context, familiar arguments are arranged around the main theme (Rom. 11:20 and/or 12:3), figuring (implicitly or explicitly) in all of the texts. Thus we can see that these texts of very different literary traditions and backgrounds (Henry Suso's *Horologium Sapientiae* and one of its Middle English rendering, known as the *Seven Points of True Love and Everlasting Wisdom*, a mystery pageant from the *N-Town Cycle*, *The Moral Play of Wisdom*, and texts related to the Pecoock controversy) reflect on questions raised by the intramural world. The juxtaposition of these texts will also illustrate how the interpretation of Paul's Epistle to the Romans changed from context to context.

The "literary fervor" of the late 14th and 15th centuries, indicating that a new context was being formed to offer a forum for the discussion of a new paradigm of knowledge, can best be grasped in terms of their common language (a new vernacular terminology shared by all of them) and the common focus on some specific ways of acquiring knowledge. The voices and the representation of the characters of the fictitious scenes or visions in these works do not only provide different narrative methods for the literary discussion of philosophical and theological problems, but also amplify a more abstract underlying issue, that of authority. If the works of Reginald Pecoock (first bishop of Saint Asaph, then translated to the see of Chichester in the mid-15th century), are approached with the purport of these literary pieces in mind, we may not only find an echo of the same intellectual concerns in his writings, but we may also come to the conclusion that Pecoock's works are not solitary giants in the 15th-century English literary field (as his writings used to be considered by many scholars).

CHAPTER 1

THE LITERARY CORPUS

The corpus of texts has been selected according to a sole criterion which unites the works of very different backgrounds, genres and characteristics under a common theme. All of them are non-academic writings evoking literally Rom 11:20, or paraphrasing the warning of this particular verse of St. Paul's. The writings related to the Pecoock controversy, however, are to some extent exceptions to the organising principle of the corpus, since, in their case, it is rather the perception of Pecoock's works by his opponents than Pecoock's works themselves that can be drawn into the context of St. Paul's reinterpretation. The presentation of texts and manuscripts in this chapter will attest to the diversity of sources under scrutiny. The analyses of the following chapters, however, will point out how the central ideas extant everywhere, i.e. the fear of, and the desire after, transgressing the limits of supposed intellectual barriers, unites this heterogeneous selection of writings. In this chapter, questions of interpretation will be taken into consideration only as far as it is inevitable to indicate the role of St. Paul's warning in the context of the literary work. Since the following presentation of the literary corpus serves to provide contexts (both historical and critical) for the ensuing analyses of the dissertation, it will not yet purpose to answer the questions implied by such an eclectic corpus: (1) Is there a deeper cohesion between the individual texts besides their shared awareness of the exegetical traditions of Rom. 11:20 and their evident contribution to the late medieval chapter of exegetical history? (2) Can the evocation of Rom. 11:20 (and controversies related to it) be associated with similar concerns and quests in the individual works? (3) Finally, is it possible to perceive these texts as representatives of the same attempt at creating alternative modes of discourse on knowledge, revising academic (or non-academic, but authoritative) restrictions on intellectual quests?

1.1. Mystical Texts

One of the earliest occurrences of Rom. 11:20, which does not belong to the exegetical tradition or to the group of academic warnings against vain scholarly speculations, is most probably the English rendering of the *Consilia* (or *Monita*) *Isidori*, "a collection of moral admonitions to good conduct arranged in brief paragraphs [which was] originally intended for

a religious audience.”¹ All of its extant 17 manuscripts, among which 4 distinct groups can be established, originate from the 15th century, and prove the work’s immense popularity among 15th-century lay and clerical audience. Two of them, both belonging to version C, were composed in the first decade of the 15th century, while the rest in the second half of the 1400s.² Several manuscripts as well as scholars of the 18th and 19th centuries agreed ascribing the English translation to Richard Rolle († 1349), thus assuming an earlier date of composition than the likewise hypothetical date of the arrival of Suso’s *Horologium Sapientiae* in England (ca. 1375)³. Carl Horstman, however, edited *The Counsels of Saint Isidore* among the works wrongly attributed to Richard Rolle; he still attributed it to one of the mystic’s followers.⁴ Although no alternative suggestion for the author’s identity has been put forward, we seem to face a manuscript (and an early scholarly tradition) which is very much convinced of the *Counsels*’ provenance from “Rolle’s school.” This assumption has important implications for the discussion of intellectual taboos in the English mystical tradition: it seems that, even before “the penetration of continental devotional literature in England,”⁵ which was marked by the arrival of Suso’s *Horologium Sapientiae* and its adaptation for the need of a different (and English) audience, there had already been a native devotional-mystical tradition also reflecting upon St. Paul’s warning to the Romans. At the same time, the analysis of the context of the respective passage from St. Paul’s epistle to the Romans in the following two chapters will also make it evident that the treatment of Rom. 11:20, and consequently the attitudes to seek higher things intellectually, significantly differs within the English mystical tradition both before and after the dissemination of Suso’s *Horologium Sapientiae*. The width of the spectrum of attitudes to intellectual quests among the English mystics is best illustrated by the two extreme poles: while the *Horologium* presents an individual spiritual journey pursued from study to study (and from school to school) in the quest to solve a personal dilemma, the text of the English *Consilia* is not even aware of the presence of a dilemma. The nature of proverbial wisdom literature, another tradition to which *The Counsels of Saint Isidore* shows much indebtedness, is simply not

¹ Albert E. Hartung, ed., *A Manual of the Writings in Middle English 1050-1500*. Vol. 7. (New Haven: The Connecticut Academy of Arts and Sciences, 1986), p. 2323. The original Latin *Consilia* was edited by Jean-Paul Migne’s *Patrologiae Cursus Completus, Patrologia Latina (PL)*, 83, 845.

² The two earliest MSS are MS Oxford, Bodleian Library Laud misc. 23 and MS Henry E. Huntington HM 744.

³ For the discussion of the first manuscripts of Suso’s *Horologium* reaching England, cf.: Roger Lovatt, “Henry Suso and the Medieval Mystical Tradition in England,” in Marion Glasscoe, ed., *The Medieval Mystical Tradition in England*. (Exeter: Exeter University Press, 1982), pp. 47-62, esp. 47-9.

⁴ *Yorkshire Writers: Richard Rolle of Hampole, an English Father of the Church and His Followers*. Vol. II. Edited by Karl Horstmann. (London: Sonnenschein, 1895-6), “Curiosite,” p. 2: 373. The basis for this edition is MS Harley 1706, which records version C.

⁵ A. S. G. Edwards, *Middle English Prose: A Critical Guide to Major Authors and Genres*. (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1984), p. 161.

compatible with the exposition of more intricate doubts, questioning the world of categorical imperatives.

The English mystical writings inspired by Suso's vision, under the scope of this dissertation, belong to the non-native current of English mysticism, i.e. translations and adaptations of Suso's *Horologium Sapientiae*: the anonymous *Tretys of þe Seven Poyntes of Trewe Loue and Euerlastynge Wisdame*⁶ and "scene 1" of *The Play of Wisdom*.⁷ Chapters 2 and 3 will apply a method of discussing the *Horologium* and its Middle English adaptations against the background of the most influential representatives of the "native" mystical tradition.

1.1.1. Suso's *Horologium Sapientiae* and Its Middle English Renderings

Henry Suso (ca. 1296-1366) entered the Dominican house of Constance at the age of fourteen. His studies with Master Eckhart in Cologne around 1320 gave him a determining impetus in his spirituality. After leaving Cologne, he returned to Constance to teach in his convent. The vicissitudes affecting both his individual contemplative life and the tranquillity of the Dominicans in Constance did not allow him to devote himself entirely to the ideal way of life he himself had envisaged in his *Book of Eternal Wisdom (Das Büchlein der ewigen Weisheit)*. At some point of the late 1320s or early 1330s, he was called to the Low Countries to account for his work and his questionable orthodoxy in front of the general chapter of his own order. He had to resign as lecturer from the Constance house. Soon afterwards, as a result of the conflict that had broken out between Pope John XXII and Emperor Louis of Bavaria in 1323, and escalated even beyond the death of the pope, the Dominicans had to leave Constance. Suso was appointed prior of the exiled community. He finished his life in absolute retirement in Ulm.⁸

My approach to the *Horologium Sapientiae* will follow the dominant view of scholarship: the Latin dialogue is Suso's own translation and partial rearrangement of his

⁶ The treatise is known under various titles and manuscript incipits; hereafter I will follow the incipit of the only modern edition of a complete text Middle English version (based on MS Oxford, Bodleian Library Douce 114) by Karl Horstmann, "*Orologium Sapientiae* or *The Seven Poyntes of Trewe Wisdom*, aus MS Douce 114," *Anglia* 10 (1888): 323-89.

⁷ The morality, often entitled as *Wisdom*, has also been edited under various titles; consequently, modern scholarship is also inconsistent in its references to this play. My usage follows the title of Milla Cozart Riggio's magnificent critical edition: *The Play of Wisdom: Its Texts and Contexts*. (New York: AMS Press, 1998). Although the play's division into "scenes" is not authenticated by any of the two extant MSS, Furnivall's division of the morality into scenes provides a practical device to structure the morality.

⁸ Jeanne Ancelet-Hustache, "Henri Suso," in Geneviève Hasenohr and Michel Zink, eds. gen., *Dictionnaire des lettres françaises. Le Moyen Age*. New edition of the first publication in 1964. (Fayard, 1994), pp. 675-6. For a detailed biography of Henry Suso, cf.: Pius Künzle, ed., *Heinrich Seuses Horologium Sapientiae*. Freiburg: Universitätsverlag Freiburg, 1977, pp. 1-18.

earlier German work, the *Büchlein der ewigen Weisheit*.⁹ This unusual turn from the vernacular to the Latin indicates, according to Pius Künzle OP, Suso's intention to spread the work among a wider public, beyond the German territory.¹⁰ It has also been conjectured that the Latin *Horologium* precedes the German *Büchlein der ewigen Weisheit*. Advocates of this proposition point out that the German work reveals Suso's later, "more mature" concept of suffering, not yet present in the Latin version.¹¹ The textual analysis especially concentrating on what the autobiographical allusions reveal about the author has led some scholars to assume the priority of the Latin version.¹²

The crux of the arguments is an allusion of the Latin prologue to the "originale huius operis," which some scholars identified with the German *Little Book of Eternal Wisdom*. Ancelet-Hustache questions this evidence and conjectures that the third part of the *Book of Eternal Wisdom*, written before the other two and omitted in the *Horologium*, might have circulated independently, even before the completion of the German book. According to her, this fragmented exemplar could have been "the original," which Suso compended with an abridged Latin version.¹³ Although this argument constructs a remarkably different context for the *Horologium* by applying a suspicious reading to all details that would lend themselves to the opposite reading by their face value, Ancelet-Hustache's interpretation risks its logical integrity at two points: (1) it is logically and semantically not convincing to claim that Suso meant under the expression "originale huius operis" (referring to the original "model" of the Latin work) a work unrelated in its content to the *Horologium*, since it was not incorporated into it; (2) Ancelet-Hustache also uses the argument which most scholars recite to defend the thesis of the priority of the German *Little Book of Eternal Wisdom*. It is supposed by a larger group of scholars that the switch from German into Latin serves the purpose of addressing a possibly larger readership than that of the German text, while Ancelet-Hustache reverses this

⁹ For a detailed summary of the controversies over the dating of the compositions, cf. Künzle, op. cit., pp. 19-27 and 28 et seqq. Künzle's authoritative stance is commonly accepted by Anglo-American literary scholars studying the spread of Suso's *Horologium* in England. Cf. Frank Tobin: "We do not know exactly when the LBEW was written, but the *Horologium sapientiae*, which builds upon the LBEW and definitely follows it, was finished in the first half of 1334." (Tobin, op. cit., p. 34.) See also Milla Cozart Riggio: "The *Orologium* was in part a Latin translation of an earlier German work of Suso's called *Das Büchlein der ewigen Weisheit*" (Milla Cozart Riggio, ed., *The Play of Wisdom: Its Texts and Contexts*. New York: AMS Press, 1998, p. 25) and Barbara Newman: "In creating the *Horologium*, Suso revised and expanded an earlier German work, the *Little Book of Eternal Wisdom* [...], even as he translated it into Latin." Barbara Newman, "Henry Suso and the Medieval Devotion to Christ the Goddess," *Spiritus* 2 (2002), p. 2.

¹⁰ Künzle, op. cit., p. 54.

¹¹ Winfried Zeller, "Előszó [preface]," in *Suso (Heinrich Seuse) misztikus írásai [The mystical writings of Suso (Heinrich Seuse)]*. Translated into Hungarian by Kulcsár F. Imre. Kairosz Kiadó, n. d, p. 8.

¹² Cf. Jeanne Ancelet-Hustache, Conrad Gröber and Quéatif-Echard in Jeanne-Ancelet-Hustache, ed., *Bienheureux Henri Suso. Oeuvres complètes*. Paris: Seuil, 1977, pp. 73-4.

¹³ Ancelet-Hustache, *Bienheureux Henri Suso*, p. 74.

opinion: “Surtout, écrivant en latin, *pour un milieu restreint par conséquent*, il pouvait se permettre de tancer les clercs, ses confrères, sans risquer de scandaliser la foule laïque des fidèles.”¹⁴ The future dissemination of the plethora of vernacular translations derived from the Latin text certainly refutes this second claim. Furthermore, Suso’s attitude to his own mother tongue at the end of the preface to the German *Little Book of Eternal Wisdom* questions his committedness to disseminate his mystical experience in the vernacular (even if “he wrote down the meditations and did it in German, because this is how they came to him from God”):

*Unlike as it is to hear for oneself the melody of sweet strings being played rather than merely to hear someone describe it, just so dissimilar are the words that are received in pure grace and flow out of a responsive heart through a fervent mouth to those same words written on dead parchment, especially in the German tongue [...] A heart void of love can understand a tongue rich in love as little as a German can understand an Italian.*¹⁵

Arguments for the posterior composition of the Latin work focus on the additions to the *Horologium*. The insertions of new motifs and themes in the Latin *Horologium* reveal that Suso did not only wish to confirm his spiritual experience, but also to reflect upon the crises of the period that elapsed between the composition and the translation. Although the dates of composition of both versions remain approximate, internal textual allusions (to the intellectual and political *cul-de-sac* of the Dominican order, of the organisation of studies as well as of the secular power) compel us to place the writing of the *Büchlein* in the second half of the 1320s, and the translation rather in the second half of the 1330s.¹⁶

Most of the new chapters and additions to the *Horologium* contain autobiographical elements, which indirectly relate to the phenomena of crises in the decade preceding the translation.¹⁷ Chapters I, 1 and II, 1, the latter of which elaborates on the theme of *Noli altum sapere*, constitute two important additions that have been interpreted by scholars not only as autobiographical reminiscences of Suso’s life, but also as a satirical mirroring of the struggle for the supreme secular power between Pope John XXII and Louis of Bavaria, on the one hand, and for the authority of intellectual power within the Church, on the other one. The

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 75 (italics mine).

¹⁵ *Henry Suso: The Exemplar, with Two German Sermons*. Translated, edited and introduced by Frank Tobin. Classics of Western Spirituality. (New York: Paulist Press, 1989), pp. 208 and 209.

¹⁶ Künzle (op. cit., p. 5) suggests 1334 for the composition of the *Horologium*. Wichgraf dates it to the same year, cf.: Wiltrud Wichgraf, “Susos *Horologium Sapientiae* in England nach Handschriften des 15. Jahrhunderts.” *Anglia* 53 (1929), p. 123.

¹⁷ Out of the entirely new chapters (*Horologium* I, 1 and 12; II, 1 and 6-8), II, 6-8 elaborate on the theme of *sponsa Christi*, while the others are all reflections on the disintegration of the life of the Dominicans, of the *studia* (and the studies in general), and on the possibility of the pursuit of a contemplative ideal in the turmoil of power struggles.

difficulty, at the same time the subtlety, of the new “autobiographical” chapters reside in the way Suso veiled his allusions to contemporary conflicts and persons with allegories appearing in the author’s visions. Most commentators on the first chapter of the *Horologium* (I, 1) accept that Suso’s allegory describes “the refusal of Pope John XXII to support Louis of Bavaria’s claims to the imperial crown as against those of Frederick of Austria.”¹⁸ The explanation of the vision of contemporary university education in Chapter II, 1 is less congruent in critical literature. J. A. Bizet considers this chapter as the extension of the theme of power struggle to the intellectual sphere, and identifies the “moderni” with William Ockham and his followers, backing the cause of Louis of Bavaria in the fight for investiture.¹⁹ Künzle, however, judges this interpretation improbable, since he draws into doubt that Suso could have been familiar with Ockham’s works in Cologne or in Constance.²⁰ According to him, *moderni* rather disguises “one contemplative *modernus*,” “*the doctor modernus*,” a *cognomen* under which Durandus of St. Pourçain became widely known by his contemporaries because of his views on Thomas Aquinas. Thus the passage could relate to the Aquinas-debate of 1309.²¹ The assumption that “Suso’s opinion of the state of the world [was] so thinly veiled that his 14th century readers probably had little difficulty in reading between the lines”²² was not contested by his 15th-century public, either. But the facts of the early 14th century seemed to be far away for the audience (or readers) of the fifteenth century. Therefore, the vision allegories, applying the clear contrasts of good and evil, tradition and modernity, and intellectual versus spiritual, easily offered themselves to more up-to-date historical explanations. Or, what happened to the English rendering was that the translator

¹⁸ J. A. Bizet’s interpretation is accepted and rephrased by Eleanor P. Spencer, “*L’Horloge de sapience*, Bruxelles, Bibl. roy. MS IV. 111,” *Scriptorium* 17 (1963), p. 287. The struggle for the *plenitudo potestatis* is not without the overtones of heresy. Louis was excommunicated by John XXII, nevertheless he enjoyed the general support of the German princes. The Bavarian king and German emperor retaliated the pope with charges of heresy, and appointed his own candidate, Nicholas V (1328) to the throne of St. Peter, who abdicated in 1330.

¹⁹ Cf. Künzle, op. cit., p. 48. The passage that is supposed to allude to a contemporary intellectual debate reads as follows: “Haec veritas [pila argentea (qui) significaret veritatem sacrae scripturae, lucidam et sonoram et incorruptibilem] a modernis quibusdam non tam studiose quaeritur quam impugnatur, dum quilibet non pro ipsa adipiscenda laborare videtur, sed totis viribus probare contendit, quod quivis alius ipsam veritatem nequamquam habeat; et ex hoc se ipsum praeferre et alium suppressere intendit. Et proinde fiunt improbationes, replicationes et opinionum novitates mirabiles, quae magis in admirationem ducunt, quam utilitati proficiant audientium.” (Künzle, op. cit., p. 523.)

²⁰ Künzle, op. cit., p. 48.

²¹ The debate still had its topicality in the years immediately preceding the *Horologium*. Künzle points out that the *doctor egregius* (p. 522) mentioned shortly before the debate-passage evidently refers to Thomas Aquinas, and thus places the contentions of the modern thinker(s) in the context of the debate going around the views of Aquinas. Hence, the “improbationes, replicationes et opinionum novitates” could refer to Durandus’s accounts for his own stance. Overall, this conflict also illustrates the idea of disintegration in Suso’s work, since it casts light upon a rivalry within the Dominican order.

²² Spencer, op. cit., p. 287.

deprived the text from its concrete historical resonance, and transformed the representation of the time-bound conflicts of Suso's work into more universal themes.

Suso's *Horologium Sapientiae* was conserved in 100 complete and 80 fragmentary copies.²³ The Middle English version of the complete text survives in eight manuscripts known (two without recommendation and preface).²⁴ Chapter 2 will only consider the MSS with the full text, since the English author-translator placed the passages of the *Horologium* elaborating on the theme, borrowed from St. Paul, to the beginning of the work. Therefore, even if an almost equal number of MSS were disseminated with extracts of points 4, 5 or 6, their contents do not concern the theme of intellectual taboos; consequently, they will not be treated later. An overview of the transmission of the fragments can, however, add important notions to the background of the MSS with the full text.

Points 4, 5 and 6 were disseminated also independently from *The Seven Points*, but because of the intricacies of the textual transmission and the significantly different versions of the same passages, scholarship does not agree on what to consider an extract of the *Horologium* or an independent translation. Lagorio and Sargent list six MSS containing extracts (mostly points 4 and 5) and three groups of independent translations of point 5 containing 4 MSS.²⁵ A last MS with which we can complete Lagorio and Sargent's most exhaustive list is given by Künzle: MS Cambridge, University Library Ii 4. 9 contains "short meditations on the Eucharist" extracted from the end of point 5 of the Middle English *Horologium*.²⁶ In the group of the MSS containing fragments, MS BL Add. 37049 merits special attention. This is the only English illustrated MS containing Suso's work besides other

²³ Künzle, op. cit., pp. 28-54. Cf. also Riggio, op. cit., p. 25.

²⁴ Valerie M. Lagorio and Michael Sargent provide the most complete list of MSS with the full text: 1. Oxford, Bodl., Douce 114; 2. Oxford, Bodl., Tanner 398; 3. Cambridge, Gonville and Caius College 390 (610); 4. Aberystwyth, National library of Wales, Porkington 19; 5. Cambrai, Bibl. mun. 255; 6. New York, Columbia University Library, Plimpton 256 and the MSS with the full text without preface: 7. Oxford, Bodl., e Museo 111; 8. Cambridge, Corpus Christi College 268. ("English Mystical Writings," in Albert E. Hartung, ed., *A Manual of the Writings in Middle English, 1050-1500*. Vol. 9. New Haven, The Connecticut Academy of Arts and Sciences, 1993, p. 3466.) Künzle does not know about the Plimpton MS (cf. the list of ME MSS in Künzle, op. cit., pp. 268-70.)

²⁵ MSS containing fragments: 1. Oxford, Bodl., Douce 322 (point 5); 2. Cambridge, University Library Ff 5. 45. (point 4, according to Künzle point 5); 3. Cambridge, University Library Hh 1. 11. (part of point 6); 4. BL Add. 37049 (part of point 4 and point 5); 5. BL Add. 37790 (part of point 4); 6. BL Harley 1706 (point 5). Independent translations of point 5 (the chapter on "ars moriendi") are grouped into three versions: a) Lichfield, Cath. Lib. 6; b) Oxford, Bodl., Bodley 789 and Glasgow, University Library, Hunterian 496; c) Hoccleve's translation in "Ars Sciendi Moriendi." Lagorio and Sargent, op. cit., p. 3466; cf. also the bibliographical notes to "To kunne to dize" ("Scire mori") in Albert E. Hartung, ed., *A Manual of the Writings in Middle English, 1050-1500*. Vol. 7. (New Haven: The Connecticut Academy of Arts and Sciences, 1986), p. 2365. According to Lovatt, the *ars moriendi* chapter of Suso's *Horologium* was rendered three times into English prose: "On two occasions it was translated as an independent text [the earlier version being MS Bodl., Bodl. 789, the later MS Lichfield, Cathedral Lib. 6]. On the third it was included almost *in toto* in the generally much abbreviated English version of the complete *Horologium*. Then, in this form, the chapter was again removed from its source and circulated as a separate work [MS BL Harley 1706]." Lovatt, op. cit., p. 56.

²⁶ Künzle, op. cit., p. 269.

devotional and instructional treatises and poems. A series of illustrations at the end of the MS, however, strangely contrasts to all the other images visualising the most commonly recurring themes in popular devotion (the wounds of Christ on the Cross, the *vir dolorum*, scenes of the Crucifixion, the Virgin Mary as mediator, the *arma Christi* and the horrors of death). A set of several devotional writings, ranging from ff. 85 to 96, is framed by the recurring figures of a young scholar and a reverent doctor facing each other. The highly unusual visual frame of institutional setting enters into a dialogue with the content of the instructional texts they relate to. This interrelation of spiritual instruction and institutional learning appears as a visual commentary on academic authorities in a context where instruction by spiritual guidance was least expected to be confirmed by the visual reminiscences of the academic *milieu*. This unique attempt at a visual reflection on academia in an extramural MS will be discussed at the end of Chapter 3.

The Middle English rendering of the *Horologium Sapientiae* was also published in five exemplars by Caxton in ca. 1490 together with *The Seven Profits of Tribulation* and *The Rule of St. Benet*. This late 15th-century print clearly marks out the context of late medieval popular devotion (both lay and religious) to which Suso's *Horologium* was assigned by its public.²⁷ While manuscripts of Suso's *Horologium*, and occasionally of its English rendering, were largely circulated in Carthusian houses and educational establishments like the Eton College or the two English universities, the English rendering found typically way to "two groups who do not in general seem to have been familiar with the Latin text: that is women, both secular and religious, and laymen."²⁸ As a result of this immensely heterogeneous readership, Suso's work underwent several transformations through which this unique representative of the late Rhineland mysticism was adapted to the very momentary (and mostly practical) needs of its 15th-century English audience. This is how *The Play of Wisdom*, incorporating long sections of *The Seven Points*, can be classified among texts continuing the mystical tradition inspired by Suso's import to England.

1.1.2. *The Play of Wisdom*

A more-than-one-century old debate over the question of whether there is any interest – besides the scholarly one – in reading the morality of *Wisdom* has loomed over scholarship.

²⁷ Wichgraf, op. cit., p. 123 and Künzle, op. cit., p. 269. Both Lovatt and Riggio date Caxton's edition to 1491. "In 1491 Caxton printed the English version as *The Treatise of the Seven Points of True Love* in a volume entitled *The Book of Divers Ghostly Matters* (STC 3305; the only complete copy is in CUL [AB 4, 64]; the incomplete Pierpont Morgan Library PML 704 is one of the five known copies)." Riggio, op. cit., p. 25.

²⁸ Lovatt, op. cit., pp. 50-2.

As Donald C. Baker summarises the history of the play's critical evaluations, he suggests that the morality has been put under unjustified attacks:

In the most recent survey of the drama, that of the Revels volumes, we find the following, on the whole, thoughtful remarks: "Wisdom is probably the least likely of the fifteenth century moral plays to find favor with a modern audience. It is scrupulously didactic, and seems to be intended for performance indoors to an educated company (perhaps of church dignitaries, undergraduates, lawyers or senior schoolboys) who are accustomed to hearing long discourses punctuated by passages of Latin and will accept a generous helping of pageantry, music and dancing to argument a most meagre allowance of dramatic action." There is much that is condemning in this passage, but it at least is an improvement upon the kinds of dismissal the play has received in the past. The passage is, in its copyright, little more than a year old, and is plucked from a volume which, though not intending the kind of coverage provided by Craig's outdated book, certainly intends serious, and, on the whole, sympathetic, coverage for students of a subject to which the writers have devoted many years. If thus treated by its friends, what need Wisdom to expect from its enemies?²⁹

What appears to be his conclusion is that a debate over tastes has pretended to be a clash of scholarly arguments. This, however, has determined much of the modern academic discourse on *Wisdom*, whose sharp reflections on contemporaneous notions of the acquisition of knowledge and learning have been revived and recontextualised to comment indirectly on the academic conventions and practices of the 20th century.

Chapter 3 of the dissertation will contribute with more in-depth observations to the ambivalent stance of scholarship concerning the place to be ascribed to the play in the canon. The following survey of the two surviving texts of the morality, however, indicates that a large portion of the difficulties of the play's assessment can be traced back to the lacunose conclusions the two manuscripts permit to draw concerning the morality's larger - theatrical, textual and socio-cultural – context.

The Moral Play of Wisdom survives in two manuscripts, MSS Washington, D.C., Folger Library V. a. 354 (known as the Macro MS after Revd Cox Macro, the 18th-century owner of the manuscripts of three independent plays – *Wisdom*, *Mankind* and *The Castle of Perseverance*, which were bound in one as late as 1819), and Oxford, Bodleian Library,

²⁹ Donald C. Baker, "Is *Wisdom* a Professional Play?" in Milla Cozart Riggio, ed., *The Wisdom Symposium: Papers from the Trinity College Medieval Festival*. (New York: AMS Press, 1986), pp. 68-9.

Digby 133 (known as the Digby MS after Sir Kenelm Digby, who got the MS in 1632 from his tutor Thomas Allen). This latter contains only a 752-line fragment of the whole play on ff. 158-69v. A group of moralities in the second part of the manuscript (collectively referred to as the Digby Plays: *Mary Magdalen*, *Candlemas Day* and *the Kylling of the children of Israelle*, and the incomplete play of *Wisdom*) is preceded by various treatises on astrological and scientific matters (in the broadest sense), including a tract *de Capite et Cauda Draconis* (ff. 57-7), and a *Trattato dell'Arte Geomantica* (ff. 61-94v, incomplete, early 17th century) as well as writings by Galileo and Roger Bacon (ff. 1-36, the first bearing the date of 1616, while the second 1551). The fourth play of the manuscript, *The Conversion of Saint Paul* interrupts the thematic unity of astrological treatises, and is inserted between Roger Bacon's *Radix Mundi* and a brief tract entitled *De Theorica Trium Superiorum (Planetarum)* on ff. 37-50v. The originally distinct items were recollected in one manuscript the dates of whose contents range from the late 15th century to 1616.³⁰

The Macro MS conserves the entire text of *Wisdom* with the omission of some lines extant in the Digby version, which, according to Milla Cozart Riggio, were left unnoticed by the copyist of the Macro MS due to the fact that almost all of them are tail-rhyming lines appearing irregularly on the margins of the Digby text.³¹ In 1819, the three morality plays of the Macro MS were compiled into one MS together with three other plays, in which *Wisdom* was followed by *Mankind* and *The Castle of Perseverance*. In 1820, the three Macro plays were bound in a separate volume in a new order, *Mankind* preceding *Wisdom*. In 1971, the MS was unbound to facilitate David Bevington's facsimile edition.³²

Scholarly investigation has come to opine various possible, even contradictory, links between the two versions of *Wisdom* in the two manuscripts. There is no agreement on the chronological priority of one over the other. Furnivall assumes that the texts were copied by the same scribe, which does not easily explain the consistent differences in spelling conventions.³³ Marc Eccles claims that the texts are independent from each other, the Digby version being later than the one in the Macro MS. Donald C. Baker and John L. Murphy

³⁰ For a detailed description of the Digby MS, cf.: Donald C. Baker and John L. Murphy, eds., *The Digby Plays: Facsimiles of the plays in Bodley MSS Digby 133 and e Museo 160*. Medieval Drama Facsimiles 3. (Leeds: The University of Leeds, School of English, 1976), p. vii; Donald C. Baker, John L. Murphy and Louis B. Hall, eds., *The Late Medieval Religious Plays of Bodleian MSS Digby 133 and e Museo 160*. EETS. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), p. ix; Richard Beadle, "Prolegomena to a literary geography of later medieval Norfolk," in Felicity Riddy, ed., *Regionalism in Late Medieval Manuscripts and Texts: Essays Celebrating the Publication of A Linguistic Atlas of Late Mediaeval English*. (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1991), p. 107; Milla Cozart Riggio, ed., *The Play of Wisdom: Its Texts and Contexts*. (New York: AMS Press, 1998), p. 1;

³¹ Riggio, *The Play of Wisdom*, p. 6.

³² Ibid., p. 3, and Mark Eccles, ed., *The Macro Plays: The Castle of Perseverance, Wisdom, Mankind*. EETS. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969), p. vii.

³³ Riggio, *The Play of Wisdom*, p. 6.

maintain that “the Digby text is far more accurate; certainly not copied from Macro. They were both probably derived from the same exemplar.”³⁴ Riggio, however, argues that it is not necessary to assume the existence of a “phantom text.” She lists numerous arguments to prove that “the Macro *Wisdom* [was] almost certainly copied from Digby.”³⁵ Such arguments, even if hypothetical, are crucial to establish the wider context of the composition and the textual transmission of *Wisdom*, since any assumption about a direct relationship between the two manuscripts necessarily implies a closer link between their respective contexts than the signatures, initials, notes and other sorts of annotations appearing on the folios permit us to outline.

In the Digby MS, the signature and initials of Myles Blomefylde appear on three folios of three different plays (*The Conversion of St. Paul*, *Mary Magdalen* and *Wisdom*).³⁶ Blomefylde was born in Bury St. Edmunds in 1525. He attended Cambridge University, and was licensed to practice physic in 1552. He lived in Chelmsford, Essex for most of the rest of his life until his death in 1603. The collection of texts in the Digby MS attests to his interest both as a physician (and natural scientist) as well as an antiquarian. Baker and Murphy do not only conclude that “the Digby plays were in Chelmsford for a part of their history,” but also discuss the possibility of their provenance from the monastery of Bury St. Edmunds. The link between Bury and Chelmsford could have been William Blomfield of the same family, who was a monk in Bury before the dissolution of the monastery, and became an alchemist and a dissenting preacher. According to another theory Myles could have acquired the plays from the Chelmsford play book which was taken into “the charge of the church wardens of whom Myles was one from 1582 to 1590. Recent research has produced substantial evidence for the theory that at least two of the Digby plays were acted at Chelmsford in the early 1560s.”³⁷

The possessor’s note on f. 121 in the Macro MS reads as follows: “O liber si quis cui constas forte queretur / Hynghamque monacho dices super omnia consto.”³⁸ The mention of a monk called Hyngham (claimed to be the possessor of the manuscript according to the testimony of the inscription) has given rise to several conjectures concerning his identity. The name most probably derives from a place in Norfolk, close to Norwich. Obviously, the ascription of the ownership to any of the concretely identifiable Hynghams in the Norfolk area affects all arguments related to the supposed date and circumstances of composition, to

³⁴ Baker and Murphy, eds., *The Digby Plays: Facsimiles*, p. ix.

³⁵ Riggio, *The Play of Wisdom*, pp. 6-15.

³⁶ Baker and Murphy, eds., *The Digby Plays: Facsimiles*, p. vii.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. ix.

³⁸ Eccles, ed., *The Macro Plays*, p. xxvii and Riggio, *The Play of Wisdom*, p. 5.

the provenance of the play as well as to the hypothetical links with the Digby MS. The popularity of the name “Hengham” is attested by the city records of Norwich.³⁹

Not until Richard Beadle’s study, published in 1995, was the ownership of one of the Hynghams confirmed over all the other possible alternatives. Walter K. Smart’s study on the sources of *Wisdom* suggested that Richard Hengham, abbot of the monastery at Bury between 1474 and 1479 might have been the first possessor of the manuscript.⁴⁰ Marc Eccles advanced another hypothesis that ascribed the possession of the book to a certain Thomas Hyngham/Hengham, monk of Norwich owning two Latin manuscripts, who left his name as possessor in a 15th-century manuscript of John Walton’s Boëthius translation.⁴¹ Riggio adds two other monks known in the vicinity of Norwich after the 1470s: George Hengham, whom we meet in 1492 in the Norwich Cathedral Priory later to be transferred to King’s Lynn as a prior, and John Hengham, who was disciplined in Wymondham in 1514.⁴² Richard Beadle demonstrated that two Thomas Hynghams were conflated. The possessor’s inscription in the Macro MS was written in the same hand as the signature by Thomas Hyngham, monk of Bury, in the manuscript containing Walton’s translation of Boëthius’ *Consolation of Philosophy*.⁴³ This Thomas is, however, not identical with Thomas Hengham, a Benedictine monk of Norwich, whose handwriting appears in two manuscripts (MSS Cambridge, University Library li. 3. 10 and Edinburgh, National Library of Scotland 6125).⁴⁴ The demonstration of this argument by Beadle provided the first time sufficient support to consider Thomas Hyngham the first possessor of the Macro *Wisdom*, and thus, to claim a Bury provenance for the MS.

Assumptions about the play’s provenance from Bury prevailed in the tentative reconstructions of *Wisdom*’s actual performance and of its audience. In their edition of the Digby plays, Donald C. Baker, John L. Murphy and Louis B. Hall maintain the possibility of the play’s association with the monastery of Bury.⁴⁵ The staging of a modern production of the morality in 1984 at Trinity College, in conjunction with which the *Wisdom* Symposium was organised, was also based on accepting this hypothetical link with Bury. To support the directors’ choice of a monastic setting, Milla Cozart Riggio provided textual evidence for a

³⁹ Riggio, *The Play of Wisdom*, p. 5.

⁴⁰ Smart quoted by Riggio, *The Play of Wisdom*, p. 4. Cf. also Gail McMurray Gibson, “The Play of *Wisdom* and the Abbey of St. Edmund,” *Comparative Drama* 19 (1985), p. 118.

⁴¹ Eccles, *The Macro Plays*, p. xxviii.

⁴² Riggio, *The Play of Wisdom*, p. 5.

⁴³ Richard Beadle, “Monk Thomas Hyngham’s Hand in the Macro MS,” in Richard Beadle and A. J. Piper, eds., *New Science out of Old Books: Studies in Manuscripts and Early Printed Books in Honour of A. J. Doyle*. (Aldershot: Scholar Press, 1995), p. 316.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ Baker, Murphy and Hall, eds., *The Late Medieval Religious Plays*, p. lxxi.

monastic performance.⁴⁶ Gail McMurray Gibson's article in the same volume elaborates on the links between Bury and the performance of *Wisdom*, and argues that a play that staged the power struggles between the spiritual and the secular realms could have reflected most accurately upon a monastery manoeuvring with utter care in the intricacies of dynastic secular politics.⁴⁷ "But, as Alexandra Johnston pointed out, identifying the manuscripts with the Abbey and assuming the play to have been performed there are different matters."⁴⁸

Arguments focusing on other central themes than the contemplative one, as e.g. the satire of the legal world or the stage picture and other elements suggesting a lavish secular entertainment, have led to other possible reconstructions of the play's performance. John J. Molloy argued for a lay audience, more specifically for a performance acted out by students at an Inn of Court.⁴⁹ Chambers took it for granted that the text's internal allusions to place names reveal its origin: "An allusion to the Holborn quest suggests a London origin."⁵⁰ The scenic effects and the large number of actors led Merle Fifield to assume a performance by a professional travelling company, which Eccles rejected in his edition.⁵¹ Bevington considers the play as a "precursor of the troupe-play," intended for both monastic and more general audiences.⁵² Finally, concrete propositions for aristocratic households have been put forward. Milton M. Gatch argued for the possibility that *Wisdom* "may have been played at the bishop of Ely's palace in Holborn for an audience of lawyers,"⁵³ while Alexandra F. Johnston advanced two further alternatives, not yet considered by scholarship: (1) the seat of the

⁴⁶ Milla C. Riggio, "The Staging of *Wisdom*," in *The Wisdom Symposium*, p. 5.

⁴⁷ Gail McMurray Gibson, "The Play of *Wisdom* and the Abbey of St. Edmunds," in Milla C. Riggio, ed., *The Wisdom Symposium*, pp. 39-66.

⁴⁸ Riggio, "The Staging of *Wisdom*," p. 5. Alexandra Johnston develops another theory which reconciles the play's strong connections with Bury with the equally strong suggestions based on other textual evidence that the performance of the play is most befitting a secular aristocratic household: "[a]lthough one can argue that the satire contained in the Will passages was directed particularly at the courtly part of the audience and not at the clerical, it makes equally good sense to argue that the play was commissioned by a great magnate and played in his house to a predominantly courtly audience with some clerics in attendance. I am not here attempting to dissociate the play entirely from Bury. Clearly the connection between Abbot Hengham and the play is very strong. However, we know Lydgate wrote for the court although he was associated with the abbey. I suggest that it is equally possible that this play was commissioned from the abbey by a serious-minded local magnate who was prepared to pay for lavish entertainments." (Alexandra F. Johnston, "*Wisdom* and the Records: Is There a Moral?" in Milla C. Riggio, *The Wisdom Symposium*, p. 96.

⁴⁹ John Joseph Molloy, "A Theological Interpretation of the Moral Play, *Wisdom, Who Is Christ*," PhD dissertation. (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1952), p. 198 and Baker, Murphy and Hall, eds., *The Late Medieval Religious Plays*, p. lxxi.

⁵⁰ E. K. Chambers, *The Medieval Stage*. Vol. 2. (Minneapolis, New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1996; unabridged republication in one volume of the work originally published in two volumes by Oxford University Press, London, 1903), p. 438.

⁵¹ Baker, Murphy and Hall, eds., *The Late Medieval Religious Plays*, p. lxxi.

⁵² David Bevington, *From Mankind to Marlowe: Growth of Structure in the Popular Drama of Tudor England*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962), p. 50.

⁵³ Milton M. Gatch, "Mysticism and Satire in the Morality of *Wisdom*," *Philological Quarterly* 53 (1974), pp. 358-60. Cf. also Riggio, *The Play of Wisdom*, pp. 76-7.

Howards, Dukes of Norfolk, at Stoke-by-Nayland, and (2) the household of the family of John de la Pole, Duke of Suffolk, at Wingfield.⁵⁴

The study of the intertexts of *Wisdom* seems to have resulted in more reassuring conclusions than that of its texts. Walter K. Smart identified the following sources whose fragments were literally inserted into the morality: Suso's *Horologium Sapientiae*, Walter Hilton's *Scale of Perfection* (both books 1 and 2), Hilton's *Epistle on Mixed Life*, the *Meditationes de cognitione humanae conditionis* and a *Tractatus de intriori domo* attributed to St. Bernard, Bonaventura's *Soliloquium*, the *Novem virtutes* ascribed to Richard Rolle and Rolle's *Meditations on the Passion*.⁵⁵ This pioneering inquiry into the textual layers of the morality has ever since constituted the basis for the assessments of the play's reliance on contemplative literature applied by contemporaneous devotional practices.⁵⁶ What is, however, more problematic is the fact that the originally independent texts were compiled to create the unity of a dramatic plot. The juxtaposition of these materials also affects the interpretation of the original literal meaning of the inserted passages. Selected materials from Suso's *Horologium Sapientiae* were incorporated in *Wisdom*'s opening scene, in the dialogue between Wisdom/Christ and Anima. As the analysis of Chapter 3 will illustrate, the playwright selects from various chapters of Suso's work to develop the idea of Christ's school, which he contrasts systematically to Lucifer's school in the play. As Suso's mystical journey presented in the Latin version of the *Horologium*, rich in autobiographical allusions, provides an entirely different context than the East Anglian dramatic, even theatrical, reflection upon the implications of the different ways of learning with very concrete allusions to the play's (or playwright's?) own constraints by the existing authoritative dictates of its time, the invocation of Rom. 11:20 by both works also attests to different perceptions of St. Paul's warning.

In a most recent study on the contribution of late medieval English theatre to "contests over who could legitimately determine the meaning of texts," Ruth Nisse proceeds to a series of case analyses to illustrate how 15th-century theatrical compositions provided an alternative setting for the discussion of questions of interpretations and biblical exegesis, distancing from a more well-established, but also much more limited, domain of the political or academic

⁵⁴ Alexandra F. Johnston, "Wisdom and the Records: Is There a Moral?" in Riggio, ed., *The Wisdom Symposium*, p. 101. Cf. also Riggio, *The Play of Wisdom*, p. 77.

⁵⁵ Walter K. Smart, "Some English and Latin Sources and Parallels for the Morality of *Wisdom*," PhD dissertation. (Menasha, Wisconsin: George Banta Publishing Co., 1912)

⁵⁶ Cf. Eccles, ed., *The Macro Plays*, p. xxxiii; Baker, Murphy and Hall, eds., *The Late Medieval Religious Plays*, p. lxx; Riggio, *The Play of Wisdom*, pp. 25-6.

discourse.⁵⁷ In her discussion of the morality's main concern, she implicitly proposes an answer to *Wisdom's* perception of Rom. 11:20 by postulating that "[the play] seems to have been composed specifically to address the new problem of runaway devotion among England's social elites."⁵⁸ Nisse interprets the play as a response to "the exegetical efforts of writers like Suso and Hilton,"⁵⁹ confirming Hilton's warning to its implied audience to root out secular sovereignty in the practices of textual interpretation and devotion. Thus, Saint Paul's prohibition, as part of the play's overall argument, seems to relegate the endeavours of a growing number of influential lay readers to vindicate the freedom of unbound (consequently, personal and biased) interpretation of crucial texts back to the sphere of non-tolerance:

The play is [...] a searching critique of the "mixed life," engaged with the social and political dangers that ensue from [its] readers' interpretations of mystical texts. If Hilton's Epistle on the Mixed Life cautiously guides the wealthy layman toward a correct response to a body of allegorical works by Rolle, Suso, Bridget of Sweden, and Richard of St. Victor among others, Wisdom rebukes a gentry who not only misinterpret such texts but wilfully read allegory in the most literal sense to advance specific political ends.

[...] the play enacts its drama of misinterpretation at [the] level of figurative language. While the Epistle on the Mixed Life opposes the layman's sovereignty to a full access to contemplative experience, Wisdom uses a variety of theatrical resources to oppose the concept of sovereignty itself to the complexities of allegory and allegorical understanding.⁶⁰

1.2. The Pageant of Christ and the Doctors in the N-Town Plays

The *N-Town Plays* represent, in many respects, an individual type among the English cycle plays – if it is possible to establish categories and types among the four full cycles and the few other fragments that survived. In the case of the other three cycles, the Chester, York and Wakefield (or Towneley) plays, we have more evidence or hypotheses based on internal textual evidence as far as the place and way of performance are concerned. Even if these texts conserve a very late phase of the development of the Corpus Christi cycles, we can detect

⁵⁷ Ruth Nisse, *Defining Acts: Drama and the Politics of Interpretation in Late Medieval England*. (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005)

⁵⁸ Nisse, "The Mixed Life in Motion: *Wisdom's* Devotional Politics," in *Defining Acts*, p. 127.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 135.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 131 and 135.

various layers of plays constituting the core of a proto-cycle and of revisions, and draw conclusions about the way a certain community revised its own dramatic activity and shaped its collective apprehension of salvation history and, in a broader sense, created their own biblical interpretation that became the basis for a civic alternative of the authoritative and legitimate practices of interpretation. Ruth Nisse argues that “the York plays, written for the celebration of the Eucharist itself and so usually taken as an epitome of late medieval conservative piety, in fact draw on heterodox ideas about translation, interpretation, and secular authority over Scripture.”⁶¹

Katherine S. Block’s preface to the first modern edition of the *N-Town Plays* starts with the following statement: “The *Ludus Coventriae*, unlike the other extant mystery cycles, is not connected with the trade guilds of a town, and the nature and purpose of this collection have been recognized as a problem of special interest.”⁶² Instead of a communal endeavour to create a discourse on interpretation and authority (and to enact it in yearly recurring rituals, providing alternatives to other well-established rituals of the Church), the *N-Town Cycle* attests rather to the withdrawal of the plays from the realm of public discourse, and witnesses a growing need of legitimating personal reception (interpretation) and contemplation in contemporary devotion. Although Ruth Nisse analyses the *N-Town Plays* in terms of theatrical performance and civic stagecraft, she also admits to the unique nature of the East Anglian mystery compilation: “The *Mary Play*, which was incorporated into the civic N-Town Cycle of Bury St. Edmunds by the manuscript’s scribe/compiler, is an anomaly in the body of surviving drama.”⁶³ This anomaly pertaining to the different concept of a devotional

⁶¹ Nisse concludes that the York plays absorb “Lollard hermeneutic ideas, filtered through English sermons, into a wider conceptual matrix of rhetoric and government.” The essence of this rhetoric is characterised as “a program of urban self-legitimation that emphasizes, like more familiar forms of European protohumanist political discourse, the role of public rhetoric in civil rule. In the plays’ stagings of biblical history, York’s concerns with political voice and citizenship become inextricably bound up with issues of exegesis and lay authority central to the Wycliffite program. [...] [Nisse’s account] focuses on the two plays that most clearly show the emergence of a civic voice from dissenting notions of language and interpretation: the *Entry into Jerusalem* imagines ideal city government as not only good speaking but good reading, according the eight leading citizens who welcome Christ the responsibility for providing a coherent vernacular exegetical narrative; the *Judgement of Christ before Pilate*, in its dramatization of the iconoclastic story from the apocryphal Gospel of Nicodemus of the banners falling before Christ, examines the rhetoric of misrule and the inability of tyrannical rulers to construct a true narrative.” Ruth Nisse, “Staged Interpretations: Civic Rhetoric and Lollard Politics in the York Plays,” in *Defining Acts*, p. 24.

⁶² *Ludus Coventriae or The Plaie Called Corpus Christi. Cotton MS. Vespasian D. VIII.* Edited by Katherine S. Block. EETS. (London: Oxford University Press, 1922), p. v.

⁶³ Ruth Nisse, “Naked Visions,” in *Defining Acts: Drama and the Politics of Interpretation in Late Medieval England*. (Notre Dame, Indiana: Notre Dame University Press, 2005), p. 66. Cf. also Nisse’s reflection on the role the Marian plays of the *N-Town Cycle* played in transmitting contemplative ideals: “Middle English theatre [...] includes a unique text that, outside the civic ideology of a Corpus Christi cycle, bespeaks an entirely different assessment of Bridgettine spirituality and the powers of contemplative women. Like the York *Nativity*, the East Anglian *Mary Play* represents a version of Bridgettine devotion on stage, portraying the Virgin herself as the exemplary prophetic author. [...] The entire play is in essence an interpretation of the *Meditations’* description of Mary before the Annunciation as, in the translation of Nicholas Love’s *Mirror of the Blessed Life*

ideal and “audience” derives from the compilation and revision of theatrical texts as a result of which the original performative character of the cycle became less obvious, and the boundaries between the collective ritual and the private devotional spheres were blurred. Unlike the Northern civic cycles, the *N-Town Cycle* does not reveal its provenance in any direct form; we cannot even be sure whether the extant cycle can be linked to any concrete performance or East Anglian locality. Furthermore, we may suppose that the text as it was conserved in the manuscript is closer to a reading used for personal devotion than to a composition keeping memory of an actual stage performance. The fact that the cycle is a compilation of several sources, including dramatic and contemplative texts, becomes evident if we compare the order of episodes enumerated by the Proclamation and the actual content of the cycle.

1.2.1. Composition of the N-Town Manuscript

The *N-Town Cycle* survives in MS BL, Cotton Vespasian D viii.⁶⁴ The MS is clearly a compilation – in Stephen Spector’s expression “an eclectic collocation”⁶⁵ – of mystery plays. The date of 1468, which appears on f. 100v at the end of the Purification play, has quite naturally been suggested as the date of compilation of the MS’s materials. But this date is rather indicative of the individual composition of this episode, and not of the compilation as a result of which the extant cycle was born.⁶⁶ The cycle had been identified by scholarship as the *Ludus Coventriae* (supposing the plays’ provenance from Coventry) after the misnomer Sir Robert Cotton’s first librarian, Richard James gave to the collection. But his note on the contents of the MS concerning the origin of the mystery plays was refuted by modern scholarly arguments; consequently, the title *Ludus Coventriae* gradually gave way to the overall acknowledged *N-Town Plays*.⁶⁷ This latter derives from the conclusive passage of the Proclamation, where the third banner-bearer announces the parameters of the plays’ performance: “A Sunday next yf þat we may / At vj of þe belle we gynne oure play / In N.

of Christ, ‘In þe wisdom of goddus lawe most kunnyng. In mekenes most lowe. In þe song and þe salmes of david most convenyent and semelich.’” (ibid., pp. 65-6.)

⁶⁴ For the description of the MS, cf.: Block, op. cit., pp. xi-xii.

⁶⁵ Stephen Spector, “The Composition and Development of an Eclectic MS: Cotton Vespasian D viii,” *Leeds Studies in English* 9 (1977), p. 62.

⁶⁶ Cf. Block, op. cit., p. xv and Fletcher, “The N-Town Plays,” p. 163.

⁶⁷ Practically, all discussions of the MS’s overall content refer to this revision of the plays’ origin, cf., e.g., Block, op. cit., p. xii and xxxvii-xl (Block’s edition, however, still keeps the conventional title of the cycle); Alan J. Fletcher, “The N-Town Plays,” in Richard Beadle, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval English Theatre*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 164.

town wherfore we pray / That god now be zoure Spede.”⁶⁸ The allusion to a certain place N has given rise to many hypotheses, which basically split on the question of whether this abbreviation is a reference to a concrete locality starting with the letter “N,” or whether it is a substitution for any place (from Lat. “nomen”).⁶⁹ After Richard James’s misleading attribution of the plays to Coventry, from the late 19th century on, the attention has been focussed on East Anglia, but many towns and settlements have rivalled for hosting the cycle’s performance.⁷⁰

The Proclamation’s bans of a Sunday performance place the plays into a context that exactly fits John C. Coldewey’s description of the late medieval East Anglian theatrical tradition of “portable performances” based on the network of parishes.⁷¹ The first layer of the compilation, the pageants enumerated and summarised by the Proclamation (therefore, briefly the Proclamation plays), were clearly destined to be enacted on stage. According to Alan J. Fletcher, “the Proclamations refer to touring, and not to a concrete town performance.”⁷² The concrete performance of the extant cycle, however, has been drawn into doubt by several critics. While Fletcher insists that the MS attests to its application in an actual play production, the marginal glosses accompanying several pageants are “indifferent to practical dramatic use.”⁷³ Claude Gauvin is more articulate when concluding that the *N-Town Plays* were never played, but destined to be read as devotional material.⁷⁴ Interpretations of the cycle proposing a thematic reading, which will be surveyed in the following section, also tend to implicitly associate a non-theatrical finish with the cycle.⁷⁵

⁶⁸ “The Proclamation,” *Ludus Coventriae*, p. 16, ll. 525-8. All further references to this cycle will be taken from this edition.

⁶⁹ Gail McMurray Gibson’s article, establishing a link between the plays and Bury St. Edmunds, provides the fullest survey of opinions concerning the cycle’s provenance: Gail McMurray Gibson, “Bury St. Edmunds, Lydgate, and the *N-Town Cycle*,” *Speculum* 56 (1981), pp. 56-8.

⁷⁰ Thomas Sharp refuted the plays’ association with Coventry, Bernhard ten Brink and Pollard established their relation with the East Midlands dialect area and “eastern countries,” respectively. Chamber proposed Norwich as the home town of the plays. In the 1960s Lincoln was conjectured as the most probable home of the plays. Hardin Craig’s earlier suggestion became to be supported by Kenneth Cameron, Stanley Kahrl, Mark Eccles and Jacob Bennett. The Bury St. Edmunds hypothesis, first suggested by Dodds, was elaborated by Gibson. A. J. Fletcher continued research in the area related to Bury, and advanced the possibility of the cycle’s provenance from Thetford, 12 miles north from Bury. Cf.: Gibson, “Bury St. Edmunds, Lydgate, and the *N-Town Cycle*,” pp. 56-8 and Fletcher, “The N-Town Plays,” pp. 164-6.

⁷¹ John C. Coldewey, “East Anglian Drama,” in Richard Beadle, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval English Theatre*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 202.

⁷² Fletcher, “The N-Town Plays,” p. 165.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 167.

⁷⁴ Claude Gauvin, *Un cycle du théâtre religieux Anglais au moyen âge: le jeu de la ville ‘N’*. (Paris: Editions du CNRS, 1973), p. 62.

⁷⁵ Martin Stevens warns us that most of the critical considerations have been based on hypothetical performance conditions, and calls attention to approaches emphasising the cycle’s unity achieved by an all-pervasive theological theme (Timothy Fry), a dominant mode, or the centrality of the idea of learning (Kathleen Walsh). Cf.: Martin Stevens, *Four Middle English Mystery Cycles: Textual, Contextual, and Critical Interpretations*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), pp. 209-14.

Because of the composite nature of the text, it is impossible to separate what we attribute to an original authorial activity from what is actually the result of edition and revision. Most of the MS was written by one scribe, probably in the third quarter of the 15th century.⁷⁶ But three other styles of handwriting can be distinguished on the folios of the MS which contain interpolations of the original cycle.⁷⁷ A number of corrections of the main scribe introduced in a different handwriting are listed by Katherine S. Block, but some of the corrections of the main scribe appear to have been made by himself.⁷⁸ This evidently casts light on the main scribe's method of revising the cycle, which he himself might have compiled. Nevertheless, the categories of "author(s)," "compiler" and "reviser" are difficult to be maintained as distinct in the process of the creation of this cycle. Claude Gauvin suggests that the last reviser of the text should be considered the ultimate author of the *N-Town Plays*.⁷⁹ In his discussion of the strata of the cycle, Martin Stevens also emphasises the "product" instead of the "process" of creation and compilation. He claims that the dramatic coherence and overall idea of the extant cycle can be better perceived if approached with the assumption of the plays' "remarkable unity" as opposed to "patchwork theories" dissecting the drama into various layers of composition, by which he also proposes a desirable focus on the achievement of the last author-reviser of the plays.⁸⁰

The most important revisions affecting the structure and the concept of the entire cycle are attested by the interpolation of two large groups of plays, the Marian episodes and the Passion group, itself comprising two distinct series of plays, Passion Plays I and II. Since the allegorical figure of Contemplacio opens both the Mary Play and the second Passion group, moreover, its further entries on stage in the Mary Play essentially structure its scenes; these interpolations have been commonly referred to as the "Contemplacio series." Some of the episodes of the interpolations were also found in the original layer of the plays as evidenced by the Proclamation, which were kept and blended in the inserted episodes. According to Fletcher's schema, we can reconstruct the genesis of the Marian episodes as follows: the last scribe-compiler copied the Proclamation plays (the episodes of the original cycle announced by the Proclamation) until the end of pageant 7, after which he inserted a self-contained play on the early life of the Virgin Mary, comprising five episodes (and blending the third episode of this fragment with the Proclamation's Betrothal of Mary). After this point, the Mary Play and the Proclamation Plays were used alternatively. As a result, the episodes of the early life

⁷⁶ Block, op. cit., p. xv.

⁷⁷ Ibid., p. xvi.

⁷⁸ Ibid., pp. xvii and xix.

⁷⁹ Gauvin, op. cit., p. 62.

⁸⁰ Stevens, op. cit., pp. 183-4.

of Mary mentioned by the Proclamation (the Betrothal, Joseph's Return and The Trial of Joseph and Mary) were enlarged to contain Conception of the Virgin Mary, Mary's Presentation in the Temple, the Parliament of Heaven with the Salutation and Conception, and the Visitation.⁸¹ The endeavour of the compiler to include "the fullest possible version" of the narrative of Mary's life as well as of the Passion in the two Passion groups is also attested by Fletcher's analysis of the MS quires of Passion Play I, in which he confirms that quire O is "an addition made by the scribe-compiler to a set of quires he had already completed [quires N, P, Q, R]."⁸² These latter quires (showing a noticeable variation of handwriting of the main scribe) are of very different lengths, attesting, still according to Fletcher, to the scribe's intention of producing booklets.⁸³

As it has been pointed out by Stephen Spector and Martin Stevens, the nature of the composite text and manuscript may not be elucidated by sorting out the different strata "according to prosodic tests."⁸⁴ In contrasting the methods of composition and the dramatic principles between the pageants of the core cycle and the interpolations, several other factors have been taken into consideration, which are more operative to assess the differences between the old and newer layers as well as the overall design of the cycle by which the last author-compiler intended to unite the core pageants with the new additions to the cycle. The shift of the plays' dramatic concept from the compilation of micro-episodes to a more overall concept of uniting smaller episodes in the framework of larger groups (even acts), evidenced by the structure of the interpolations and the cycle's stress on the continuity rather than the separation of its episodes, were interpreted as the visible aspects of the last author-compiler's intention to subordinate all layers, both old and new, to his overall design.

1.2.2. Interpretations of the Overall Design of the *N-Town Cycle*

Besides the propositions that can be deduced from the confusion created by the rearrangement and revision of the pageants, the marginal glosses of the manuscript also provide valuable information. Alan J. Fletcher claimed that these marginal glosses, drawn

⁸¹ Alan J. Fletcher, "The N-Town Plays," p. 168. Cf. also Timothy Fry, "The Unity of the *Ludus Coventriae*," *Studies in Philology* 48 (1951), p. 544 and Alan J. Fletcher, "Layers of Revision in the N-Town Marian Cycle," *Neophilologus* 66 (1982), p. 469.

⁸² Fletcher, "The N-Town Plays," p. 176.

⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴ Spector, *op. cit.*, pp. 63-5 and Stevens, *op. cit.*, pp. 183-4. Although Stevens objections to the stanzaic stratification theory proposed by Spector, following Greg, Spector also proposes an alternative approach to uncover the layers of the *N-Town Plays* on less formal grounds, i.e. the comparison of the sources of the original Proclamation episodes with those of the insertions. From this, he draws the overall conclusion that the authors of the Proclamation pageants relied for the apocryphal materials mainly on Pseudo-Matthew and other mystery cycles, while the interpolated strata were rather inspired by the *legenda Aurea*, Nicolas Love's *Mirror* and the *Northern Passion*. (Spector, *op. cit.*, p. 66.)

from theological works, “give a certain ‘finish’ [to the interpretation of the cycle].”⁸⁵ The profound analysis of the physical composition of the manuscript and its relationship with the content led Fletcher to the conclusion that the purpose of the manuscript of the *N-Town Plays* was to offer a wider *accessus* to meditative reading, i.e. to provide “a means to open the work’s contents for selective use;” thus the options of the play’s usage could have been determined by the community itself.⁸⁶

The further analysis of the marginal glosses by Fletcher in another article⁸⁷ confirmed these conclusions. All the glosses, except for the last one, relate to the plays of the folio on which they appear. Four out of the seven glosses concern genealogical matters, which indicate clearly the special interest of the scribe of the glosses. His intent was to provide detailed information on the background of the characters figuring in the episodes. Moreover, the glosses are concentrated in the so-called Marian group of the cycle, evidently a later insertion into the original series of plays. Thus the glosses can be seen as the accompanying apparatus of the scheme of transforming the original cycle by the scribe-compiler. They facilitate an understanding of the full biblical context beyond the staged episodes of Salvation history particularly in the Marian group, whose material is based on apocryphal sources. This unity of text and glosses probably seeks to construct the biblical narrative without interruptions in the main text by making explicit everything that would be hidden from the audience of a performance. The information carried by the glosses was not for the profit of the actors, since “the academic, glossarial mentality which the glosses betray would have been wasted on a medieval actor, but not on a medieval reader.”⁸⁸

Fletcher’s “theological” reading of the N-Town Cycle, based on manuscript evidence, confirms Timothy Fry’s interpretation of the cycle as a dramatic illustration of the theology of salvation.⁸⁹ Although Fry’s analysis does not touch upon the question of performance and “performability,” he seems to suggest that the play’s main function is to expound the abuse-of-power theory. This particular Patristic theory of Redemption originated in the treatises of St. John Chrysostom and St. Cyril of Alexandria, and was also confirmed by such authorities as St. Augustine, Pope Gregory the Great, and Peter Lombard. This concept explained the causes of Redemption by Satan’s abuse of his power to inflict death on mankind after the Fall, when he misperceived Christ’s real nature and wanted to take possession of Him as well.⁹⁰

⁸⁵ Fletcher, “The N-Town Plays,” p. 167.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 177.

⁸⁷ Alan J. Fletcher, “Marginal Glosses in the N-Town Manuscript,” *Manuscripta* 25 (1981), pp. 113-7.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.* p. 117.

⁸⁹ Fry, *op. cit.*, pp. 527-70.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.* pp. 528-9.

The pageant of Christ and the Doctors plays an important role in the development of this theological concept, since Christ Himself explains the mystery of the Incarnation and its reasons in the dialogue with the priests:

*To blynde þe devil of his knowlache
And my byrth from hym to hyde
Þat holy wedlock was grett stopage
Þe devil in dowte to do A-byde.⁹¹*

These four verses condense the essential elements of the abuse-of-power theory: Satan is invested with a certain power that is manifested by his knowledge. This knowledge, however, cannot outwit divine authority and wisdom. Moreover, God tricks Satan by disguising the divine nature in human flesh so that, finally, Hell's power is crushed when Christ descends and deprives Satan of the power he held temporarily.

Both Timothy Fry and Rosemary Woolf point out that Christ's exposition of the mysteries of His birth is textually related to other passages in which the divine plan concerning Redemption is alluded to. Moreover, Rosemary Woolf considers Christ's "unfolding the divine mysteries" as "the doctrinal heart of the cycle," where Christ's theological interpretation is "also the echo of the tempter's speech to Eve in the Play of the Fall."⁹² The author-reviser of the cycle drew very consciously on the serpent's words to Eve ("Of þis Appyl yf 3e wyl byte / Evyn as god is so xal 3e be / wys of Connyng as I 3ow plyte / lyke on to god in al degree"⁹³), when he evoked the same scene in the pageant of Christ and the Doctors:

*Myght is þe faderys owyn propyrte
To þe gost apperyd is goodness
In none of these tweyn temptyd he
Mankende to synne whan he dede dresse
To þe sone connyng doth longe expres
Ther with þe serpent dyd Adam A-say
Ete of þis Appyl he seyde no lesse
And þou xalt haue connyng as god verray.⁹⁴*

The reminiscence of the serpent's speech modifies the purely theological concept of Redemption and emphasises the relationship between knowledge and salvation. Thus it is

⁹¹ "Christ and the Doctors," *Ludus Coventriae*, p. 186, ll. 245-8.

⁹² Rosemary Woolf, *The English Mystery Plays*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972, pp. 214-5.

⁹³ "Fall of Man," *Ludus Coventriae*, p. 22, ll. 182-5.

⁹⁴ "Christ among the Doctors," *Ludus Coventriae*, p. 182, ll. 121-8.

implied that man has to reach (or restore) a certain intellectual and spiritual state in order to be redeemed. The problems of defining the nature of this knowledge and the manner of its acquisition are the main concerns of the pageant and, in general, of the entire N-Town Cycle.

Kathleen Ashley also analyses the cycle in terms of a guiding idea which is developed and illustrated by the episodes. According to her, the thematic core of the theological message of the plays is shown in the pageant of Christ and the Doctors, in which the wit of man is seen clearly insufficient when facing divine wisdom.⁹⁵ This episode, however, does not leave the mystery of salvation unresolved, but intends to disperse the doubt over man's insufficiency to understand its secret.

1.3. Texts Related to the Pecoock Controversy

The last chapter of the dissertation, investigating a mid-15th century controversy which itself represents an important stage in the history of late medieval non-academic revisions of Rom. 11:20, does not focus on one single text. Instead several works written by Bishop Reginald Pecoock and his opponents have been selected to follow the process of channelling an individual endeavour to expand the discourse specific to the academic world beyond its boundaries into a debate over the exegetical controversies of St. Paul's warning. The selection of texts, attached to the controversy, illustrates a rivalry between different concepts of author and authority, in which Pecoock's opponents revive St. Paul's warning as a taboo on vain speculations and curiosity to defend the inaccessibility of the academic model of authority from extramural positions.

The controversy itself is elusive, since its repercussions reach beyond Pecoock's death. Furthermore, it seems that urges to censor Pecoock's works were not systematically put forward, since before the concerted attack of secular and ecclesiastical authorities, which culminated in the examination of the bishop's books, his trial and his public recantation, his writings were freely circulated. Suspicions concerning Pecoock's heterodoxy and tensions arising out of his activity and writings started to increase visibly after his scandalous preaching at St. Paul's Cross, London (1445/47), by which he infuriated Thomas Gascoigne and other advocates of a new preaching zeal in the mid-15th century. Although the ensuing enmities and criticisms provoked by the sermon did not stop simmering after this event, the grudging against Pecoock was not sufficient to undermine the status of the bishop. In his

⁹⁵ Kathleen M. Ashley, "'Wyt' and 'Wysdam' in N-Town Cycle," *Philological Quarterly* 58 (1979), pp. 121-35.

Folewer to the Donet, he complains about the exhausting vigilance he has to apply to divert the unjustified accusations of his fellow clergymen:

[...]y wote wel þo conclusions wolen be holde for trewe of ech greet leernyd man in dyuynyte or in lawe of canoun while þe world schal dure. And y wolde wite what clerk wole take vpon him forto answere to þe proofis of hem; ffor no clerk zit hidirto into þis present day, bi more þan vj zeer passid aftir þe bigynnyng of the strijf, durste take vpon him forto answere to þe proofis of hem, þouz summe clerkis han be ful redi forto argue and make motyues azens hem and azens sidehalf maters.⁹⁶

Approaches to the controversy from a politico-historical perspective have tended to comment upon the case as one crystallising the actual tensions of dynastic politics permeating the secular and ecclesiastical elite.⁹⁷ Green analyses Pecock's fall also in terms of a career bound to the declining Lancastrian dynasty, at the same time, she also raises the issue of academic involvement, which broadens the horizon of interpretation for discussions of internal tensions in the academic establishment.⁹⁸ The dominating themes of the earlier assessments of Pecock's case, as e.g. the dichotomies of Lancastrian vs. Yorkist policies or orthodoxy vs. heterodoxy, got more subtle treatments in more recent studies. Ball discussed the preaching scandal and Pecock's clash with his contemporaries into the background of "a recent theological movement which appealed to patristic authority to resolve controversies of faith (associated with orthodox mentality)."⁹⁹ Jeremy Catto's article elaborates on the participation and exact role of the king's government in initiating the prosecution of Pecock, extending the broad context, also drawn by Ball in his study two years later, to the inherent dichotomy of 15th-century cultural politics: the censored intellectual activities were encouraged to create an alternative paradigm to what had to be suppressed and forgotten. As Catto remarks, an emphasis was put on preaching, though the religious idiom of the age was private devotion.¹⁰⁰ The controversy surrounding Pecock's writings was anticipated by the

⁹⁶ Reginald Pecock, *The Folewer to the Donet*. Edited by Elsie Vaughan Hitchcock. EETS. (London: Oxford University Press, 1924), p. 104. For a detailed assessment of the onslaughts elicited by the sermon, cf.: V. H. H. Green, *Bishop Reginald Pecock: A Study in Ecclesiastical History and Thought*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1945), pp. 35-8; Jeremy Catto, "The King's Government and the Fall of Pecock, 1457-58," in Rowena E. Archer and Simon Walker, eds., *Rulers and Ruled in Late Medieval England. Essays Presented to Gerald Harriss*. (London: The Hambledon Press, 1995), pp. 206-7; Wendy Scase, "Reginald Pecock," in M. C. Seymour, ed., *Authors of the Middle Ages: English Writers of the Middle Ages*. Vol. 3: 7-11. (Aldershot: Variorum, 1996), pp. 95-9; R. M. Ball, "The Opponents of Bishop Pecock," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 48 (1997), pp. 230-3.

⁹⁷ E. F. Jacob, *The Fifteenth Century, 1399-1485*. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1961), p. 682 and Charles W. Brockwell, Jr., *Bishop Reginald Pecock and the Lancastrian Church: Securing the Foundations of Cultural Authority*. Texts and Studies in Religion. Vol. 25 (Lewiston, NY: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1985).

⁹⁸ Green, *Bishop Reginald Pecock*, pp. 37-9.

⁹⁹ Ball, "The Opponents of Bishop Pecock," p. 243.

¹⁰⁰ Catto, "The King's Government and the Fall of Pecock, 1457-58," p. 206.

authorities' urge to disrupt two religious and intellectual paradigms that were interrelated in many points as will be shown in Chapter 5.

*The polemical paradigm of Wycliffite writings opposed to the devotional material encouraged by Arundel and Henry V, [as illustrated by the production of works like] Love's Mirror, Hilton's Scale of Perfection, Richard Mysin's translation of Rolle's Incendium Amoris, Catherine of Siena's Dialogo, translated as The Orchard of Syon.*¹⁰¹

Finally, Wendy Scase's study on Pecoock's life, comprising the richest archival documentary that has ever been used for any biography, confirms that the controversy in case cannot be reduced to its political aspects.

My interest in Pecoock's works and its contemporaneous critics is the dialogue (even if essentially monological), which shifts the emphasis from inquiring into Pecoock's thought to the perception of the controversy by his contemporaries. An important text that retrospectively recast the ongoing debate along the medieval exegetical tradition of Rom. 11:20 was Archbishop Thomas Bourchier's admonition to the diocesans of his province pertaining to the prohibition of reading Pecoock's books, as they encourage those who endeavour to know more than befitting ("plus sapere conantes quam oportet").¹⁰² The earlier phases of the controversy will be outlined by two authoritative works, preceding Pecoock's adult years and the beginning of the controversy: Nicholas Love's *Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ* (1410), a translation of the late 13th-century Franciscan *Meditationes Vitae Christi*¹⁰³ and Thomas Netter of Walden's *Doctrinale Antiquitatum Fidei Catholicae Ecclesiae*.¹⁰⁴ My discussion of these preliminary works to the controversy will examine how exactly these works had shaped the authoritative constraints in the first half of the 15th century, and whether they also bound Pecoock in his authorial strategies. The most important contemporary source to assess the perceptions of the controversy, besides chronicles and other sorts of notes on Pecoock's trial, will be Thomas Gascoigne's theological dictionary, the *Liber*

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² F. Donald Logan, "Archbishop Thomas Bourchier Revisited," in Caroline M. Barron and Christopher Harper-Bill, eds., *The Church in Pre-Reformation Society: Essays in Honour of F. R. H. Du Boulay*. (Dover, New Hampshire: The Boydell Press, 1985), p. 187 and Scase, "Reginald Pecoock," p. 124. Cf. also another document, a copy of the letter from Bourchier, forwarded by the bishop of London to Thomas Bekynton, Bishop of Bath and Wells, paraphrasing Bourchier's stance on the harmful effects of studying and discussing Pecoock's texts by students and clergymen in Scase, "Reginald Pecoock," pp. 123-4.

¹⁰³ Nicholas Love, *The Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ*. (A Critical Edition Based on Cambridge University Library Additional MSS 6578 and 6686.) Edited by Michael G. Sargent. (New York: Garland, 1992).

¹⁰⁴ Thomas Netter of Walden, *Doctrinale Antiquitatum Fidei Ecclesiae Catholicae*. (Venetis: Apud Vincentium Valgrisium, 1571)

Veritatum.¹⁰⁵ The analysis of selected entries of his dictionary related to Pecoock's activities will demonstrate that the main elements of Bouchier's discourse are missing from the charges of Pecoock's main academic opponent. The interpretation that the Archbishop forced upon the debate in retrospect is essentially alien from Gascoigne's polemical charges, which revolved around the defence of academic authority by means of dismissing Pecoock as an outsider in academic debates, and thus intended to redraw the boundaries of high learning and deep interpretation – not as internal constraints on academic quests, but as external borders to fend off extramural claims on similar authorities.

Although the surviving books of Pecoock constitute a well-treatable corpus for the investigation of the controversy, those of a more devotional nature, *The Donet* with its slighter edition reworked for the sake of the less learned laity, the *Poore Mennis Myrroure*, were not involved in my discussion. *The Reule of Chrysten Religioun*¹⁰⁶ (incomplete) provided two passages, isolated from the context of the controversy, which were incorporated to comment upon Pecoock's authorial strategies as attested by the second prologue to the book as well as to reflect upon Pecoock's share of the late medieval exegetical history of Rom. 12:3, a twin passage of Rom. 11:20. More extended arguments and longer passages, relevant to the controversy, were taken from Pecoock's three other extant writings, *The Repressor of Over-Much Blaming of the Clergy*, *The Book of Faith* (both incomplete), and *Folewer to the Donet*.¹⁰⁷ In the appendix to her monograph, Green lists 36 other books that have been lost, but their existence can be confirmed by Pecoock's allusions in his surviving books. She also enlists works attributed by Bale to Pecoock without any evidence to support the bishop's authorship.¹⁰⁸ Since Pecoock's extant writings were conserved in one manuscript each, no complications arise out of textual variants. Yet the works are rich in cross-references due to Pecoock's method of writing: "The difficulty establishing the date or even the completion of Pecoock's works is impeded by his method of working on a number of books at the same time."¹⁰⁹ Nevertheless, philological issues will not be considered in the discussion, because

¹⁰⁵ Thomas Gascoigne, *Loci e Libro Veritatum: Passages Selected from Gascoigne's Theological Dictionary Illustrating the Condition of Church and State, 1403-1458*. Edited by James E. Thorold Rogers. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1881)

¹⁰⁶ *The Reule of Chrysten Religioun by Reginald Pecoock*. Edited from Pierpont Morgan MS 519 by William Cabell Greet. EETS. (London: Oxford University Press, 1927)

¹⁰⁷ These works, central to the discussion of the last chapter, were edited in the following volumes: *The Repressor of Over Much Blaming of the Clergy by Reginald Pecoock*. Vols. 1-2. Rolls Series. Edited by Churchill Babington. (London: Longman, 1860); *Reginald Pecoock's Book of Faith: A Fifteenth Century Theological Tractate Edited from the MS in the Library of Trinity College, Cambridge*. Edited by J. L. Morison. (Glasgow: James Maclehose and Sons, 1909) and *The Folewer to the Donet*. Edited by Elsie Vaughan Hitchcock. EETS. (London: Oxford University Press, 1924)

¹⁰⁸ Green, *Bishop Reginald Pecoock*, pp. 238-45.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 245.

questions pertaining to the order and exact chronology of Peacock's works are not decisive in my approach to the controversy, nor do they essentially condition the method of my analysis.

CHAPTER 2

“SEEKING THE HIGHEST” AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR ACADEMIA IN THE ENGLISH MYSTICAL TRADITION

The mystical experience has been pursued for centuries to “seek high things” - in spite of Paul’s warning to the Romans, *Noli altum sapere* – and to receive in the ultimate reward of divine grace, i.e. the *unio mystica*, the participation in the self-revelation of the divine. Still, in no way could we claim that the mystical quest and experience would transgress (either in the spiritual or in the intellectual sense of the word “sapere”) the ancient taboo on embracing the divine, since the fruit of the mystical experience is not knowledge, but a stage of being incorporating knowledge. It cannot be verbalized; it can only be evoked and approximated by words.

In mystical writings, the unspeakable truth of the mystical revelation, never ultimately attained under the control of reason, is in contrast with the intellectual inquiries of knowledge. Although mystics may attribute different emphases to the initial role of the intellect in their quest for the union with the transcendental, they all agree in the description of their ineffable experiences that the sphere of “those realities” belongs to another paradigm, where the rational laws and experiences of the human existence lose their validity. Different traditions of Christian mysticism attributed different roles to the human mind and will, i.e. the intellectual and affective faculties, in the mystical experience. The Augustinian tradition emphasized the interaction of both faculties, maintaining the idea that “an intellectual ‘vision’ of God is the goal of mystical contemplation.”¹ At the end of the “intellectual path” the superior part of mind, the *ratio superior*, is filled by wisdom (identified with sapience or the image of God), while the inferior part of the mind, the *ratio inferior*, is completed by knowledge.² Another current, influenced by the Council of Nicaea (325) and Gregory of Nyssa, eliminated the intellect in the unitive phase of the mystical experience, and put an exclusive emphasis on the affective faculty. Traditional images of this affective mysticism describe the last stage of the mystical experience before the union of God as a total abandonment of images and thinking, an existence suspended in absolute darkness where only love can connect the mystic’s soul with the divine.

¹ TeSelle quoted by Patrick J. Gallacher, ed., *The Cloud of Unknowing*. TEAMS. Middle English Text Series. (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1997), p. 3.

² Ibid.

When the mystics write down their experiences, they do it with the purpose of transmitting the reality of their “showings,” but they do not claim that the “mystical experience” could be learnt. We find numerous *topoi*, recurring images and metaphors, moreover similarities, in the structure and the narration of the visions, but nothing that could suggest that there is a methodology (available to all) in reaching such experiences. Therefore, when, in some mystical texts of the late medieval period, the image of institutional education appears, it seems that these writings, which form the object of analysis of this chapter, rival the academic experience of acquiring knowledge, and offer another path to a wider public with the more appealing hope of not transgressing St. Paul’s warning to the Romans. As opposed to the academic career, in the mystical experience one did not have to be afraid of reaching higher. Still, criticisms of Richard Rolle by the *Cloud*-author or Walter Hilton as well as the avowedly irreconcilable alternatives of the institutional vs. institutionally unauthorised, inwardly oriented (mystical) quests of knowledge evidenced by Thomas Basset’s defence of Richard Rolle indicate that the academic notions of authority and intellectual taboos also underlie the discourses of “intellectual mysticism.” The dissemination of Henry Suso’s *Horologium Sapientiae* in England (first in Latin, then in different English renderings) marks a turning point in the view toward academic learning and its encounter with the mystical experience. Suso’s work envisions different forms of academic learning in the mystical vision itself. The discussion of texts inspired by Suso’s *Horologium* in the English mystical tradition will reveal that their authors were ready to create a new and less authoritative context for St. Paul’s warning against inquiring into higher secrets, if learning was to be interpreted as a personal spiritual endeavour to experience a cosmic harmony in one’s own soul.

2.1. Reflections on Academic Learning in the English Mystical Tradition of the 14th Century

To see where exactly Suso’s *Horologium Sapientiae* differed from the English mystical tradition would require a concise survey of all mystical pieces written prior to, or in the immediate proximity of, the arrival of Suso’s work in England. The vastness of this investigation would, however, exceed the frames of this dissertation, and possibly shift its focus from more essential questions to less relevant ones. Therefore, only two crucial aspects will be studied in some representative pieces of the English mystical tradition of the 14th century, written before (or close to) the earliest explicit reference to Suso’s *Horologium*,

which occurs in the will of a Bristol merchant, dated 18 April 1393.³ The first of these aspects focuses on the question of the extent to which the major figures of 14th century English mystical literature applied notions of academic teaching and learning in the elucidation of their mystical experiences. The investigation of such motifs is indispensable for the discussion of the second, and perhaps more relevant, aspect: the question of whether the occasionally emerging notions borrowed from the academic field constitute an implicit claim by mystical authors on an external criticism of academia by urging a necessary change in the institutional footing of the acquisition of knowledge. Ultimately, the purpose of this discussion is to see whether English mysticism, at any point of time before Suso, had co-opted the idea of challenging the paradigm upheld by academic authorities by advocating a “mystically oriented” basis for learning (also within the institutional frame).

Elements of this approach have already been investigated by scholarship. Wolfgang Riehle devoted his exhaustive study of English mysticism, published in 1977, to the analysis of the vocabulary and the images of mystical writings.⁴ Metaphors related to the school or other aspects of academic life do not receive any attention, though. The only instance he provides for an explicit occurrence of the metaphor of school is taken from the *Cloud of Unknowing*: “after a trewe feling comeþ a trewe knowing in Gods scole.”⁵

More attention has been drawn to the internal tensions within the “English mystical school” - often considered as an unbroken tradition in the 14th century - due to the mystics’ different educational careers that developed a wide range of attitudes to institutional learning and intellectual authorities. The suspicion with which the *Cloud*-author and Walter Hilton, two of the most learned authors among English mystics, looked upon Richard Rolle’s exposition of the nature of the inward fire, heat and melody the mystic had experienced, had far-reaching implications outside the field of terminology and theology, and channelled the debate towards issues of orthodoxy and authority.⁶ Not only Rolle’s “Franciscan-styled” conversion from his Oxford studies to an eremitic way of life and to apostolic poverty, but also his defence written by Thomas Basset, a disciple of his, attest to an existing gulf between the mystical and the academic paradigms of the acquisition of knowledge. Nevertheless,

³ Roger Lovatt, “Henry Suso and the Medieval Mystical Tradition in England,” in Marian Glasscoe, ed., *The Medieval Mystical Tradition in England*. Transactions of the Exeter Symposium Held in Exeter, 1980. (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1986), p. 48. The supposed date of Suso’s work reaching England, though, could be placed more than a decade earlier to about 1380. Cf.: Lovatt, op. cit., p. 49.

⁴ Wolfgang Riehle, *Studien zur englischen Mystik des Mittelalters unter besonderer Berücksichtigung ihrer Metaphorik*. (Heidelberg: Carl Winter Universitätsverlag, 1977)

⁵ The *Cloud*-author quoted by Riehle, op. cit., p. 156.

⁶ For the analysis of the internal tensions, cf. Michael Sargent, “Contemporary Criticism of Richard Rolle,” *Analecta Cartusiana* 55:1 (1981), pp. 160-87.

Rolle's disaffection with academic studies was as decisive an experience in his life as had been his studies at Oxford. His command of Latin and of theology gave rise to hypotheses, proposed by Dom Maurice Noetinger and embraced later by Nicole Marzac and Wolfgang Riehle, according to which Rolle, "following his time at Oxford, [...] matriculated at the Sorbonne, became a Doctor of Divinity, and was ordained a priest. At this point in his life, according to Noetinger, he rejected scholastic success and worldly honors, and became a hermit."⁷ The *Cloud*-author, described as "a priest, a trained theologian, and an experienced contemplative"⁸ by Phyllis Hodgson, also targeted "scholastic success" by some of his more critical passages; nevertheless, his figure was more often paralleled with Walter Hilton. Hilton probably studied at Cambridge, and became Inceptor in Canon Law. His works were written in the undeniable spirit of "academic expertise and theological conservatism."⁹ As seen from this overview of the mystics' academic career, all the male key figures of 14th-century English mysticism (a list we can complete with the name of William Flete) were learned men trained at universities, but showing extremely different degrees of sympathy and respect towards their common academic background. The other extreme is represented by Hilton's contemporary, the anchoress of St. Julian of Norwich, whose illiteracy has been interpreted in several ways by scholarship.¹⁰

⁷ Valerie Lagorio and Michael Sargent, "English Mystical Writings," in Albert E. Hartung, ed., *A Manual of the Writings in Middle English, 1050-1500*. Vol. 9. (New Haven, Connecticut: The Connecticut Academy of Arts and Sciences, 1993), p. 3052. It should, however, be remarked that judgments on Rolle's expertise in Latin seem to be based on rather subjective criteria set up by scholars. Rolle's Latin as well as his style received negative comments from Hope Emily Allen ("unarguably impressionistic," "boring," "repelling," and "monotonous") and from Carl Horstman, who claimed that "[Rolle's] defects lie on the side of method and discrimination; he is weak in argumentation, in developing and arranging his ideas. [...]; his form is not sufficiently refined, and full of irregularities; his taste is not unquestionable; his style frequently difficult, rambling, full of veiled allusions [...]; his Latin is incorrect and not at all classic – it is a Latin of his time, and, besides, full of solecisms and blunders of his own." For a full criticism and counter-arguments, cf. Paul F. Theiner, ed., *The Contra Amatores Mundi of Richard Rolle of Hampole*. University of California Publications. English Studies 33. (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1968), pp. 29-30.

⁸ Lagorio and Sargent, op. cit., p. 3068.

⁹ Ibid., p. 3074.

¹⁰ The scholarly debate on Julian's illiteracy has focussed on the phrase "symple creature vnlettryde" at the beginning of the long text of her visions, by which she "seems to provide a clue to her learning." Cf.: Denise Novakowski Baker, *Julian of Norwich's Showings: From Vision to Book*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), p. 8. For a review of scholarship on Julian's illiteracy, cf. Baker, op. cit., pp. 130-1. Opinions in the question range between two extremes, the first reading the phrase as Julian's admitting to her own inability to read and write, and thus identifying Julian as a unique and eccentric visionary. For this position, see: Brant Pelphrey, *Love Was His Meaning: The Theology and Mysticism of Julian of Norwich*. Salzburg Studies in English Literature, Elizabethan and Renaissance Studies. (Salzburg: Institut für Anglistik und Amerikanistik, Universität Salzburg, 1982), pp. 18-28. The other extreme, represented by Edmund Colledge, James Walsh and Anna Maria Reynolds, argues for Julian of Norwich's good grounding in Latin, Scripture and the liberal arts. Cf.: *A Book of Showings to the Anchoress Julian of Norwich*. Vol. 1. Edited by Edmund Colledge and James Walsh. (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1978), pp. 43-59; idem, "Editing Julian of Norwich's Revelations: A Progress Report," *Mediaeval Studies* 38 (1976), pp. 404-2 and Anna Maria Reynolds, "Some Literary Influences in the Revelations of Julian Norwich," *Leeds Studies in English* 7-8 (1952), pp. 18-28.

Since the mystics' relations with academia underlie the notions they apply from the world of institutional education, the investigation of the above aspects will not follow a chronological line, as is conventional in studies on medieval English mysticism, but will establish three groups according to three ways in which English mystical authors encountered the schools and organised their own perceptions of them: (1) Notions of academia by an "unlettered" mystic (Julian of Norwich), (2) The coexistence of the academic and mystical experiences in mystics of scholastic learning (the *Cloud*-author and Walter Hilton's criticism of Richard Rolle), and (3) Mystics following alternative paradigms to institutional authorities (Richard Rolle and Thomas Basset).

The texts under my scope will be limited to a selection of the corpus shaping the "mystical canon" of the 14th century as well as to pieces considered usually only secondary to the achievement of the main writers, but essential in the reconstruction of the perception of academia in mystical writings and experiences: treatises by Richard Rolle (*Incendium Amoris*, *Melos Amoris*, and *Contra Amatores Mundi*); the *Consilia Isidori* (or *Monita Isidori*) attributed to a disciple of Richard Rolle; the *Defensorium contra Oblectatores* written by the hermit Thomas Basset in defense of his master, Richard Rolle; *The Revelations of Divine Love* or *A Book of Showings to the anchoress Julian of Norwich*; Walter Hilton's *Scale of Perfection* and the anonymous *Cloud of Unknowing* together with its continuation, *The Book of Privy Counselling*. Though it has been conjectured that the *Horologium* might have exercised a direct influence on Walter Hilton and Julian of Norwich,¹¹ this possibility will not be the concern of the following analysis for lack of solid evidence on my side. Secondly, the governing aspect of my comparative reading of the writings of Julian of Norwich and Walter Hilton, on the one hand, and Henry Suso, on the other, permits ignoring the probable indebtedness of the former authors to the latter.

¹¹ Lovatt, op. cit., 50. Georgia Ronan Crampton, in the introduction to her edition of *The Shewings of Julian of Norwich*, also raises the possibility of identifying the anchoress of St. Julian of Norwich "as the late successor of the Rhineland mystics of a century and a half before, many of them women, whose writings, sometimes in a vernacular, constituted a literary phenomenon as well as a contribution to spiritual renewal in their own times." *The Shewings of Julian of Norwich*. Edited by Georgia Ronan Crampton. TEAMS. Middle English Text Series. (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1994), p. 14. Crampton reviews scholarly opinions that argue for the palpable continental influence in Julian of Norwich's *Revelations*. Sister Anna Maria Reynolds "notes resemblances to Meister Eckhart." On the other hand, Theresa Halligan claims that God's motherhood as a common theme in Mechtild of Hackeborn and Julian's visions should not be seen as proofs of the latter's indebtedness to Mechtild's *Liber Specialis Gratiae*. She concludes that Julian's work "owes nothing to her predecessors overseas." Finally, "Riehle believes that what Julian got from continental mysticism was models that gave 'a decisive impetus for her literary initiative and her mystical experiences'." For the review of scholarship on Julian of Norwich's continental influences, cf.: Crampton, op. cit., pp. 14-5.

2.1.1. The Perspective of the “Vnlettryde”: Notions of Academia by Julian of Norwich

*The Revelations of Divine Love*¹² by the anonymous anchoress of St. Julian of Norwich, for the sake of practicality identified as Dame Julian of Norwich (or simply Julian of Norwich), constitutes a unique achievement in the English mystical corpus by not only verbalising the author’s struggle to bridge the gap between her understanding and things concealed from human knowledge, but also by visualising the experiences of what she learnt about the wisdom of God in most unusual “shewings.” Julian of Norwich’s mysticism places God the Creator and His creature in a relationship that also determines the limits of man’s intellectual capacities. Knowledge becomes dependent on grace, but as Julian of Norwich admits, even if grace leads the mystic to the learning of divine secrets, the momentary experiences of wisdom do not coincide with the fulfilment of what Augustine called the inferior reason.

In Chapter IV of *The Shewings*, wisdom itself is identified with understanding.¹³ Julian of Norwich does not fail to make it explicit that wisdom is not a qualitative or quantitative extension of human knowledge, but the two terms operate in totally distinct spheres. It also follows that, as it is impossible to create a verbal bridge between the very understanding of the visions and the explanations of their meaning, there is no transition from knowledge (or wit) into wisdom. Thus Julian of Norwich subscribes to the current of mysticism that emphasises the necessity of entirely abandoning all the works of the intellectual faculty (perceptions, images, thoughts or reasoning) in the last stage of the contemplative experience. Wisdom and understanding do not belong to the intellectual faculty, and, quite misleadingly, are not part of the intellectual vocabulary of *The Shewings*. The embodiment of Julian of

¹² Editors of the modernized (or translated) long text of Julian of Norwich’s revelations almost all reached a common agreement on the title of their editions: *Revelations of Divine Love*. Edmund Colledge and James Walsh’s translation, published in 1978 in the Classics of Western Spirituality series, follows the tradition of “showings” (*Julian of Norwich: Showings*. New York: Paulist Press, 1978). The titles of the editions of the Middle English long text show a great variety. Hereafter I will follow the title of Georgia Crampton’s edition (*The Shewings of Julian of Norwich*), which I also consulted and used for references.

¹³ IV, 136 and ff.: “God shewid in party the wisdom and the truth of hir [the Virgin Mary’s] soule, wherein I understood the reverend beholding that she beheld hir God and maked mervelyng with grete reverence that He would be borne of hir that was a simple creature of His makeyng. And this wisdom and truth, knowyng the greteness of hir maker and the littlehede of hirselfe, that is made, caused hir sey full mekely to Gabriel, ‘Lo, me, Gods handmayd.’ In this sight I understoode sothly that she is mare than all that God made beneath hir in worthyness and grace.” (IV, 135-42) At the same time, this understanding also implies a momentary union with God as far as God is identified with wisdom (or possessing wisdom), cf.: “And to lerne us this, as to myne understandyng, our Lord God shewed our Lady Saint Mary in the same tyme, that is to mene the hey wisdom and treth she had in beholding of hir Maker, so grete, so hey, so mightie, and so gode. This gretenes and this noblyth of the beholdyng of God fulfilled her of reverend drede, and with this she saw hirselfe so litil and so low [...] thus by this grounde she was fulfillid of grace and of al manner vertues and overpassyth all creatures.” (VII, 234-41), “I saw truly that nothing is done be happe, ne be aventure, but al thing be the foreseing wisdom of God” (XI, 430-1), and “myn understandyng was lifted up into Hevyn” (XIV, 536 repeated in XXII, 781). Crampton, op. cit. (All further references to *The Shewings of Julian of Norwich* will be to this edition; chapter and line numbers will be given after citations.)

Norwich's thought, i.e. the most exact carrier of her understanding, is a visual *reductio ad minimum*, the last image which sums up her existential experience in the vision of all the earthly life being but a point.

What makes Julian of Norwich's description of her visions so vibrant is her persevering effort to tune the "showings" to the lower pitch of "sayings," by which the words only applicable and operative within the limits of the human mind ("witt(e)," "lerning," "teching," and "knowen") become deceiving and inadequate equivalents of the steps leading to understanding. Though *The Shewings* agrees with St. Paul in claiming that human knowledge (wit) cannot reach the high things, Julian of Norwich's premises essentially differ from those of St. Paul.¹⁴ The mystic does not assume that the *secreta Dei* are accessible at all to the inquiring human mind. Accordingly, she does not even ascribe any danger to the investigations of reason, but considers them impractical for the contemplative experience as God's words attest: "Pray inderly [earnestly] thow the thynkyth it savowr the nott" (XLI, 1423). Julian of Norwich brilliantly recalls and rearranges the elements of Paul's warning: God's words in XLI, 1423 do not warn the mind not to desire to savour in cunning too high, but urge it to drop all doubts and turn to prayers (a term describing "inward learning" leading to self-knowledge) which are even more savoury than the dubious end of thoughts. But, while Paul's argument is built upon the notion of taboo, i.e. a divine prohibition, barring human endeavours from reaching Heaven and becoming the same with God, Julian of Norwich experiences that "the use of our reason is now so blynd, so low, so symple, that we cannot know that hey, mervelous wisdam, the myte, and the goodness, of the blisful Trinite" (XXXII, 1081-3).

The frailty of knowledge compels the author to double the narrator's self in the description of the mystical visions. In several passages the mystic in the state of understanding vis-à-vis her vision is simultaneously present with the narrator trying to interpret the vision after the lapse from understanding. In Chapter XXII she admits: "I beheld with gret diligens for to wetyn how often He [Christ] would deyn if He myght, and sotly the noumbre passid myn understondyng and my wittis so fer that my reson myghte not ne coude

¹⁴ *The Shewings* sets out with the claim that Christ is not willing us to know his secrets (I, 24-32). The same idea is rephrased in Chapter III, echoing the contrast of the partial knowledge of the present and the full understanding in the future heavenly bliss of I Cor 13:12: "I might have the more knoweing and lovyng of God in blisse of Hevyn" (III, 80). Cf. also: "there is no creature that is made that may wetyn how mekyl, and how swetely, and how tenderly our Maker loveth us" (VI, 219-20). The meditation on the nature of sin in Chapter XXVII also concludes with the confirmation of God's inscrutable secrets: the unknowable nature of sin, one of God's secrets will be made known only in Heaven (XXVII, 950-63). Finally, both Chapters XXX and XXXIV elaborate on the Lord's "privy counsel" or "privities" not to be known. Moreover, Chapter XXXIV classifies the divine secrets into two groups: (1) those to be hidden from people until the end of times, and (2) those to be revealed by God.

comprehend it” (XXII, 799-801). More interestingly in Chapter XXVI, her meditations, simultaneous with the vision upon which she is meditating, claim that the number of Christ’s words to her passes her wit, understanding and might: “The nombre of the words passyth my witte and al my understandyng and al my mights, and arn the heyest, as to my syte.” (XXVI, 924-5). In spite of the shortcomings of the human mind, Julian of Norwich never claims that the understanding of the essential mystical experience, and the embracing of wisdom, would in any way correlate with the mystic’s intellectual capacities. “For al that is spedeful to us to wetyn and to knowen, ful curtesly wil our Lord will shewen us, and that is this, with al the prechyng and techyng of Holy Church” (XXXIV, 1153-5). The training of the intellect becomes, after all, a preparation for the mystic to become the receptacle of Christ’s wisdom in the future. This preparation takes place in the school of Christ, where Christ is both the teacher and the teaching.¹⁵ Yet, while the mystic by his or her ascent is able to acquire experiences anticipating the state of bliss, the intellect cannot reach its maturity in its earthly state, and always remains the servant of its master, or to use Julian of Norwich’s simile, the pupil at the beginning of his elementary school reading course: “Also in this mervelous example I have techyng with me as it were the begynnyng of an ABC, wherby I may have sum understandyng of our Lordis menyng” (LI, 2020-1).

2.1.2. The Cloud-Author’s Criticism of the “Coryous Kunnyng of Clergie”¹⁶

The anonymous author of *The Cloud of Unknowing* and of its “continuation,” *The Book of Privy Counselling*, written probably some years later to the same addressed, attesting to his spiritual advancement, puzzles modern readers by the straightforward imagery pressing upon the revolting mind and urging the apprentice-mystic to find comfort in an absolutely “anti-intellectual” (or rather post-intellectual) state. The pursuit of negation, the comfort out of the unthinkable, should lead to the spark that alone can ignite the fire of the mystical

¹⁵ Cf. Chapter XXXIV: “God shewid ful gret plesance that He hath in al men and women that mytyly and mekely and wilfully taken the prechyng and techyng of Holy Church, for it is His Holy Church. He is the ground, He is the substance, *He is the techyng, He is the techer, He is the leryd,* He is the mede wherfore every kynd soule travellith” (XXXIV, 1156-9; italics mine). The visual counterpart of this idea can be found in a most concrete expression of the common contemporary devotional experience in Chapter XXIV: “with His [Christ’s] swete lokyng He led forth the understandyng of His creture be the same wound into His syde withinne” (XXIV, 864-5).

¹⁶ Our scarce knowledge about the *Cloud*-author is ultimately based on what he reveals about himself indirectly in his works. “[H]e apparently lives as a recluse; his assimilated theological learning suggests a university graduate; like a priest, he gives the blessing at the reader of *The Cloud*. On linguistic evidence *The Cloud* derives from the north-east Midlands in the last quarter of the fourteenth century, and hence the *Cloud*-author and Walter Hilton were living and writing in much the same area and period, with parallel passages in their writings suggesting that one or both knew the other’s work.” Barry Windeatt, ed., *English Mystics of the Middle Ages*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 67.

burning. But this way finds no equivalence in language. What it is can best be explained by the expropriation of the author's answer: "I wote never."¹⁷ What we can tell, however, is rather what it is like, i.e. to which mystical tradition the work belongs.

The author of *The Cloud of Unknowing* is aware of his place in the apophatic tradition of medieval mysticism. Following the paradigm established by Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, he also pursues the *via negativa* to approximate the divine being by discarding everything that it is not.¹⁸ His extremely "zooming" focus on the highest contemplative mode expressed by the cloud of unknowing may, however, leave the discussion of the degrees of active and contemplative life in Chapter VIII almost unnoticed. Yet, this passage implies that the author also places the darkness of the cloud at the end of a gradual ascent through the different degrees of active and contemplative lives.¹⁹ Thus the *Cloud*-author does not deny the hierarchically superimposed existential modes, but unlike Walter Hilton, who structures the degrees by a narrative technique so that the notion of gradual ascent is perceptible by his readers, he rejects this straightforward technique. Instead, he uses zooming, which reflects more appropriately on the state of the contemplative in the cloud of unknowing.

The *Cloud*-author's indebtedness to the idea of the gradual ascent from the lowest towards the highest does not explain his apparent hostility to people's intellectual quests. Yet, the insistence on detaching the attributes of wit from "the working" in the cloud of unknowing is a sign of a most consistent interpretation (or rather awareness) of "ascent." The access to a higher contemplative degree does not only necessitate the full accomplishment of apprehension at the lower degree, but also the accommodation of the apprehensive faculties to the nature of the new and higher manner of life. The *Cloud*-author echoes Walter Hilton's and Julian of Norwich's convictions about the limited scope of the human wit. Unlike his contemporaries, he does not consider at all to what end and to what degree the intellect can serve the mystical ascent in the lower stages of the contemplative existence. He only emphasises the necessity of switching between the modes of apprehension, which finds its sharp expression in contrasting a complex allegory, built upon the core idea of "intellect," with the image of the cloud, which is not a metaphor, not an image associated with the signified, but something outside meaning.²⁰ The different modes of apprehension also clash in

¹⁷ *The Cloud of Unknowing*. Edited by Patrick J. Gallacher. TEAMS. Middle English Text Series. (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1997), VI, 36. All further references to this work will be made to this edition with chapter and line numbers indicated.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 8. For the Dionysian paradigm prevailing among many mystical writers of the early and high Middle Ages, cf. *ibid.*, pp. 4-5.

¹⁹ Cf. VIII, 543-84.

²⁰ Notions like metaphor, allegory or images are also incompatible with the core of *The Cloud of Unknowing*, since they would all refer us back to the sphere of verbal expressions, whose comprehension is based on the

the incongruity of the categories contrasted with each other: “intellect” becomes part of a complex metaphor, which emerges as the opposite pole to a non-metaphor. To elaborate on this duality, the *Cloud*-author embraces another, non-mystical, tradition that spoke out against vain curiosity.

The mode of apprehension associated with the activity of the intellect (“fantasie, or any fals ymaginacion, or queynte opinion” belonging to the “proude, coryous, and [...] ymaginatiif witte” IV, 392, 394) is characterised as the negative antipode to the “meek blynde stering of love” (IV, 393). All notions associated with the cloud, such as humility, unknowing, spiritual, ghostly light, and the vision of God, find their negative counterparts in the theme of vain curiosity:

For whoso herith this werke outhere be red or spoken, and weneth that it may or schuld be comen to by travayle in their wittes (and therefore thei sitte and sechin in their wittes how that it may be, and in this coriousité thei travayle their ymaginacion, paraventure, agens cours of kynde, and thei feyne a maner of worching, the whiche is neither bodily ne gostly): trewly this man, whatsoever he be, is perilously disseyvid. (IV, 397-402)

A later passage developing the same *topos*, however, reveals that the literary convention based upon the criticism of vain curiosity cannot be inherently identified with an overall anti-intellectual attitude. When the young mystic is reminded that both good and evil can press upon the contemplative in the darkness, depending on how that state is used, the metaphor of school and speculative learning is not entirely ousted from the apprehensive mode uniquely belonging to the existence in the cloud:

Bot then is the use ivel, when it is swollen with pride and with coriousité of moche clergie and letterly conning as in clerkes, and maketh hem prees for to beholden not meek scolers and mayhstres of devinité or of devocion, bot proude scolers of the devel and maystres of vanité and of falsheed. (VIII, 534-7)

Contrarily to the assumption of the immediately following exposition on active and contemplative lives, here it is suggested that in the darkness, the meek scholars and the masters of divinity do not cease to exist in their previous identity as experts of a speculative science, combining their knowledge with spirituality, which also implies that their earlier quests do not automatically hinder them from ascending to the cloud.²¹

arbitrary convention that the perceptible signs can directly be equalled with their signified. The *Cloud*-author resists any attempt at reading or seeing a metaphor in the image of the cloud: “For when I sey derkness, I mene a lackyng of knowyng.” (IV, 415-6)

²¹ Cf. especially the passage summarising the transition from one degree to another: “And right as it is impossible to mans understandyng a man to come to the higher party of actyve liif, bot if he seese for a tyme of the lower

The *Cloud*-author seems to be more absorbed in the theme of vain curiosity in his *Book of Privy Counselling*. The young contemplative, the same person as was addressed by *The Cloud of Unknowing*, certainly matured on his spiritual journey; at the same time, he most probably became more sensitive to the dichotomy of intellectual and spiritual quests, the appeal of knowledge, and the urge of grasping his own advancement in terms of measurable categories. This changing sensitivity of the apprentice-mystic also affects the method of treating the theme of vain curiosity. The author seems to be more determined to elucidate the inexplicable and unknowable meanings of his images by approximating them to more concrete terms.²² He is also keener on rendering the metaphor of school education into a more vivid idea in his work. Representatives of the path of vain curiosity and empty speculations are not only evoked, but also involved in the dialogue as fictitious listeners, or even questioners eliciting the author's answers:

[...] I merveyle me somtyme whan I here sum men sey (I mene not simple lewid men and wommen, bot clerkes [and men] of grete kunnyng) that my writyng to thee and to other is so harde and so heigh, and so curious and so queinte, that unnethes it may be conceivid of the sotelist clerk or wittid man or womman in this liif, as thei seyn. (p. 80)

The *topos* elaborating on vain curiosity steps out from its timeless abstraction and is used by both sides of the dispute to downgrade the meaningfulness of the other's efforts. The understanding of the "lettered" clerks retorts the contemplative experience with the same label "curiosity" that was targeted against them. The author's response to his applied inimical audience repeats the same idea, evidently turned against the clerks:

Bot to thees men most I answere and sey that it is moche worthi to be sorowid, and of God and his lovers to be mercyfully scornid and bitterly reprovit, that now thees dayes not only a fewe folkes, bot generally nighhond alle (bot yif it be one or two in a contrey of the specyal chosen of God) ben so bleendid in here coryous kunnyng of clergie and of kynde that the trewe conceite of this light werk, thorow the whiche the boistousest mans soule or wommans in this liif is verely in lovely meeknes onyd to God in parfite charite, may no more, ne yit so moche, be conceyvid of hem in sothfastnes of spirit, for her blyndnes and here coriousitee, then may the kunnyng of the grettest clerk in scole of a yong childe at his A.B.C. And for this blyndnes erryngly

party: so it is that a man schal not mowe com to the higher party of contemplative liif, bot yif he seese for a tyme the lower partye." (VIII, 573-6)

²² For this new methodology, cf. the equations of the beginning of the work: "That meek derkness be thi mirour and thi mynde hole." "The Book of Privy Counselling," in Barry Windeatt, ed., *English Mystics of the Middle Ages*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 79. All further references to this work will be made to this edition; page numbers will be indicated in parentheses after citations.

thei clepin soche simple teching coriouste of witte, whan, yif it be witterly lokyd, it schal be founden bot a symple and a light lesson of a lewid man. (p. 80)

The author's willingness to engage himself in this skirmish with words indicates that he does not any more rely on the literary convention elaborating on vain curiosity as alienated from his own self, but personalises it to express his own criticism of the contemporary intellectual authorities. Passages returning to, and overtly disapproving of, the "moche crafte of clergie and of kunnyng and moche sotil seching"²³ abound in the text.

The metaphor of school permeates the treatise. The idea of the mystical ascent is doubled by an underlying set of school metaphors. The different stages in the educational system are implicitly juxtaposed to the different levels of the contemplative advancement. This doubling technique, however, remains quite allusive since the author operates only with the lowest and highest extreme poles of the educational career. He belittles the clerks' speculations comparing them to an elementary school pupil's reading of his ABC book²⁴; at the same time, he amplifies the appraisal of the highest mystical achievement by authorising the young mystic to become the master of all those groping about in the darkness of curiosity and denying the wisdom of more intuitive truths:

And thof al that thi wantoun seching wittys kon fynde no mete unto hem in this maner of doying, and therefore grochingly thei wilen bid thee algates to leve of that werk and do sum good on here corious maner (for it semeth to hem that it is no thing worth that thou dost, and al is for thei kan no skile therapon), bot I wolde love it the betir, for bi that it semith that it is more worthi then thei ben. [...] And therefore, althof thi wittis kon fynde no mete unto hem in this werk, and therefore thei wolde have thee away, yit loke that thou leve not for hem, bot be thou here maystre.

[...] yif a soule, that is thus ocupied, had tonge and langage to sey as it felith, than alle the clerkes of Cristendome schuld wondre on that wisdam. Ye! and in comparison of it, al here grete clergie schuld seme apeerte foly. (pp. 82 and 92)

While the recurring cross-reflection of the school experience upon the mystical experience may suggest that there is a smooth and almost impalpable transition from the

²³ Ibid., p. 81. Also cf. the passage interpreting "Beatus homo qui invenit sapienciam et qui affluit prudencia" in the extended English translation: "He is a blisful man that may fynde this onyng wisdom and that may abounde in his goostly worching with this lovely sleight and prudence of spirit, in offring up of his owne blynde feling of his owne beyng, alle corious kunnyng of clergie and of kynde fer put bak." (p. 86) Or elsewhere in another confutation of "science without conscience": "And alle this I sey in confusion of here erryng presumpcion that, in the coryouste of here clergie or here kyndely witte, wolen algates be principal worchers hemself, God bot suffryng or only consentyng, whan verrely the contrary is soth in thinges contemplatye. For only in hem ben alle corious skyles of clergie or of kyndely kunnyng fer put bak, that God be the principal." (p. 98)

²⁴ Cf. quotation above containing the comparison of the "grettest clerk" with the "yong childe at his ABC" in school (p. 80).

intellectual (establishment) to contemplative wisdom, the treatise ultimately ends with a careful separation of the properties of the active and contemplative lives, and assigns to each of these phases the appropriate means of apprehension. The intellect (“kyndely kunnyng,” p. 98) will abound in the active life, “[b]ot in thinges contemplatyve the heighest wisdom that may be in man is fer put under, that God be the principal in worching, and man bot only consentor and sufferer” (p. 99). The turn to a balanced argument over active and contemplative life transforms this mystical text into the defence of the priority of “goostly felyng” over the natural desire after knowing:

[...] a man kyndely desireth for to kunne; bot certes he may not taast of goostly felyng in God bot only by grace, have he never so moche kunnyng of clergie ne of kynde. And therefore, I preie thee, seche more after felyng then after kunning; for kunning oftymes disceyvith with pride, bot meek lovely felyng may not begile. Sciencia inflat, karitas edificat. [I Cor 8:1] “In knowyng is travaile, in felyng is rest.” (p. 105)

2.1.3. “*Sciencia inflat, caritas autem aedificat*”: Debated Authorities in Richard Rolle, Walter Hilton and Thomas Basset

While the 14th-century English mystical texts, written before the arrival of Suso in England, lack Suso’s systematic reflection on the scholarly world, Richard Rolle’s life, as preserved in *The Officium and Miracula of Richard Rolle of Hampole*, “prepared against the eventuality of his canonisation,”²⁵ as well as in some of his works with autobiographical hints,²⁶ had established a pattern, similar to that of Suso, which provided the discussion of academia and authorities with a narrative and structural frame. The *Office* relates Richard Rolle’s abrupt turn from Oxford University to the eremitic way of life in the wilderness.²⁷ Rolle’s conversion to a solitary contemplative life, denying all previous attachments to the world and duties in his active life, was a drastic abandonment of the structured and authoritatively organised academic career for the sake of the “liberty of spirit,” a piety without “rule and structure” which gradually became itself an eremitic movement due to Rolle’s outstanding example. But a generation later, it already seemed for Thomas Arundel, then

²⁵ Michael G. Sargent, “Contemporary Criticism of Richard Rolle,” *Analecta Cartusiana* 55:1 (1981), p. 160.

²⁶ Cf. especially the personal, but not autobiographical *Contra Amatores Mundi*, which remains very controversial by its impersonalized narrative: “[...] no light whatsoever is shed on Rolle’s biography as a result of reading this treatise, even though we are reminded on almost every page of the direct involvement of the author with the events described.” *Contra Amatores Mundi of Richard Rolle of Hampole*. Edited by Paul F. Theiner. University of California Publications. English Studies 33. (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California, 1968), p. 19. All references to this treatise will be made to this edition.

²⁷ Cf. Sargent, “Contemporary Criticism,” pp. 160-1.

Bishop of York and his closest colleagues, Walter Hilton and others, that the movement based on spiritual liberty rather opened the way to unruliness.²⁸

Like Suso, as we will see in his allegorical vision of schools in his *Horologium*, Richard Rolle distances himself from the scholastic world with its sarcastic presentation. Rolle is even more straightforward in expressing his disdain for the “fools” of ambitious careers. The castigation of the figures of his previous life becomes the dominant tone of his evocations of academia:

*Excecantur utique oculi secularium tenebris viciorum, sed et sapiencia mundi, per quam magnos se esse putant, nimirum stultos efficit, et a vere sapiencie lumine in obscura ducit. Hinc quippe abhominabiles facti sunt in studiis suis; non est qui [faciat] bonum, verum nec unus (Ps. 13:1); omnes namque superflue mundi gaudiss se exhibent, et infirmata languore visibilis speciei mentali acie, interioris hominis percordia celestibus amplectendis non assurgent.*²⁹

Rolle also turns from carnal food and drink to the more savoury drinks after the experience of the mystical union: “[E]x spirituali potacione pervenit potestas qua fulcior facere festivitatem et sedile quod suscepi sustinere.”³⁰ Moreover, he also uses the image of vomiting out the unsavoury drinks; in his case the unjustified charges brought against him by his detractors turn out to be venomous for his spiritual advancement:

*Verum quod valui volando videre quodque potui perficere patenter dulcoribus divinis [ociosi et invidi ambulantes in imis ac scelus scientes] hoc [perpetrari] posse per haustum et escam, immo fieri illud affirmantes sumptu superfluo, pessime interpretabantur. Hii in hoc utique ostendunt se non intelligentes, nam archanum ignorant quod accipit electus; deliciis divinum me degere dixerunt et data divinitus dulcedine non ditari. Sed dolo decepti durius domantur, quia virus evado quod evomerunt. Nullus enim sufficit se ipsum portare nec eciam fortissimus per seipsum subsistet.*³¹

But, unlike Suso, Rolle’s paradigms of the academic and spiritual quests are inimically confronted with each other. Rolle impatiently turns against the representatives of the former; “caritas” and “scientia” are irreconcilably alien concepts for him:

²⁸ Janel Mueller, “Preface,” in Walter Hilton, *The Scale of Perfection*. Translated from the Middle English, with an Introduction and Notes by John P. H. Clark and Rosemary Dorward. (New York: Paulist Press, 1991), p. 15.

²⁹ *Contra Amatores Mundi*, III. 41-8

³⁰ Richard Rolle, *Le Chant d’Amour (Melos Amoris)*. Texte latin de l’édition E. J. F. Arnould. Introduction et notes par François Vendenbroucke, OSB. Traduit par les moniales de Wisques. Vols. 1-2. Sources chrétiennes 168-9. (Paris: Cerf, 1971), p. 94. All further references to this work will be to this edition.

³¹ *Melos Amoris*, p. 96.

*Sub umbra illius quem desiderabam sedi et [fructus] eius dulcis gutturi [meo] (Cant. 2:3) Propter quod conturbare conabantur comprobacionem qua clarificabar ad honorem omnium Auctoris, blasphemantes beatificandum semetipsos, exaltati in eorum opinione, ut eminentes ubique apparerent abierunt in accusacionem transeuncium in terra; et falsidici fere oppressi sunt usque in exterminium, quia in argumentis artistarum et sophismatibus sine sanctitate, non in operibus electis nec in fervore fidei cum digna dileccione, superare suspicabantur quos Cunctipotens in calidissima et canora charitate coronauit.*³²

In Rolle's mystical voyage, there is no room for alternative authorities after the school of clergy; he only acknowledges the "Auctor" as the omnipotent authority in the life after schools. Rolle does not apply the notion or images of institutional learning for the life in burning love. The evocation of academic activities is always a malicious and angry looking back at a self-enclosed world, with which no mutual understanding can be established.

Rolle's conversion opened the way towards the mystical experience of a "perceptible, real" fire burning in his heart, an "abundance of [...] unaccustomed comfort" he had never felt before.³³ This experience returned to him several times afterwards, and also found its literary formulation in Rolle's new mystical trinity, "fervor, dulcor, canor." But another legacy of the conversion in Rolle's writings was the inseparable nature of the mystical experience from the immediately preceding rejection of academic studies. For Rolle, the two modes of intellectual and spiritual beings, the academic and eremitic, appear as consecutive stages on one's spiritual journey. But Rolle experiences the step from the one into the other as irreversible: even if the new and richer spiritual state of the hermit is reached by surpassing the lower level, the higher state does not keep and incorporate anything from the lower level.

After his conversion, Rolle does not only clash with the rules and norms of the world he identifies as the exact opposite of his spiritual state, but he is also deeply tempted to introspect into this prohibited realm of speculations, sophisms and vain arguments, and constructs a new voice and identity on the basis of what he deemed to deny from this pre-life. But in this denial, he almost invisibly rejoins the debate on teaching authorities, and introduces elements of the Pauline discourse in his writings. While he insists on rejecting the

³² *Melos Amoris*, p. p. 76. Cf. also the place of secular wisdom in the process of the soul's turning to a receptacle of amor: "Amor utique audacem efficit animum, quem arripit ab imis dum eterni [Auctoris incendium] amicum inflammat et suscipit in sublimitatem supra sophiam secularem ut non sentiat nisi sanctitatem" (*Melos Amoris*, p. 98.); and the *locus classicus* interpretation of I Cor. 8:1 in Rolle's *Fire of Love*: "Knowledge without love does not edify or contribute to our salvation; it merely puffs up to our dreadful loss." Richard Rolle, *The Fire of Love*. Edited by Clifton Wolters. (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1972), Chapter 5, p. 58 and further related passages in prologue, pp. 46-7 and Chapter 33, p. 149.

³³ The *Office* quoted by Sargent, "Contemporary Criticism," p. 163.

academic reminiscences in his writings, in one passage of the *Fire of Love* he still reshapes the ultimate authority of the mystical quests with the borrowing of the notion and image of the teacher, and thus continues the Augustinian and Bonaventuran tradition of the inner master:

*But those who have acquired their learning not directly but second-hand, and who are puffed up with their complicated arguments, say scornfully, "Where did he learn all this? To which teacher has he been listening?" They do not believe that lovers of eternity can be taught by an inner Teacher, or speak more eloquently than those taught by men who have spent their whole life studying for empty hours.*³⁴

Rolle shows up a mirror to his implied academic audience who evidently try to stigmatise their non-academic opponents, refuting the academic paths of acquiring the redemptive knowledge, by disclaiming their intellectual and academic qualities. What Rolle describes in this passage is an early record of the common strategy of the authorities of the late 14th and 15th centuries in launching an attack against heterodox, or simply suspicious, thought:

*Recent work on heresy and literacy demonstrates that educated authorities often tried to brand heretics as illiterate, especially when compare to those who came from schools. And what knowledge the former did possess was considered not very rigorous and always susceptible to dangerous permutations and false understanding. Lollards, however, infuriatingly made the same argument against the learned clerics, who they believed neglected the Scriptures and thereby misled the faithful.*³⁵

But this mirror is double-sided: it does not only reflect the automatic reactions of learned authorities to the worrying extramural claims to an alternative authority, but also the well-articulated claims of the exiled that (1) "official views might be based on deliberate misinterpretations," and (2) in Fiona Somerset's words, "the laity could instantly acquire the learning they would need" through Christ's own words to his disciples, which confers knowledge "independent of institutional training."³⁶ In his endeavour to clearly delineate his new authority, and detach himself from a world with which he breaks, but whose claims and principles he wants to keep, Rolle recontextualises a crucial passage from Paul's Epistle to the Romans (Rom. 12:3):

Postremo possessor plurimorum si arbitretur se licite posse uti habundancia quam accepit et divicias suas defendere a [destructoribus] dum ei demorari non denegatur in hoc piaculoso progressu, videat vigilanter ne ipsis inhereat amore inordinato aut

³⁴ *The Fire of Love*, Chapter 33, p. 149.

³⁵ Ben Lowe, "Teaching in the 'Schole of Christ': Law, Learning, and Love in Early Lollard Pacifism," *The Catholic Historical Review* 90 (2004), p. 415.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 6 and 7.

sapiat eas plus quam oportet sapere, *ne delitibus deliciis diviciisque debacatus per temporalis prosperitatis dulcedinem adversitatem sciat amaritudinis.*³⁷ (emphasis added)

Rolle puzzles the reader, familiar with the Pauline warning especially in contexts cautioning against illicit intellectual pursuits, by identifying the object of “sapere,” moreover with things (“personal possessions”) that seemed entirely irrelevant for the traditional discourse on, and implications for, Rom. 12:3. Rolle, in this passage, argues for his own right to have accepted basic sustenance for his eremitic way of life from his patrons. By answering the charges of his detractors, he does not only defend the compatibility of a modest living (even if eremitic) with eremitic contemplation, but also indicates his withdrawal from accepting academia’s traditional claims on drawing the boundaries of the knowable. He applies Rom. 12:3 to mark the lowest boundary of the mystical existence (i.e. not to be immoderately attached to material things), and thus removes the highest or upper barrier to the pursuit of knowing, since he does not substitute new taboos and cautions for the earlier, Pauline passages.

Rolle’ struggles with authorities continued also beyond his life in the implicit criticisms of the *Cloud*-author and Walter Hilton.³⁸ One of Hilton’s main concerns in his *Scale of Perfection* is an attempt to undermine Rolle’s allegations about the physical reality of the heat and burning of the heart which he experienced several times.³⁹ The debate, evidently, had theological implications pertaining to the spiritual nature of the mystical ascent, and thus to its material impalpability, but what underlay Hilton’s critique was also an endeavour to temper Rolle’s stance on authorities, and to accommodate this suspicious, at the same time very influential, mystic to an ordered canon and institutional background.

At the very start of the *Scale*, Walter Hilton also makes his contribution to I Cor 1:8 (“Scientia inflat, caritas autem aedificat”), indicating that he is not inclined to maintain the dichotomy of science vs. love. He distinguishes between two ways of the pursuit of knowledge, one of which leads to contemplation (through humility), while the other, lacking

³⁷ *Melos Amoris*, pp. 206-8.

³⁸ For a detailed review of these authors’ contributions to Rolle’s criticism, cf.: Sargent, “Contemporary Criticism,” pp. 176-82.

³⁹ Hilton never names Rolle when he supposedly hints at his convictions that the feeling of heat and fire in his heart and body was really a material and sens-bound experience. He is most explicit in the refutation of these ideas in *Scale I*, 26: “Alle men and women that speken of the fier of love knowe not wel what it is, for what it is I cannot telle thee, save this may I telle thee, it is neither bodili, ne it is bodili feelid. A soule mai fele it in praiere or in devocioun, whiche soule is in the bodi, but he felith it not bi no bodili witt. For though it be so, that yif it wirke in a soule the bodi mai turne into an heete as it were chafid for lykinge travaile of the spirit, nevertheless the fier of love is not bodili, for it is oonly in the goostli desire of the soule.” Walter Hilton, *The Scale of Perfection*. Edited by Thomas H. Bestul. TEAMS. (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Medieval Institute Publications, Western Michigan University, 2000), I, 26, p. 59. All further references to this work will be to this edition. For other probable hints at Rolle, cf.: *Scale I*, 9 (about the characteristics of the gift of burning in contemplation), and I, 31 (another passage against the materiality of the fire of love).

humility, disintegrates knowledge, and leads to pride, vain glory, covetousness, worldly ambitions, or errors, heresies, and open sins. It is only in this second respect that knowledge becomes condemnable, since it puffs up people. But knowledge itself is good as far as it may empower someone to access to another level of existence which already has the “spiritual savour of God”:

Contemplatiyf liyf hath three parties. The first is in knowynge of God and goostli thynges geten by resoun, bi techynge of man and bi studie of Hooly Writ, withouten goostli affeccion and inward savour feelid bi the special gift of the Hooli Goost. This party han speciali summe lettred men and grete clerkes whiche bi longe studé and travaile in Hooli Writ comen to this knowynge, more or lesse, after the sutelté of kyndeli wit and contynuanse of studie after the general gift that God gyveth to everi man that hath use of reson. This knowyng is good, and it may be called a partie of contemplacioun in as mykil as it is a sight of soothfastnesse and knowynge of goostli thynges. Nevertheles, it is but a figure and a schadewe of verry contemplacioun, for it hath no gostli savoure in God ne in the inwarde swetnesse of love, whiche may no man feele but he be in mykil charité. [...] Of [knowing without love] seyde Seynt Poul thus: Scientia inflat, caritas autem edificat. [...] This knowyne aloone is but water, unsavery and cold.⁴⁰

Hilton insists on the intellectual foundation of the contemplative progress, and associates the necessary moderation and patience that the contemplative has to practice in order to advance from one stage into the next in the right moment with the necessary assistance of a teaching authority, the institutional authorities in general, and more concretely with the Church. While shifting Rolle’s audacious imagery back to what theological authorities can embrace with any problem, Hilton also reverses his predecessor’s experiments with distancing from academic authority. In this discourse, he closes the circle of the contested interpretation of the Pauline warning in late 14th-century English mystical writings. In Book 1, Chapter 6 of the *Scale of Perfection* Hilton steals in the paraphrase of Rom .11:20 in a context which intends to encourage the contemplative in the lower degree of the second part of contemplation to endure in patience and hope until the more reassuring longer mystical experience comes:

The lowere degré of this [burning] feelinge, men whiche aren actif may have bi grace whanne thei be visited of oure Lord, as myghtili and as ferventli as thei that gyven hem hooli to contemplatiff liyf and han this gift. But it lasteth not so longe. Also this

⁴⁰ *The Scale of Perfection* I, 4, pp. 33-4 and 35.

*feelynge in his fervour cometh not alwey whanne a man wolde, ne it lasteth not wel longe. [...] And therefore whoso hath it, meke hymself and thanke God, and kepe it prevey, but yif it be to his confessour, and holde it as longe as he may with discrecion. And whanne hit withdraweth, drede not to mykil, but stond in feith and in meke hope, with pacient abidyng til it come agen.*⁴¹

He literally translates “tu autem fide stas” (“but stond in feith”), but anticipates Paul’s second imperative (“sed time”), softening it by “not to mykil” (i.e. “Do not fear too much.”), and thus transforming the original caution into an exhortation. What is omitted in the paraphrase is St. Paul’s first imperative, more exactly its prohibition, “noli altum sapere,” which came to be substituted here by the phrase “[stond] in meke hope.” No boundaries are imposed upon the endured patience of someone committed to progress in contemplation.

At the same time, the theme of the fears of the contemplatives for the block-outs of the mystical experience is related to the discussion of Chapter 21. In this part, Hilton elaborates on the idea of how it is possible to remain in the lower degree of the second stage of contemplation, or even to continue it, in spite of the discouraging intermezzi without the certainty of the eventual return of the burning feeling. Concerns about the temptations of this contemplative phrase are lengthily treated in the *Scale*. While, in Chapter 6, the contemplative was encouraged by a paraphrase of Rom. 11:20 without even reminding him of the issues of boundaries, in Chapter 21, Hilton specifies the boundaries, previously omitted:

*Secunde thyng which thee bihoveth for to have is a siker trowth in articlis of the feith and the sacramentes of Holi Chirche, trowand hem stidefastli with al the wille of thyn herte. And though thu feele ony styryng in thyn herte agens ony of hem bi suggestion of the enemye, for to putte thee in doute and in dweer of hem, be thu stidefast and not to mykill have drede of sich styrynges ne of the feelyng of hem, but forsake thyn owen witte withoute disputyng or ransakyng of hem, and sette thi feith generaly in the feith of Hooli Chirche, and charge not the styryng of thyn herte whiche, as thee thenkith, is contrarie therto.*⁴²

Hilton redraws the barrier Rolle removed, and that he himself omitted from his paraphrase of Rom. 11:20. As is clear from *Scale*, Hilton inherently associates the Church with teaching authority, and knowledge with conformity to the Church’s teaching. Thus he brings back the issue of authority, and curtails Rolle’s legacy by embracing the hermit’s tempered views as a representative of learned teaching, from which Rolle escaped.

⁴¹ *Scale* I, 6, p. 36.

⁴² *Scale* I, 21, p. 53.

But Hilton's contribution is not the last to the problem of authority and knowledge in the mystical tradition. A document, written by a disciple of Rolle's Thomas Basset, in defence of his master against his detractors, attests to the fact that the storms around Rolle's authority were more violent, and trickled down more deeply than the allusions of the *Cloud*-author or Walter Hilton allow us to see. The unique copy of Basset's *Defense* survives in MS Uppsala, Universitetsbibliotheket C. 621.⁴³ The defence was addressed to a Carthusian, as the salutation reveals, but we do not know any more about the identity of this person. Basset is deeply involved in the restitution of his master's and his own respect by refuting the opponent's charges in a very complex way, applying a wide range of emotional and formal logical arguments. Basset argues from the position of the simple and ignorant, for whom he claims wisdom on the basis of quoting I Cor. 1:19. Parallel to this, he also denies the wisdom to the Carthusian, although – in the eyes of the world – he is invested with authority and the power of knowing.⁴⁴ In spite of these “stirrings” over Rolle, which had probably rather a local significance, the overall temporary “standstill” in the tug of war over authorities between the institutionally oriented and the extramural currents of mysticism, was disturbed by Suso's contribution to the preliminary debate in English mystical texts.

2.2. Henry Suso's *Horologium Sapientiae*

Henry Suso's pursuit of wisdom and his spiritual progress attested by the autobiographical passages of his *Horologium Sapientiae* as well as by several chapters of his *Vita* parallel in many ways the quests of Richard Rolle. Although Suso never openly broke with the existing institutional system, as he himself became teacher in the Dominican house of Constance, the years of study he spent with Master Eckhart at Cologne and his spiritual sensitivity prepared the way for his conversion from a purely intellectual life to that of ascetic spirituality. Although the causes for Rolle's conversion were not conserved by the sources related to the early period of his life, we may assume that the English hermit turned away from university studies after similar considerations that can be reconstructed from Suso's allegorical justifications. Künzle and Tobin agree that Suso

in the Horologium sapientiae, [...] expresses his dissatisfaction with the theology of the schools and the motivation of those pursuing it. He finds that such school learning

⁴³ Sargent, “Contemporary Criticism,” p. 183. Sargent also publishes the diplomatic transcript of the letter in the appendix of his article.

⁴⁴ Cf.: *Ibid.*, pp. 189-90.

*is dry and that it nurtures the vanity and egotistical pedantry of those engaged in it, while there is little about it that promotes spiritual life.*⁴⁵

As member of the Dominican order, Suso pursued the path prescribed by the Order's constitutions: following one year of novitiate and two years of the *divinum officium* (the study of the constitutions of the Dominicans), the young friars went through a five-year course of philosophy and three years of theological studies (the first of which consecrated to the Bible, and the last two to Peter Lombard's *Sentences*).⁴⁶ For the intellectually more ambitious or promising members, the normal course of training might have been completed by a three-year course at the *studium generale* of the Order. Suso was sent to Cologne, the place of the Dominicans' provincial school, where he actually finished his career as a disciple.

The vision of the diversity of doctrines and the multitude of disciples as appears in part 1 of the second book of the Latin *Horologium* seems to derive directly from the organisation of learning that Suso experienced during his career. The vision of the golden sphere ornamented with gems, an allegory for all arts of teaching, emphasises a *caesura* between the lower and upper mansions within the globe, corresponding to the division of the Dominican curriculum into the lower five years of philosophy followed by three (eventually twice three) years of theology. The partition of sciences into a hemisphere of the liberal sciences and another of theology reinforces the pattern known from Suso's scholastic progress. At the same time, the vision with its symmetrically elaborated ternary subdivisions on each half of the sphere is also indicative of an artificially conceived mental representation of the classification of sciences. The inferior hemisphere is subdivided into the *artes liberales*, the *artes mechanicae*, and *philosophia*.⁴⁷ The ensuing list of sciences illustrating the three branches, however, modifies the content of what the scientific categories imply. The mention of "astrologi," "physici" (who "naturas rerum subtiliter considerabant," 520, 14-5), "geometrici," and "musici" reduces the seven arts only to the *quadrivium* completed with physics, resulting in a combined category that in some medieval classifications crystallises as

⁴⁵ Henry Suso. *The Exemplar, with Two German Sermons*. Translated, edited and introduced by Frank Tobin. Classics of Western Spirituality. (New York: Paulist Press, 1989), p. 33. Pius Künzle also emphasises that Suso's harsh criticism of the contemporary schools and especially of the teaching of theology is not targeted against a concrete master or representatives of a well identifiable school of thought, but rather against the institution as such. Cf. Pius Künzle, ed., *Heinrich Seuses Horologium Sapientiae*. (Freiburg: Universitätsverlag Freiburg, 1977), pp. 3 and 47.

⁴⁶ Cf. Jeanne Ancelet-Hustache, ed., *Bienheureux Henri Suso. Oeuvres complètes*. (Paris: Seuil, 1977), p. 15. Tobin reconstructs Suso's academic career as follows: between 1313 and 1319 he learnt philosophy in Constance and probably in Strasbourg; the first half of his *cursum* being devoted to *philosophia rationalis* (Aristotelian logic), while the second half to *philosophia realis* (physics, geometry, astronomy, Aristotelian metaphysics, ethics and politics). The superior studies included sciences almost all of which (except for ethics and politics) are echoed in the vision of chapter II, 1 of the *Horologium*. The philosophical studies were completed by three years of theology and the years spent at the *studium generale* in Cologne. Tobin, op. cit., p. 21.

⁴⁷ Künzle, op. cit., 520, 12-3. (All references to Suso's *Horologium* will be made to this edition.)

natural philosophy.⁴⁸ The importance of mechanical arts, represented here by “*medicina*” and “*fabrilia*,” may again be traced back to influences of Hugh of Saint Victor, who in his *Didascalica*, inserted the category of seven mechanical arts to counterbalance the seven liberal arts.⁴⁹ The third branch of the inferior sciences, “*philosophia*” is not elucidated by any of her disciplines, but the context of the passage and of Suso’s academic advancement compels us to identify it with metaphysics in the Aristotelian sense. The term “*philosophy*” is certainly not reserved for theology, since the pursuit of this latter receives the superior hemisphere on its own.

The higher mansion of the globe contains three orders of students and doctors of theology, corresponding to three modes of studying the Sacred Scripture: the “*carnalis*,” the “*animalis*,” and the “*spiritualis*.” These three manners of the study of theology are determined by the purpose of the scholars underlying their activity: (1) “*ascendere et apparere*” (521, 23), (2) “*in statu proprio persistere*” (525, 13), and (3) “*ad divina contemplando raperentur*” (525, 18-9). At the point of Wisdom’s commenting on the meaning of the complex vision, the allegory of the golden sphere, storing Suso’s personal reflections on, and criticism of, the institutional forms of teaching, turns into the expression of a mystical visual *topos*, the moment of illumination and the emanation of truth. The first treasure that *Sapientia* discloses from herself is Saint Paul’s warning to the Romans: “*Fili mi, noli altum sapere, sed time*” (526, 23). The access to Wisdom’s treasure is a divine response to Suso’s recognition of a necessary change in the attitude determining one’s intellectual quest after truth. St. Paul’s words do not only respond to Suso’s urging Wisdom to open her treasure box, but rather to the scholars of the lower modes of learning philosophy and theology whose intellectual aims are totally misdirected. The way this key sentence is placed in the vision results in a paradox that also characterises the macro structure of the *Horologium*. The moment of the encounter with the divine (narrated in more traditional terms of a “*supernatural rapture*” in Chapter 2 of Suso’s *Vita*) coincides with a prohibition on “*altum sapere*,” which Suso exactly experiences, just as well as the ability to know how to live well presupposes the knowledge of how to die.

⁴⁸ Isidore of Seville differentiates two divisions of philosophy, the first of which he calls the Stoic way, where philosophy’s first branch is natural philosophy (or physics) consisting of the arts of the quadrivium. The same category is kept by Scot Eriugena. Hugh of Saint Victor elaborates on the Stoic classification, and involves the mathematical sciences (i.e. the quadrivium) with physics and theology under the label of theoretical (or speculative) philosophy. Suso’s presentation of his perception of scientific classification shares also other common traits with Hugh of Saint Victor’s system. Cf. James A. Weisheipl, OP, “Classification of the Sciences in Medieval Thought,” *Mediaeval Studies* 27 (1965), pp. 64-6. For further detail of theorisations on the division of sciences, cf. Chapter 3. Pius Künzle also pointed out coincidences in Suso’s and Hugh of Saint Victor’s thoughts: Künzle, op. cit., p. 521, note to line 3.

⁴⁹ Weisheipl, op. cit., pp. 65-6.

Suso translates his own conversion into the paradoxical language and structure of his vision: one has to mortify himself in order to live with the possession of the most useful arts.

[Sapientia:] Doctrina mea, ipsa erit vita tua. Igitur exordium disciplinae salutaris a timore domini inchoantes, qui initium est sapientiae, docebo te haec per ordinem: Primo qualiter moriendum sit; postea qualiter vivendum [...]. Scientia utilissima et cunctis artibus praeferenda est haec scientia, scire videlicet mori. (527, 24-528, 2 and 528, 10-1)

Chapter 3 of Suso's *Vita* contains a parallel episode of his conversion experience, though with a different emphasis on his dissatisfaction with the scholastic system. Here, the description of the moment of rapture is entirely rendered as a deep, personal, mystical experience, the epiphany of Wisdom in Boethian terms:

[T]o the extent he [Suso] was able to imagine her [Wisdom] through the explanatory examples of scripture with his inner eyes, she presented herself to him thus: She was suspended high above him on a throne of clouds. She shone as the morning star and dazzled as the glittering sun. Her crown was eternity, her attire blessedness, her words sweetness, and her embrace the surcease of all desire. She was distant yet near, far above yet low, present yet hidden. She engaged in activities with others, but no one could claim her. She towered above the summit of heaven and touched the bottom of the abyss. She spread herself out sovereign from one end of the earth to the other and ordered all things sweetly.⁵⁰

Although the disaffection with institutional training is detached from this episode of the *Vita*, an alternative vision incorporating the *topoi* of the vision allegory of the *Horologium* appears independently in Chapter 19 of Suso's *Life*. In this passage, the young disciple is led by a young man descending from above to the school of the Spirit, where he is introduced into the art of detachment:

[I]t seemed to him [Suso] in an inner vision that a fine young man came down from above, stood in front of him and said, "You have spent enough time in the lower school. You have practiced enough at that level and have graduated. Come with me. I shall now lead you to the highest school that exists on earth. There you shall diligently

⁵⁰ *Vita* I, 3 in Tobin, op. cit., p. 69. Cf. Boethius's vision in his *De Consolatione Philosophiae* I, prose 1: "Haec dum mecum tacitus ipse reputarem [...], astitisse mihi supra verticem visa est mulier reverendi admodum vultus oculis ardentibus et ultra communem hominum valentiam perspicacibus, colore vivido atque inexhausti vigoris, quamvis ita aevi plena foret, ut nullo modo nostrae crederetur aetatis, statura discretionis ambiguae. Nam nunc quidem ad communem sese hominum mensuram cohibebat, nunc vero pulsare caelum summi verticis cacumine videbatur; quae cum altius caput extulisset, ipsum etiam caelum penetrabat respicientiumque hominum frustrabatur intuitum." Ancius Manlius Severinus Boethius, *Philosophiae Consolationis Libri Quinque*, ed. By Karl Büchner, 3rd ed. (Heidelberg: Carl Winter Universitätsverlag, 1977), pp. 5-6.

learn a most lofty art that shall place you in divine peace and bring your holy beginning to a blessed completion.”

[...] The young man took him by the hand and led him, as it seemed, into a spiritual land where there was a very beautiful house that seemed to be the dwelling of religious people. In it lived those who were practicing this same art (of detachment). When he entered, he was received kindly, and all greeted him pleasantly. They hurried to the chief teacher and told him that someone had come who also wanted to be his disciple and learn this art. He replied, “First I want to see him for myself, whether I like him.” When he saw him, he smiled very kindly at him and said, “Let me tell you that this guest can very well become a capable religious teacher of our exalted art, if he is willing with patience to betake himself into the confining living quarters where he must prove himself.”⁵¹

In this vision, the preparation for the mystical union is allotted a separate place (house), where the learning of self-detachment is pursued. This place, however, adjusts exactly to the exterior forms of the earlier paradigm of learning. The narrative emphasises the transition from school to school and from the learning of an art to another, the disciple remains a disciple received by another master and fellows in the new establishment. The progress from the lower schools to the highest also fits the rituals of the institutional stages of maturity: advancement, graduation, selection and initiation. In spite of all these features confirming the stability of the institutional context for the entire mystical experience – from intellectual preparation to the ascent and mystical fulfilment – no attachment to the established forms of the acquisition of knowledge can counterbalance the striking *caesura* dividing the disciple’s experiences. The challenge Suso faces in a puzzled way in the highest school urges him to continue his progress by reversing the spirit of all his previous schools: “‘This art [of detachment] requires that one be free for inactivity. The less one does, the more one has really accomplished.’ The activity he [the young man who led Suso to the school] had in mind was that which in doing a person becomes an obstacle to his own progress and does not carry out purely in praise of God.”⁵²

Placing Suso’s school visions and, with that, the message of restraining oneself from the endeavour to know higher things as appears Chapter II, 1 of the *Horologium*, into various contexts results in manifold interpretations of Saint Paul’s warning. The context itself is interpretative, since, as we could see, Suso’s *Life* is already an interpretation of his biography

⁵¹ *Vita* I, 19 in Tobin, op. cit., pp. 97-8.

⁵² *Vita* I, 19 in Tobin, op. cit., p. 98.

by Elsbeth Stigel and possibly other spiritual daughters of Suso's in the cloister of Töss. What emerges from most scholarly interpretations is the centrality of the argument that Suso's additions to the Latin *Horologium* reflect upon concrete experiences of his in the interval that elapsed between the composition of the German and the Latin works. Consequently, the passages related to the academic world are conceived of as newer developments in Suso's thought. But the transition from the conformity to the existing educational system to a different, spiritually-directed paradigm is already visible in the prologue to the German *Little Book of Eternal Wisdom*:

The author presents his instruction in the form of question and answer in order to make it more interesting, and not because he is the one it pertains to or because he himself spoke it all about himself. He intends to present here common teaching in which both he and everyone else can find what applies to them.

As a teacher should, he takes on the roles of all persons, now speaking as a sinner, now as someone perfect, now as an example of the loving soul, and then, according to the demands of the material, in the figure of a servant with whom eternal Wisdom speaks. Almost everything is explained symbolically. Much is present here for instruction that a serious person can choose for himself for his devotions.⁵³

Suso shapes himself in the role of author as well as a new teacher with an admirable flexibility between tones, registers, and even characters. He demolishes the authoritative bases of the teaching functions insofar as he counterbalances the teacher's authoritative role with his being sinful. He also gives free choice to the disciple to determine his own enrichment on his own spiritual journey. The vision he draws about teaching itself is that of a common adventure whose spiritual experience is shared by the guide and his followers.

2.3. Suso's Vision in the Middle English Renderings

The English renderings of Suso's *Horologium Sapientiae* (*The Seven Points of True Love and Everlasting Wisdom*) are ignorant about the identity of the author of the original text; thus, they are unaware of the textual and spiritual tradition they continue. Some of them identify their source by naming the title of the Latin work; otherwise, only the overall content is given in the incipit.⁵⁴ Copyists of fragments of the same work that appear independently in

⁵³ *Little Book of Eternal Wisdom*, Prologue in Tobin, op. cit., p. 208.

⁵⁴ MSS containing the complete text with a reference to the Latin original are as follows: 1. Aberystwyth, National Library of Wales, Brogyntyn 19 ("Tretyse of the seven poyntes of trewe love and everlastynge wisdom drawn out of the boke that is wretten in latyne and clepede Orologium Sapientie"); and Oxford, Bodleian Library Douce 114 ("These be the chapitres of this tretys of þe seuene poyntes of trewe loue and euerlastynge wisdame, drawn oute of þe boke þat is writen in latyne and callyd Orologium Sapiencie").

almost as many manuscripts as the complete text of *The Seven Points* are not more ignorant than the translators (or copyists) of the full version. Most of them refer exactly to the *(H)Orologium*, from which the fragment was extracted.⁵⁵ The author (translator) of the version in MS Oxford, Bodleian Library, Douce 114, edited and directly related by Horstmann to MSS Cambridge, Gonville and Cajus College 390 (=610), the fragment in Oxford, Bodleian Library, Douce 322 and Caxton's edition,⁵⁶ only assumes that the author of the original was a Dominican friar:

*Off þe whiche boke þe processe stant for þe moste parte in gostlye reuelaciones and deuowt ymaginaciones, in manere of spekyng bye-twix þe maystre, euerlastyng wisdom, and þe deuowt discyple þat wrote þe boke; whose name is vnknownen to vs, but, as we mowe sopelye byleve, hit is wryten in þe boke of lyfe; Neuerlese, as hit schewep, he was a frere prechour.*⁵⁷

For the English translator, the person of the original author does not seem to carry much significance. Clearly, he seems to have identified the author's status by relying on some signs (cf. above: "as hit schewep"), which could rather be inferred from extratextual evidence.⁵⁸ The author's pretence of dealing with a quasi-anonymous work, however, serves his masterly reshaping of the authorial voice of the original treatise. Not only does he rearrange and cut the material, but he also lends his own voice to the original author, whom he considers solely as the impersonation of the disciple in the dialogue with Sapience.

The recommendation of *The Seven Points* reveals immediately that the circumstances of composition are drastically different from those of the *Horologium*. True that Suso himself

⁵⁵ See e.g. MSS CUL Ff v. 45 containing only Chapter 5 ("Here sueth a tretys cleped Orologium Sapientie"); BL Add. 37049 with Chapters 4 and 5 ("It is written in the boke that is cald Horologium Divine Sapientie..."); and Oxford, Bodl. Douce 322 with only Chapter 5 ("A tretyse called Orologium Sapientie").

⁵⁶ Karl Horstmann, "*Orologium Sapientiae* or *The Seven Poyntes of Trewe Wisdom*, aus MS Douce 114," *Anglia* 10 (1888), pp. 323-4.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 325. (All further references to *The Seven Points of True Love and Everlasting Wisdom* will be made to this edition; page and line numbers will be indicated in parentheses after citations. Horstmann's edition of the text does not number lines continuously, but restarts on each new page.)

⁵⁸ G. Schleich conjectured that the origin of MS Douce 114 can be traced back to the Carthusian house of Beauvale, Notts. He excludes the hypothesis of Dominican authorship for the translation; he argues that it would be most unlikely that an English brother from Suso's order would not know the name of the *Horologium*'s author. On the other hand, a letter in the same manuscript "endyted in latyn Dan Stephen of Senis, sumtym Pryour of þe hede-Charteus... vnto Frere Thomas Anthonij of Senis, of þe ordyr of prechours" proves the friendly relationship between the Dominicans and Carthusians, which would also confirm the hypothesis of the Carthusian provenance of the MS. Cf.: G. Schleich, "Auf den Spuren Susos in England," *Archiv für das Studium der neueren Sprachen und Literaturen* 56 (1929), p. 193. A note in the MS on f. 148 confirms that, at a certain time, it belonged to the Carthusians of Beauvale: "Iste liber est domus belle vallis ordinis cartus<i>iensis</i> in comitatu notyngham." (Künzle, op. cit., p. 269.) This, however, does not state anything concrete about the circumstances of the translation of the English text. Lovatt is also cautious when writing about the presence of the MSS containing the *Horologium* in the English Carthusian houses: "[T]he *Horologium* was known in some form in the Charterhouses of Beauvale, Coventry, Hinton, London, Mountgrace and Witham, and probably also at Sheen." (Lovatt, op. cit., p. 50.)

destined his own Latin work for a much wider circulation even beyond the group of people with whom he could maintain a personal relationship, he possibly did not foresee that voices alien from his own would almost necessarily intrude into the dialogue between the disciple and Sapience. Thus, visions that emerge from Suso's personal quest on his spiritual journey may not only be transmitted, but also interpreted by a second person expropriating the voice of the narrator. In the case of the English rendering, a chaplain addresses a lady of higher rank, his spiritual daughter ("[m]y moste worschiful lady aftir 3owre hyz worpynesse, and derrest-loued goostly douzter after 3our vertuous meeknes", 325, 1-2). The context of the translation is spiritual instruction. Although the spiritual guide admits to having ruminated for quite long on the original Latin text, and also claims to have understood its spiritual message (which is proved by his assiduity in the translation),⁵⁹ the recommendation of the work into the lady's grace does not expect at all the spiritual daughter to cope with interpretation. At the end of the recommendation, the translator implies both a reading and listening public for his work; moreover, he implicitly envisions the further circulation of the translation among a public which may not be directly accessible to him. The translator's self-referential approach to Suso's work reads itself as an alternative narrative frame which the English author substituted for Suso's autobiographical references. The English recommendation permits us to reconstruct the translator's journey from the moment he got acquainted with the *Horologium* to the fate he envisions for his own translation. This gradual process goes parallel with the metamorphosis of the translator into an author.

The spiritual father presents the work to the lady addressed with the purpose of confirming the lady's "gostlye wisdom" by strengthening her in the fight with the "deceyuable" wisdom of the world. The translator's mental representation of the world (and the world of intellect) cannot, however, be reduced to this binary opposition. He assists the lady's spiritual advancement with his own "simple kunnyng" (325, 9-10), which, however, does not seem to be so simple in understanding and rendering the "clergialie teremes" (325,

⁵⁹ "Butte 3it at þe bigynnyng of þis werke, towchyng mye-selfe, soþelye I knowleche myne variaunce in wille þere-to: ffor sum-tyme for love and likyng þat I have hadde in þe forseide boke Orologium sapiencie, and also for gostlye comfort of 3owe specialye and oþer deuowte persones þat desyrene hit, I haue be stired to þe translacione þere-of in to englische in manere before-seyde; but þer-wiþ consideryng þe multitude of bokes and treetes drawne in englische, þat nowe bene generale cominede, mye wille haþ bene wiþdrawne, dredyng þat werke sumwhat as in waste. Neuerlese [...] felyng mye-selfe not lettete þere-bye fro oþere gostlye excercyses, but rapere confortede: whanne I haue leysere and tyme, I have take vpon me þat symple werke in certeyne tymes, whanne myne affeccione falleþ þere-to, after þat owre lorde Jhesus wole send me his grace in þis place of grace. ffor þe whiche grace in alle þinges, as hit is nedefulle to me in þis wretchede lyfe. I bes(e)che alle þoo þat redene or hirene þis treete, to preyre to him þat is welle of alle grace, owre lorde Jhesu Cryste." (*Seven points*, p. 326, 4-21) The pun the translator makes with the word "grace" may be an allusion to the Carthusian house of Mountgrace; thus the author's place does not only enjoy Christ's blessing through the grace coming from Heaven, but also by virtue of its very name.

34) of the “deuowt contemplatyfe boke wrytene clergialye in latyne” (325, 12). When after the dichotomy of spiritual and deceivable wisdom, the author introduces the terms “kunnyng” and “clergialie,” he draws on the convention of contrasting the two (the humble use of the natural human wit as opposed to the intricate speculative thinking), suggesting that the dichotomies are operative along two axes: the first ranging from the worldly to the spiritual, while the second from the lack of curiosity to extremely vain curiosity. But a closer look at the context of the two occurrences of “clergialie” compels us to revise this precipitated conclusion.

In the first instance (“wrytene clergialye in latyne”), the adverb appears in a syntactically ambiguous position. It cannot be decided whether the *Horologium* bears the clerical attribute simply because it was written in Latin or if its style is labelled as clerical besides the fact that its language is Latin. Only the second of these interpretations would be disapproving of the author and the style of the original work. But even if this was the intentional message of the translator, he certainly does not condemn the original author of being “clergialie,” i.e. falling into the trap of vain curiosity, since, in this case, he would indirectly admit to being inspired by an overtly vain work.

The second occurrence of the same adjective, in spite of its ambiguous context, again casts doubt on the traditional negative connotations associated with the word. In this passage the chaplain uncovers the principles he respected when preparing the translation:

Ne I translate not þe wordes as þei bene wrytene, one for a nopere, þat is to seye þe englische worde for þe latyne worde – by-cause þat þere beþ manye wordes in clergialie teremes þe wheche wold seme vnsaverye so to be spokene in englische: and þere-for I take þe sentence as me þinkeþ most opune to þe comine vnderstandyng in englische. (325, 32-6)

The author commits himself to the golden rule of translation (“sense for sense” without insisting on “word for word”), because practice dictates so. He found many Latin words for which he could not find equivalents in English. Most probably, these “clergialie teremes” belong to the scientific field, since the author suggests that he could have kept them in the English translation. So the problem is not so much that these expressions would not make any sense at all in English, but rather that they would sound strange or obscure or meaningless for the addressed (and the future implied audience of *The Seven Points*). “Unsavoury” - the word usually appearing without the negative prefix as a verb in warnings against ascending too high

in the pursuit of vain knowledge,⁶⁰ is invested here with another meaning: the translation riddled with Latinate words would discourage the translator's spiritual daughter and other contemplatives from reading the work. But "clergialie" itself is not judged either positively or negatively; it is simply deemed to be unfitting for the audience's taste. Moreover, "clergialie teremes" are not even identified with the pursuit of dangerous knowledge, which has no appeal to a spiritual audience and is therefore deemed unsavoury. What appears unsavoury for the author (thinking already with his readers' mind) is the stylistic cacophony of a schoolish translation that would not be able to turn the Latin text into English. "Clergialie" is not incompatible with the nature of the original text, because it was written in Latin, and the "academic" expressions are supposed to be understood by a Latin-speaking public. Therefore, the idea carried by this word cannot be equated with vain curiosity or the clergy's lettered, but spiritually empty intellectual quests. What translates the "vnsaverie" language of the original text into the more familiar idiom of the English readers is the chaplain's "simple kunnyng," as "clergialie" as is the original author. This "kunnyng" enables him to comprehend the Latin text as well as to superimpose his own voice on that of the original author and his guidance on his public.

The translation inevitably creates a new work; furthermore, the chaplain arbitrarily redesigns the original:

Butte for als miche as in þe forseide boke þere beþ manye maters and long processe towchyng him þat wrote hit and opere religiose persones of his degre, þe whiche, as hit semeth to me, were lytel edificacione to wryte to zowe, my dere ladye, and to oper deuowte persones þat desyrene þis drawyng owt in englische: þerefore I leve seche materes and take onely þat me pinkeþ edifying to zowe; and also I folow not þe processe of þat boke in ordere, but I take þe materes in-sindrye, as þei acordene to mye purpos. (325, 24-32)

The chaplain is not only a purposeful translator of the text, but he also takes on the authorial responsibility for Suso's work. He subordinates the raw material to his intention, and carefully selects what may be "edifying" to the lady. In the first place, he discards systematically everything in connection with Suso and his fellow brethren. He deprives the *Horologium* from its structuring narrative, i.e. the disciple's roaming from school to school and his advancement from blindness to intuition to illumination, all in all the "long processe" in the translator's words, which can only signify Suso's allegorical, at the same time

⁶⁰ Cf. e.g. the English translation of Sapientia's response to the disciple ("Noli altum sapere, sed time." *Horologium* II, 1): "Wille þou noht sauere in kunnyng to hye, but drede" (328, 30)

autobiographical spiritual journey. As we have seen, the English author substituted his own “process” of comprehension and inspiration for Suso’s progress. Therefore, the structural pillars of Suso’s composition, the two important stations of Suso’s way to illumination (*Horologium* I, 1 and II, 1) are discarded, only the abridged second vision of the academic life being recycled as part of the English introduction. This rearrangement essentially denies Suso’s underlying message. The main idea of Suso’s *Horologium* is to find the path that is not limited and that can lead to wisdom. On the journey, the disciple also enters paths that turn out to be barred at their other ends; therefore, he has to abandon them. Limits are not initially imposed on his progress to keep him away from the wrong paths, but the pursuit of wisdom proved retrospectively that many of the paths were inherently limited and unviable to reach his goal. The main gesture of the English rendering is closing down. The disciple receives a teaching of seven points (modelled upon the seven gifts of the Holy Ghost) in one package from the “soueryne doctour, euerlastyng wisdam, Jhesus” (326, 2) at the very beginning of the treatise. The ensuing vision of the preface (corresponding to Suso’s *Horologium* II, 1) reinforces the idea of the omnipresent obstacles in all walks of learning to the spiritual advancement. But this conclusion lacks the experiences that underlie Suso’s vision of the disappointing limitedness of all arts, crafts and sciences.

Although *The Seven Points* was rearranged in order to provide a devotional guide for the translator’s spiritual daughter, the recommendation, the preface and point (chapter) 1 contain important reflections on different ways of knowing. The recommendation, as we have seen, introduces the theme of unsavoury knowledge in a most elusive way. Vocabulary itself seems to evoke the *topos* of vain curiosity, but the respective passage does not echo the overall warning against the acquisition of forbidden knowledge. Moreover, the English author emphasises that the same purpose may be pursued in a “clergialie” way for the one, and in a more idiomatic way for the other. The first connotations of “vnsaverye” strangely contrast to the second occurrence of the same word in the prologue.

The prologue to the seven points is an abridgement of Book II, 1 of Suso’s *Horologium Sapientiae*, occasionally intertwining fragments from Books II, 2 and 3.⁶¹ Without much hesitation, the English translator presents the “disciple of wisdom”⁶² at the end of his quest: he briefly refers to the disciple’s wanderings from school to school until he had a vision. The dichotomy emerging in this narrative prelude to the vision becomes the main theme of the prologue and the first chapter of the translation. The disciple’s vision itself

⁶¹ Wichgraf, op. cit., p. 348.

⁶² The English translator keeps Suso’s self-reference as “servus eterne Sapientiae.”

comes as the first variation on the main theme, which elaborates also visually on the core idea. The dichotomy is a paradox. The disciple of wisdom engages himself in the pursuit of everything but wisdom:

þere was sumtyme a deuowt disciple of wisdom, þe whiche aftere þat in his zowþe hadde gone to diuerse scoles 7 lerede sere sciences of mannus doctrine 7 worldlye wisdom, aftere he cam to more age and was towchede bye ... to þe trewe love of owre lorde Jhesu, him þowhte miche veyne trauayle in þe forseide sciences; wherefor (he) preyede continuelye and deuowtlye to godde, þat he wolde not suffer him departe fro þis lyfe til he cam to þe knowelechyng and þe kunyng of soþe fast 7 souereyne philosophye. And in þe mene tyme as he went fro studye to studye and fro scole to scole, sechyng bisilye þat he desirede, but in none manere soþefastlye fyndyng but onelye as a ymage or a liknesse þere-offe. (326, 31-41)

Wisdom is juxtaposed to “sciences of man’s doctrine,” “worldly wisdom,” and “the knowledge and knowing of true and sovereign philosophy.” But as the careful choice of vocabulary for rendering the vision reveals, this dichotomy does not illustrate the irreconcilable ways of pursuing truth by intellect, on the one hand, and by the affective faculty, on the other. It rather points out the contradictions of what one pursues and what one believes to pursue. When the “rounde hows,” divided into a lower and an upper mansion, appears in the disciple’s vision, the semantic fields pertaining to the description of the intellectual activity in the mansions are also carefully separated.⁶³ In the lower mansion, the masters and disciples are occupied with “alle naturele sciences and alle craftes vndere sonne” (327, 3-4), and comforted in their “science and crafte” (327, 6). But “whan þe forseide (disciple) hadde abedene a while in þoo scoles and tastede of here drinke, his stomake ouerturnede 7 beganne to haue a vomyte” (327, 9-11), and therefore left the “scoles of sciences” (327, 11-12). The upper mansion is the school of “soþfaste diuinyte” (327, 15), where the master is everlasting wisdom. All the three orders of students pursue wisdom, but have different understandings in their “kunyng.” The mansions consistently separate the

⁶³ The Middle English vision is a more architecturally conceived equivalent of Suso’s mysterious image of a shining sphere that appears in Book II, 1 of the *Horologium Sapientiae*: “[...] quadam vice videre sibi videbatur quasi quadam sphaeram auream, mira amplitudine diffusam et pulchritudine gemmarum perornatam, ubi cunctarum artium et scientiarum magistri et scholares innumeri degebant. In sphaera autem praedicta duae mansiones distinctae fabricatae erant, et quaelibet harum suos doctores et discipulos habebat.” (520, 6-11) This vision emphasises both the immateriality and the materiality of the sphere: it appears as pure shining, but has a clearly perceivable extension, which is even divided into two distinct mansions that were fabricated into it. Still, the vision of the sphere is not translated into a material counterpart. The notion of the round house in the English translation may reflect on the translator’s endeavour to objectify the mystical vision. On the other hand, Chapter 19 of Suso’s *Vita* presents an alternative vision to that of Book II, 1 in the *Horologium*. Cf. quotation above: [p. of this chapter](#).

notions of craft and science belonging to the lower house, and “kunyngē” which only belongs to the upper one. “Wisdom” is denied of both of them; it never appears as related to learning in either mansion; it is used only in the meaning of everlasting wisdom or the wisdom of God (328, 5).

The vision incites the disciple to address Wisdom in a concluding prayer, which unites all previous notions related to the school:

O þou souereyne and euerlastyngē wisdam, siþene hit is so þat alle menne by kynde desyrene for to haue kunyngē, and in þe, vniuersele prynce and auctour of kynde, allemanere tresores of wisdam and kunyngē beþ hidde, and also þou art makere of alle þyngē and hast alle manere of science and alle þyngē þou seest and knowest: þerefore I aske of þe with a gredye desyre of alle mye hert þat þou opune to me þe tresorye of þi souereyn wisdam. (328, 12-18)

The integration of all quests represented by the lower and upper mansions coincides with the dissolution of the initial dichotomy of the vision. At the beginning, the disciple thirsted after the knowledge of sovereign philosophy, while, at the end, he solicits everlasting wisdom for his treasure. The first demand goes from the seeker, bound to the perspective of the schools. The prayer is uttered by the disciple who experienced that the knowledge offered by schools was unsavoury for him, because the suavity he was attracted by could not be distilled gradually in quantitative portions of knowledge. The answer to the first demand was the disciple’s vision, in which he experienced the outer point of view. The answer to the prayer comes directly from everlasting wisdom, and repeats St. Paul’s warning to the Romans: “Mye dere sone, wille þou noht sauere in kunyngē to hye, but drede! Here me nowe and I schalle teche þe þynges þat beþ profitable to þe; I schalle zive þe a chosene zifte, for myne doctryne schalle be þi lyfe” (328, 29-32).

The warning against “sauere in kunyngē to hye” closes the vision of the house. The allegory of the school (or house) of “clergyē” transforms into the school of love. In spite of this progress, the notion of school and of scholarly instruction provides the frame for the new allegory as well. The disciple continues to take lessons with everlasting wisdom, and the points of instruction will fill him with a manner of sweetness.⁶⁴ But instead of “kunyngē,” the mode of apprehension characterising the previous stage of learning, here, the affective faculty is will actualised as love: “O lorde, welle were me zif I knowe þis lessone of love declarede in þe VII forseide poyntes of love! What scholde I more desyre? For seynt Austyne seythe:

⁶⁴ Cf. the heading of Chapter 1: “ffirst off þe properte of þe name and þe loue of euerlastyngē wisdam, and how þe discyple schalle hwue hym in felyngē of þat loue boþe in beternesse and in swetnesse.” (329, 16-18)

‘loue parfityle, and do what þou wylte’” (329, 8-11). In the course of the first lesson (point 1), the disciple is led to understand that the imperative “drede” of Rom. 11:20 is “turnede in to loue” (331, 9) in the moment of embracing eternal wisdom, which in return espouses his disciple in a gracious visitation.⁶⁵

The remarkable recognition of a moment of illumination to come, i.e. the idea expressed as “the gracious visitation,” assures the reader that her instruction is delimited by boundaries necessary in a situation of instruction. As we could see in the preamble, the translator carefully balances between the knowledge of his reader and his own. He also rearranges the material in order to suggest that the notions of limitedness and subordination determine the character of this highly valued piece of devotional writing.

*The translator’s treatment of his source was purposive and premeditated. Explicitly in his preface, as well as implicitly in his editorial work itself, he made clear not only his own attitude towards the Horologium but also his views about how it might best be rendered more suitable for a wider, and potentially less sophisticated, readership. His approach to the work sprang from his perception that its central purpose, what he called the ‘processe of the foreseyde boke,’ was ‘to stirre devowte sowles to the trewe love of owre lorde Jhesu.’ At first sight such an assessment might seem unexceptionable, at least as a brief generalisation; indeed the words echo one of Suso’s own remarks in his preface. But to define the Horologium in these terms is to invest it with a unity and coherence of theme which it does not possess.*⁶⁶

At second sight though, the assessment seems to evaluate the translator’s own achievement, which does possess coherence and a unity of theme. This structuring theme is that of boundaries and authorities. The translator does not only perceive an existing boundary between his intellect and that of his readership, but consciously presents himself in a position

⁶⁵ The theme of *sponsa Christi* and the mystic’s heavenly wedding with Christ is used by Suso both as a mystical *topos* and a device to describe inspiration (or illumination) in terms of a heavenly *visitatio*. Since Christ is the same with eternal Wisdom (female *Sapientia* in Latin), he is gendered female when identified with Sapientia, but appears masculine when He espouses the female Anima, the soul of His followers. “[I]n the *Little Book of Eternal Wisdom*, Suso refers to his own soul as Wisdom’s ‘poor servant girl,’ and Wisdom responds to him a ‘my daughter.’ The biblical figure of Lady Wisdom is mentioned only in passing, for in the text *Eternal Wisdom* is predominantly the suffering Jesus. But when Suso decided to recast his book in Latin for a male readership, he altered the heterosexual romance with divinity by reclaiming the male role for himself, while recasting God as a goddess. In the *Horologium*, Suso programmatically oscillates between two versions of the divine love affair: sometimes the writer speaks as the female Soul pining for her divine Bridegroom, but more often as the male Disciple ravished by love of his heavenly Bride.” (Barbara Newman, “Henry Suso and the Medieval Devotion to Christ the Goddess,” *Spiritus* 2 (2002), p. 2) The English translator also keeps the feminine pronouns when referring to Christ as the sapience or the bride of the disciple. The translator also followed Suso’s original text in addressing Wisdom as “moder of loue” (332, 15) and “maystresse of alle love” (332, 37). The translator’s treatment of this theme

⁶⁶ Lovatt, *op. cit.*, p. 57.

of authority which is not unlimited. His transformation of Suso's *Horologium* attests to an implicit exploration of boundaries in the course of which he is not so much interested in trespassing the borders he seems to be very much aware of, but rather to what degree he, as an authority, is entitled to interfere in his own authority's work to be effective in an instructional situation – within his own boundaries.

The first significant field of exploration is the visible reconsideration of Suso's intricate treatment of Wisdom's gender duality:⁶⁷

*In Suso's dialogue Wisdom, though always identified with Christ, is sometimes manifested as the beautiful biblical goddess Sapientia, the spouse of Suso's masculine soul, and sometimes as the masculine Christ of the cross, spouse of the Church and saviour of humanity. Thus, both Suso's Sapientia and the disciple with whom s/he talks are effectively androgynous, encompassing in their androgyny the masculine and feminine aspects of human nature.*⁶⁸

The English translator interprets the gender oscillation in Suso's work in the same vein, but as soon as he invests the soul (the Latin feminine "anima" identified with the disciple) with an exclusively masculine quality, he also deprives Wisdom of its original gender duality, and represents her systematically as the bride of the soul:

ffor þowhe hit so be þat euerye persone of þe holye trinite taken by hit-selfe is wisdam, and alle þe persones to-gydere one euerlastyng wisdam, neuerlese, for als miche as wisdam is proprelye applyede to þe sone and also hit falleþ to him by resone of his generacione specialye, þefore [þe] bylouede sone of þe fadere is takene and vnderstande in þat-manere significacione of wisdam custumablye, nowe as godde and nowe as manne, nowe as he þat is spowse of his chirche and nowe as sche þat is spowse and wyfe of euery chosene sowle, þat maye seye of euerlastyng wisdam in þees wordes of þe boke of wisdam: hanc amaui et exquisiui a iuuentute mea et quesui eam sponsam assumere, et amator factus sum forme illius. (329, 22-32)

Thus, the "custumablye" richer interpretation of the dialogue between Wisdom and the soul/disciple is reduced to a spiritual love affair between a more active and dominant female figure, and consequently, a subordinated masculine soul. Christ, who is Wisdom, is consistently referred to by the female personal and genitive pronouns, while the soul is androgynous only in the first instance, after which the translator switches to masculine

⁶⁷ Wisdom's gender duality in Suso's Latin *Horologium*, affected by his dual identification with Christ, on the one hand, and with the biblical goddess Sapientia, on the other one, is treated in detail by Milla Cozart Riggio, ed., *The Play of Wisdom: Its Texts and Contexts*. New York: AMS Press, 1998, pp. 39-47. Cf. also Newman, op. cit., pp. 3-6.

⁶⁸ Riggio, *The Play of Wisdom*, p. 39.

pronouns as if substituting the Latin “anima” with the implied masculine person possessing that soul: “O, blessed is þat sowle to wham is grauntede in alle *here* lyfe, þowhe hit be but one tyme, to feele þat hit be (so); and þowh hit be so þat deþ falle þere-bye, hit schalle not be to *him* greuowse” (330, 11-4, italics mine). The usage of pronouns is so regular that the English translator practically discarded the notion of gender “game” from his work. Thus, he eliminated all the eventual discrepancies between the Latin biblical quotations and their English renderings. Whenever the Latin reads “sapientia” or “sponsa,” the English text applies the grammatically corresponding female pronouns.⁶⁹ Moreover, wisdom’s address to the disciple – “*Fili*, prebe mi cor tuum: *Sone*, ziffe me þi herte!” (331, 2-3; italics mine) – does not result in any disturbing gender ambiguity, since the disciple/soul lost his original gender duality, and does not wear any more the reminiscences of the female “anima.”

Redrawing the boundaries of gender and articulating the gender characteristics of the two participants of the dialogue strangely affect the intended intimate relationship between male author and female reader in the English version. Firstly, the experience of the amorous dialogue is continued in the school of Christ. The theme of the “craft of love” is enclosed in the envelope of an “amorose lettere,” i.e. Holy Scripture, God’s message to His disciples. With this elaborate metaphor it is even more conspicuous that the relationship between Wisdom and the soul is not shaped according to what would seem most natural to the context of the English rendering. By maintaining the masculine identity of the disciple, the translator alienates his spiritual daughter from the role she could easily identify with. With respect to gender, the translation mirrors the exact opposite of the hierarchical bond that exists between the male translator and his spiritual disciple. The authoritative voice of the male instructor in the preface yields to the submission of the male voice (not necessarily the same) into a position of humility. Nevertheless, reminiscences of the preface in the disciple’s words in chapter 1 suggest some continuity between the two male voices, and indicate the partial identification of the author-translator with Wisdom’s disciple. At the moment when Wisdom and the disciple’s self-defined roles suddenly switch, Wisdom turning into an inquirer and the disciple into a puzzled inquired, perplexity of the latter forces him to resume motifs that were dropped after deciding to leave the school of clergy and to join the school of love: “Oo þou souereyne maystresse of heuenlye discipline, howe scholde I, so *symple and vnkunynge*, answeere to þat *hye questione*?” (333, 11-2, italics mine). The voice of the disciple does not only literally reiterate elements of the initial warning – “Wille þou noht sauere in kunynge to

⁶⁹ Cf. also the non-pronominal addresses of Wisdom by the disciple, all of which emphasise the female attributes of the allegorical character: “þou moder of love, euerlastynge wisdom (332, 15); “þu maystresse of alle love” (332, 37) and “oo þou souereyne maystresse of heuenlye discipline” (333, 11).

hye, but drede!” (328, 30) –, but also resumes the dilemma of knowledge and boundaries. In a passage where the dilemmas concerning the dangers of ascending higher in “kunyng” are not any more relevant, the invocation of this motif emphasises the disciple’s insistence on self-imposed boundaries.

The conclusion drawn from the complexity of the gendered voices is a paradox since self-imposed boundaries imply certain freedom. The male voice of the disciple possesses this liberty by virtue of the other roles of the author in which he appears in positions of authority. Firstly, he is the explicit instructor of a woman. Secondly, he is the author and the translator of the text.

The ultimate source of freedom, though, lies outside the translator’s authorial and authoritative stance. He shares in Suso’s conviction that the school of love is not comparable to the conventional processes of teaching, implying authorities and exterior limitations, but is a process of dismantling the boundaries and acceding to a freedom which remains undefined at its first mentioning: “Mye love discharges hem þat beþ ouerleyde with þe heve birþene of sinnes, hit purifyeþ and makeþ clene þe conscience, hit strengþe þe mynde and þe sowle, *hit zeiviþ fredam to hem þat beþ parfyte*” (330, 24-6; italics mine). The translator plays an overall game with the reversal of boundaries: he interprets the original and reverses it; he thinks in terms of the concrete situation of devotional instruction and reflects upon it from its reversal; finally, he places himself on both sides of the boundary of authority. In spite of this all-permeating game, his explorations of the notion of limits only blur, but do not entirely demolish, boundaries. The warning against advancing too high remains valid for the whole concept of the translation. But the author’s endeavour to see where exactly the boundaries are fixed, if they are, is manifest from his recognition that the aim of the disciple’s quest is freedom without limits.

CHAPTER 3

VISUAL AND STAGED REFLECTIONS ON SUSO

3.1. Suso's Vision in The Play of Wisdom

In the description of the discharging effects of Christ's love, both manuscripts of *The Play of Wisdom* substitute "wisdom" for "freedom" (in the equivalent passage of *The Seven Points*): "My loue dyschargethe and purifyethe clene; / It strengtheth þe mynde, þe sowll makyt pure, / And yewyt wysdom to hem þat perfyghte bene."¹ This seemingly minor alteration casts light upon the difference between the concept of *The Seven Points* and the morality play. What the treatise seems to admit is that the conformity of man's affective power to God discharges the contemplative from the burden of sins, which themselves are limits to the experience of freedom. In a later passage of the translation, Wisdom dispels her disciple's fears of the contrast between his own simplicity and the high questions by elaborating on the notion of freedom:

[A]nd so grete scholde be þe fredam of affeccione in a prouede discyple, þat not onleye he scholde not be bownde in love to bodylye delytes, but also he scholde not so miche bisye hem in his desyre more lovynglye þanne him þat is siuere of hem and souereyne gode takene in hit-selfe. Wherfore consydere and take hede to þei-selfe what þou sekest or what þou loueste. Ffor vnparfyte menne sechene þoo þinges þat bep of þe zifte of þe lovede, and not himselfe. (333, 23-31)

The understanding of the ideal conformity and the paradox of the nature of liberty brings the disciple and the translator the fruit of ascending beyond their own limits: Wisdom turns to her disciple with the address of "autor" (333, 33), verbally transforming him into the identity he craved to design for himself with the laborious task of ruminating over, translating and rearranging the devotional work. The morality play, on the other hand, does not go as far as suggesting the blurring of limits in the process of according human will to the divine, but restates the self-evident, almost syllogistic, truth that the conformity to wisdom makes wisdom attainable. This discrepancy between the two passages also reveals that the notion of freedom underlies essentially the discourse on knowledge and wisdom either explicitly and

¹ Riggio, *The Play of Wisdom*, ll. 54-6 (italics mine). All further references to this play will be made to this edition, verse numbers will be given in parentheses after quotations. Cf. the parallel passage of *The Seven Points* at the end of the previous chapter (*Seven Points*, 330, 24-6).

avowedly as in the English rendering of Suso's *Horologium*, or implicitly and aversely as in *The Play of Wisdom*.

The invitation of the disciple to the *schola theologicae veritatis*² in Suso's dialogue, which is the starting point for the Middle English rendering, is echoed by *The Play of Wisdom*, whose first scene is a dramatic elaboration on the prologue to *The Seven Points*. Scene 1 opens the play with Anima's self-recognition through the instructions of Wisdom (Christ).³ "Dysyer not to sauour in cunnynghys to excellent, / But drede and conforme your wyll to me" (ll. 87-8) is Wisdom's warning to Anima at a structurally crucial transition of the scene: Anima's devoted enchantment by the love of Wisdom evoking the subtleties of discourses on courtly love ("A soueren Wysdom, yff your benygnyte / Wolde speke of loue, þat wer a game." ll. 39-40) turns into a more dialogical interaction between Wisdom and his disciple after Anima's explicit demand to "[t]eche [her] þe scolys of [Wisdom's] dyvynyte" (l. 86). Most of the analogies with *The Seven Points* are embedded before this turning point. The way Suso's *Horologium* is used to introduce the real instructional conversation between Anima and Wisdom and Wisdom's revelation of His own truths results in significant alterations in the structure and focus of Suso's dialogue.

3.1.1. Alterations in the Play

3.1.1.1. The Dramatic Structure

The opening dramatic gesture of the morality is Wisdom's entry. The scene receives an emphatic visual expression as explicated by the stage direction, describing Wisdom's "ryche purpull clothe" and his array in terms of the regalia associated with the traditional emblems of royal authority and coronation ceremonies.⁴ Wisdom's appearance on stage is not

² Suso, *Horologium Sapientiae*, in Künzle, op. cit., 520, 27.

³ The play is divided into five sections (scenes) in Mark Eccles's edition of the morality, but "neither M[acro] nor D[igby MS] provides textual authorization for the scenes." (Riggio, *The Play of Wisdom*, p. 181.) Hereafter, the terms "scene," "section" and "part" will be used synonymously for the structural units which Eccles made explicit in his edition. Lines 1-65 of the first scene are taken from the Middle English rendering of Suso's *Horologium*. "The Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, MS 268, a parchment book in quarto written in the latter half of the fifteenth century, contains a copy of the *Seven Points of True Wisdom* (the English *Orologium*), which may be slightly closer to the *Wisdom* text than are other extant English MSS, though it does not contain the noun *nobley*, found in MS Douce 114 and in l. 4 of *Wisdom*." (Riggio, *The Play of Wisdom*, p. 183.) For a verse-by-verse correspondence of the play with the *Horologium*, cf. Walter Kay Smart, *Some English and Latin Sources and Parallels for the Morality of Wisdom*. PhD diss. (Menasha, Wisconsin: George Banta Publishing Co., 1912), pp. 9-12, where he points out further similarities in ll. 69-70, 79 and 86-90 of the play with the English version found in MS Douce 114; and Schleich, op. cit., pp. 184-7.

⁴ The stage picture of scene 1 has been paralleled by several scholars with contemporary regal portraits and other visual sources attesting to the conventions of fifteenth-century coronation ceremonies. Cf. Milla Cozart, "Wisdom Enthroned: Iconic Stage Portraits," in C. Davidson and J. H. Stroupe, eds., *Drama in the Middle Ages. Comparative and Critical Essays*. (New York: AMS Press, 1991), 249-79; Riggio, *The Play of Wisdom*, pp. 181-3; and David M. Bevington, "'Blake and wyght, fowll and fayer': Stage Picture in *Wisdom*," in Milla Cozart Riggio, ed., *The Wisdom Symposium: Papers from the Trinity College Medieval Festival*. (New York: AMS

solicited by Anima's quests; His presence is without cause and in itself is the effective cause of the ensuing play. Wisdom's opening monologue concludes with an ambiguous statement: "Thus Wysdom begane" (l. 16). This line can be interpreted both as a metatheatrical device to mark the end of Wisdom's first speech (i.e. the character of Wisdom reflecting upon the end of His own speech in the sense of "Thus Wisdom began to speak") and as a reference back to the essential theme of the monologue, Wisdom's "hye generacyon" (l. 12).

Both interpretations are plausible. The latter assimilates the line into the dramatic frame of the drama and provides a suitable conclusion to Wisdom's expository tracing of his own lineage. In contrast, the prologue theory may help to account for changes made in adapting the Suso text to the play. The first 16 lines of the play, spoken before Anima enters, constitute Wisdom's prologue to the drama and set the stage for the ensuing dialogue with Anima. Though the Suso work overall is in the form of a dialogue, the 65 lines quoted at the beginning of Wisdom are not; in the Orologium and its English translation [...] the dialogue exchange of the play forms a lengthy monologue spoken by Sapientia. The dramatist breaks the speech into dialogue after Wisdom's opening soliloquy, which in this reading ends with the actor's indirect allusion to Suso: Thus Wisdom Begane [to speak].⁵

In spite of the playwright's obvious intentions to transform the monologue into a dialogue, the dramaturgy of the opening scene undermines this formal frame. Anima's entry is juxtaposed to Wisdom's ceremonial procession on stage. In her first speech, Anima presents herself in her relation to Wisdom and declares the impossibility of knowing the "full exposycyon" of her divine spouse (l. 26). At this point, Wisdom interrupts, revealing the meaning of his worthy name in a passage where motifs that describe the "what is it like" instead of the "what is it" abound, and thus indirectly reflect upon the unknowable nature of Anima's desired spouse.⁶ The relationship of the two figures on stage is not dialogical, since

Press, 1986), pp. 18-38.

⁵ Riggio, *The Play of Wisdom*, p. 186.

⁶ Cf.: "Merowre of þe dyvyn domynacyon / And þe image of hys goodnes." (ll. 31-2) and "And all þat may dysryde be / Ys not in comparyschon to my lyknes." The recurring occurrences of the ideas of image and likeness also constitute the theological crux of the play. Hill pointed out that the idea of image practically disappears after the entry of Soul's three faculties (Mind, Understanding and Will) on stage. His analysis confirms the idea that "image" and "likeness" are not used as mere synonyms in the play. The choice of either of the two words reflects on a systematic inner logic of the morality, which, though, is not entirely in accordance with Walter Hilton's use of the same ideas in his *Scale of Perfection*, the direct source for ll. 103-70. Eugene D. Hill, "The Trinitarian Allegory of the Moral Play of *Wisdom*." *Modern Philology* 73 (1975): 128-9. According to Molloy, the ways that image and likeness are distinguished as well as the concept of wisdom and learning echo Thomas Aquinas. Cf. John Joseph Molloy, *A Theological Interpretation of the Moral Play, Wisdom, Who Is Christ*. Ph. D. diss. (Washington, D. C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1952), pp. 2-30. For the underlying theological implications of the emphasis on the distinction between image and likeness, see also Riggio, *The Play of Wisdom*, pp. 198 and 201; and Bevington, "Stage Picture in *Wisdom*," pp. 36-7n countering

they simply co-exist in their sequence of monologues. Anima submerges in the vision of Wisdom, who appears to her as the embodiment of her own desires from her tender age. This co-existence is also emphasized by the distinct discursive modes of the two characters: Anima adapts the language of intimate love coloured with an underlying anguish of losing the simultaneously close and distant spouse and sweet “amyke,”⁷ while Wisdom continues his monological speeches in his expository voice. The transition from this initial dramaturgy into a new, instructional situation ushers in a much more balanced conversation between the instructor and his disciple, but the ensuing passage is already beyond the reach of Suso’s work. The direct source of the content of Anima’s lesson is taken from Walter Hilton’s *Scale of Perfection* and other medieval devotional works.

3.1.1.2. *The Suppression of Gender Dualities*

Both the structural transformation of the opening scene and the simplification of the gender dualities in Wisdom and Anima may evidence the “closing” down of the understanding vis-à-vis Suso’s *Horologium*. Roger Lovatt, in his study on Suso’s reception in England, concluded that the text and its spirituality got alienated from its original context and were tuned to another, perhaps second-rate, devotion for the contemporary English audience:

[M]uch of the impact of the Horologium on English readers was made at second hand and incomplete form. In all sorts of different guises parts of the Horologium became familiar to those who, like Hoccleve himself, were unlikely to be acquainted with the work in its full, original form. However, this process of penetration and absorption also entailed the dilution and impoverishment of Suso’s decisive message. As their audience widened, so Suso’s teachings lost much of their characteristic flavour. At this stage it becomes quite misleading to speak of the reception of the Horologium in England as though this was a one-way process. Rather it was in the nature of a dialogue between Suso and his English readers, where Suso’s words were tempered by a sense of what it was that this audience wished to hear. Hence English readers tended to find in the Horologium what they were already seeking, or what happened to coincide with existing devotional fashion.⁸

Hill’s argument.

⁷ Cf. II. 39-40, 69-70 and 84-5.

⁸ Roger Lovatt, “Henry Suso and the Medieval Mystical Tradition in England,” in Marian Glasscoe, ed., *The Medieval Mystical Tradition in England*. (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1986), p. 55. Cf. also Milla Cozart Riggio, resuming the same argument: “From the beginning, Suso’s *Orologium* entered the English in excerpted, edited, and simplified versions. [...] The playwright’s levelling of the complex, dual identity of Christ as both man and woman is in keeping with that general impulse to simplify this devotional treatise for a programmatic and probably lay English audience.” Riggio, *The Play of Wisdom*, pp. 43-4.

Indeed, not only Wisdom's expository voice, but also the simplification of the gender dualities reduces the scene to a more explicit spiritual instruction emanating from a male authority of Wisdom to another male figure. The scene ultimately suppresses the feminine element in both characters. Although Anima appears as a queen on stage, and is dressed in a queen's ritual robes for coronation ceremonies,⁹ her gender becomes nominal, even delusive. Not only are Anima's faculties – Mind, Understanding and Will – masculine, which would tacitly support the theological argument on the distinct nature of the soul and its faculties,¹⁰ but Anima herself is consistently identified with masculine pronouns or gendered nouns to fit the gender identity Christ/Wisdom attributes to the personified soul in His direct address: "*Fili, prebe me cor tuum*" (Prov. 23:26, l. 79; italics mine).¹¹

On the other hand, the gender duality of Wisdom-Sapiencia in both Suso's dialogue and the Middle English rendering are levelled out in the morality play. At this point the playwright resists the possibilities of abstraction as could be exploited from the character of Wisdom, and reshapes his figure to the identity of the Son of God. The only remnant of the formerly "alternating masculine and feminine identity of Christ as Wisdom"¹² appears in lines 15-16, where Wisdom in his opening soliloquy calls himself "[s]pows of þe chyrche and very patrone, / *Wyffe of eche sowle*" (italics mine).

Yet, what Lovatt would call the miscomprehension of Suso's original intentions is only maintainable as far as those intentions are inherently bound to certain structural and compositional characteristics. Certainly the playwright of *Wisdom* significantly transformed, viz. reduced, the structural features and the gender duality of Suso's dialogue. But, while taking out Wisdom's lesson from its exciting context and redrawing it according to the conventional way of institutional instruction with its most typical setting (a male authority expounding on doctrines to another male or a group of males), the playwright focuses his keener attention on the very content of this lesson. The lesson itself is not self-contained in the fragment that the playwright inserts from Suso's work into his play. Nor is it exhausted in the first unit (scene 1) by the presentation of the Soul's faculties and the ideal devotion which they should embrace. The lesson is the "doctryne of Wysdom" (l. 1162), declared at the very

⁹ Cf. the parallels drawn between Anima's costume and contemporary sources describing queens' coronation robes in Riggio, *The Play of Wisdom*, pp. 186-8 and idem, "The Staging of Wisdom," in *The Wisdom Symposium: Papers from the Trinity College Medieval Festival*. (New York: AMS Press, 1986), p. 10.

¹⁰ Hill, op. cit., p. 127.

¹¹ Cf.: "Wat reformythe þe sowll to *hys* fyrste lyght?" (l. 120); "In a sowll watt thyngys be / By wyche *he* hathe *hys* very knowynge?" (ll. 133-4; the second masculine pronoun refers to Christ); "Thys, þe clene soule stonyth as a *kynge*" (l. 289); "I wyll go make [*his* – a scribal "error" for "this" in the Macro MS] examynacyon" (l. 371); and "Mercy hathe reformyde yow and crownyde as a *kynge*" (l. 1124). All italics mine.

¹² Riggio, *The Play of Wisdom*, p. 186.

end of the play, which crystallizes out of the clash of the schools of Lucifer and Christ. What has traditionally been considered the “action” of this morality, i.e. the temptation of Anima’s Might, their fall, their depraved life and their restoration to their initial brightness, is only the surface of an all-encompassing and more abstract plot of the play.

3.1.2. The Main Theme: The Schools of Learning

In whatever situation the faculties of the Soul appear, the playwright never fails to indicate the immutable context of the morality: the school(s) of learning. Motifs of knowledge and learning link scene 1, Lucifer’s school, and the “curryus” life of Anima’s corrupted faculties. The playwright establishes a ground large enough to carry out his inquiry on the relation of Wisdom’s doctrine to all other forms of knowledge in the play: “cunnyng” and “oncunnyng,” “knowyng” and “wyly ... knowyng,” and “(the library of) reson.”¹³ While it may seem too general, and practically self-evident, to state that motifs of knowledge are scattered in a play demonstrating the role of different forms of knowledge in mystical contemplation, the fact that all of them are embedded in allegories of institutional instruction is more striking. The imperative quoted from Suso’s lesson (“Teche me þe scolys of yowr dyvynyte,” l. 86) not only follows the original instructional pattern of the *Horologium*,¹⁴ but also borrows the same frame to the next unit of the play, Lucifer’s school.

3.1.2.1. Lucifer’s School

¹³ The occurrences of expressions describing different forms of knowledge form an interrelated net of motifs in the play. The expressions that belong to Anima’s innocent state of being and contemplating have their echoes and perversions in scenes 2 and 3 of the play. For each of the items enumerated above, cf. the following verses, respectively: “[Wysdom] Dysyer not to sauour in *cunnyngys* to excellent” (l. 87); “[Mind] Grace yewyt curryus eloquens and that mase / That all *oncunnyng* I dysdeyn” (ll. 579-80); “[Anima] O, endles Wysdom, how may I haue *knowyng* / Off þi godhede incomprehensyble?” (ll. 93-4); “[Wysdom] By *knowyng of yowrsylff* ze may haue felyng / Wat Gode ys in yowr sowle sensyble” (ll. 95-6); “[Wndyrstondyng] Thus, by knowyng of me, to knowyng of Gode I assende. / I know in angelys he ys desyderable” (ll. 252-3); “[Lucyfer] I am as *wyly* now as than; / Þe *knowyng* þat I hade yet I can” (ll. 341-2); “[Wyll] The *lybrary of reson* must be wnclosyde, / Ande aftyr hys *domys to take entent*” (ll. 227-8). All italics are mine.

¹⁴ Anima comfortably places himself in the role of Wisdom’s student and creates his own identity according to this context. He willingly submits himself to Wisdom’s lessons: “O soueren auctore most credyble, / Yowr lessun I attende as I owe” (ll. 99-100). The allegory of school lessons is further elaborated in Will’s first monologue by referring to the library of reason and his own willingness to pay attention to the doom of reason. (Cf. ll. 227-8) Riggio interpreted this place as a reference to “the collected learning of reason,” which seemed to her at odds with Wisdom’s earlier warning against accumulating cunning. She dissolves the contradiction of this image by claiming that the expression does not imply erudite knowledge. “The phrase instead links the *consent* of Will to the intuitive knowing of God associated with Mind as the higher faculty of reason.” Riggio, *The Play of Wisdom*, p. 212. At the end of scene 1, Wisdom warns Will not to learn ill lessons, which foreshadows the turn in scene 2 by exactly anticipating the phrases of Lucifer’s temptation: “Wan suggestyon to þe Mynde doth apere, / Wndyrstondyng, delyght not ze þerin. / Consent not, Wyll, yll lessons to lere, / Ande than suche steryngys by no syn” (ll. 301-4).

Lucifer's speeches in scene 2 do not only echo Wisdom's role as a teacher, but also amplify the way he appropriates this function and its authority to himself. Lucifer constructs his false seeming on the model of a university master, and seems to take delight in the verbose evocation of a university course in logic. He intends to examine Soul's faculties ("I wyll go make thys examynacyon," l. 371); he imposes a seriously dialectic course upon the dialogue with the Mightes ("No, ser, I prowe well yis," l. 399); he argues, demonstrates and draws conclusions ("Thys was vita mixta þat Gode here began," l. 428); he forces the Mightes to accept new rules of reasonableness dictated by Lucifer ("[Mind to Lucifer] Truly, me seme 3e haue reson," l. 445); he watches over his own superiority, fearing that their disciples might realise the unreasonable turns of his argumentation ("Dyspute not to moche in þis wyth reson," l. 482); finally, he performs a verbal metamorphosis, and translates all his actions into terms of logical demonstration and dispute ("At hys deth I xall apere informable, / Schewynge hym all hys synnys abhomynable, / Prewynge hys soule damnable." ll. 539-41).

Interpretations of *The Play of Wisdom* have repeatedly revisited this passage with the aim of eventually revaluing Lucifer's argumentative purposes. The central dilemma of almost all analyses is the question whether Lucifer advocates the *vita mixta* in order to tempt cloistered people from the contemplative life. Most scholars claim that this interpretation is supported by some textual evidence in the play. Perhaps, scholarship has overmuch been preoccupied with the face value of Lucifer's arguments. Walter Kay Smart claimed that there is no point in Lucifer's arguments unless the play was intended for monks.¹⁵ Riggio continues Smart's argumentation: "By establishing Lucifer as a negative gauge of the play's values, *Wisdom* appears to attack the idea of the *vita mixta* and to affirm the cloistered life."¹⁶ Milton M. Gatch emphasises Lucifer's perverted interpretation of the *vita mixta* by blurring good works in the world with embracing pleasure: "The purely contemplative life is not under consideration, and Lucifer's attack is not on contemplation *per se* but on the mixture of contemplation and activity: if yours has to be a non-contemplative life, he argues, be totally

¹⁵ Smart, op. cit., p. 79.

¹⁶ Riggio, *The Play of Wisdom*, p. 27. Cf. also Riggio's comments on staging *Wisdom* at the Trinity College Medieval Festival: „It is true that Wisdom alludes only to Hilton's lower stages of contemplation in a dialogue that primarily reflects the sensuous love language of the Song of Songs. Considered alone, this scene would not have influenced us to stage the play in the Abbey of Bury St. Edmunds. But it is tied in with Lucifer's addressing the Mightes as 'idle' cloistered contemplatives: 'fonnyde fathers, founders of foly' (l. 393). This is one of the most controversial sections of the play, for in this scene alone, the Mightes seem to be cast as monks, who are being urged by the play to resist Lucifer's temptations and, thus, to renew their commitment to a cloistered life. Throughout this scene, Lucifer's temptations all have to do with entering the world. [...] In this scene the monastic associations are clear; arguments to the contrary – for instance, that 'fathers' could designate secular magnates as well as clerics, or that Will lives a celibate life because he is a student – might individually be persuasive, but they lose their strength in the context of the whole scene, which echoes the same theme time after time: Lucifer is tempting a set of cloistered contemplatives to enter the world." Riggio, "The Staging of *Wisdom*," in *The Wisdom Symposium*, p. 6.

worldly and do not try to mix in contemplative piety. The active life as he presents it is a life of license, without restraints.”¹⁷ Gatch judges this argumentation as superficial. In the reflection on scene 2, Malcolm Godden says that:

*[...] the arguments which Lucifer uses are ones which might in themselves seem innocuous except in a strongly contemplative or monastic context. He accuses the faculties of idleness, and argues that they have a duty to work as well as pray and fast. When they claim that they are committed to the contemplative life, he uses against them Hilton’s theory of the mixed life as a higher calling, and claims Christ himself as giving a precedent for such a life. [...] Both arguments are thoroughly orthodox, if offensive to the monastic and fraternal orders.*¹⁸

Discussions of Lucifer’s argumentations have narrowly been connected with hypotheses concerning the audience of the play. Chambers, Molloy and Donald C. Baker have argued that the play is addressed to students who, by virtue of their way of scholastic life, were celibate,¹⁹ while Mark Eccles and Alexandra F. Johnston proposed more or less specific lay audiences for the possible context of the play’s staging.²⁰ While the inclusion of hypotheses pertaining to the context of the performance may open up new paths in the discussion of Lucifer’s challenging arguments, it may also incur the danger of narrowing down, if not paralysing, the scholarly reflections on understanding the morality by the endeavour to find an answer to a question that was purposefully left undecided in the play. Alexandra Johnston proposed a turn to the research of aristocratic households first because archival evidence revealed in frames of the SEED and REED projects did not yield much result for morality plays, secondly because she admitted that *The Play of Wisdom* does not make it clear whether “the intellectual thrust of the play is concerned with [...] secular or religious authority.”²¹ But while external sources are silent, and the internal evidence remains the literal interpretation of Lucifer’s arguments, the dilemma cannot be solved.

¹⁷ Milton M. Gatch, “Mysticism and Satire in the Morality of *Wisdom*,” *Philological Quarterly* 53 (1974), p. 351.

¹⁸ Malcolm Godden, “Fleshly Monks and Dancing Girls: Immorality in the Morality Drama,” in Helen Cooper and Sally Mapstone, eds, *The Long Fifteenth Century. Essays for Douglas Gray*. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1997), p. 222.

¹⁹ For a review of opinions concerning the play’s performance, cf. Gatch, op. cit., pp. 348-9. More specifically: Molloy, op. cit., pp. 77-8 and Donald C. Baker, “Is *Wisdom* a Professional Play?” in Milla Cozart Riggio, ed., *The Wisdom Symposium*, p. 80.

²⁰ Eccles suggests a general audience of a town or a guild, while Johnston conjectures that the performance of the morality could take place in bigger households of East Anglia. Cf. Gatch, op. cit., pp. 348-9; Mark Eccles, ed., *The Macro Plays: The Castle of Perseverance, Wisdom, Mankind*. EETS. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969), p. xxxv; and Alexandra F. Johnston, “*Wisdom* and the Records: Is There a Moral?” in Milla Cozart Riggio, ed., *The Wisdom Symposium*, pp. 99-101.

²¹ Johnston, op. cit., pp. 87-8 and 95.

3.1.2.2. *Notions of Logic in Lucifer's School*

Most of the approaches, hitherto listed (except for Donald C. Baker's essay), share the conviction that the passage exposing Lucifer's persuasion is to be treated as a logically coherent argumentation. Notions of logic and allusions to the methods of this science, which appear so abundantly in his speeches, have been taken as indubitable evidence for a message that obeys the laws of logic. As a consequence of the fact that these analyses have been constructed on this axiomatic ground, the conclusion that could be drawn from Lucifer's twists of arguments was that they are contradictory, superficial, or at least that they manipulate the laws of logic. But a crucial instance of the same passage indicates that the role of the plethora of logical notions may not at all be used to emphasise the logical integrity of what Lucifer says, but to point out that the passage interprets itself and reflects more generally on the implications of logic (and its application).²²

Two essays, written by David M. Bevington and Donald C. Baker, represent exceptional moments in *Wisdom* scholarship by suggesting an interpretation of scene 2 from the "meta-logical" perspective. Instead of reading Lucifer's arguments *per se*, they maintain that the way Lucifer presents his arguments, and the way he is presented while arguing, reflect metadramatically upon more abstract and intellectual problems that this morality highlights. Bevington identifies the underlying intention of Lucifer's argument with a lesson on the intricate relationship of deceptive images and spiritual vision.

[The] language of moral meaning can be abused through evil intent, of course. Lucifer represents this perversion of moral language through a change of costuming that does not accompany moral change. [...] The duality of inner and outer is obviously related to the motif of fair and foul, white and black as it appears elsewhere in the play. Yet the seeming resemblance is deceptive, for Lucifer is not, like Anima, fair within and foul without to signify the soul's potential cleanness and the flesh's corrupting power. He is speciously attractive within, but only as a means of tempting

²² In line 482 Lucifer himself warns Mind not to use logic to argue the case presented (or not to dispute too much with logic in order to decide the verity of Lucifer's statement): "Dyspute not to moche in þis wyth reson." This has at least two possible interpretations. Riggio translates it as follows: "Dispute not too much in this with reason." (Riggio, *The Play of Wisdom*, p. 123) and interprets it as a warning to Will not to use logic in arguing over the case presented (ibid., p. 242). The ambiguity of the line arises out of the dangling position of the preposition "wyth": (1) Lucifer may suggest not to dispute against logic (reason) at all, implying that Will should not dispute Lucifer's statement with Reason (the superior faculty of the soul), since Will could not have superior arguments over Reason, or (2) he may discourage Will from arguing / disputing with the help of (his own) reason. In this latter case the prohibition would fall upon the activity of disputing by means of reason. Both of these interpretations prepare the notion of parody underlying the scene: the disputation is close to an intended parody of academic discourse or debate either because (1) Lucifer claims there is no good argument (good logic) to defeat his own stance after the evident twists with which he manipulated Mind or because (2) he all of a sudden abandons the terrain of logical discourse when suggesting to Will that he should resign on logic in spite of the avowedly "logical" constraints of their debate.

*and deceiving mankind. [...] He uses the contrast between outer and inner not as expressive of a spiritually divided nature, as in Anima, but as a device of illusion and convenience for rapid costume change. [...] His alteration metadramatically calls attention to the theatrical nature of the trick to emphasize his skill as actor and playwright in his little drama of cunningly manipulated appearances. Mistrust of images, in the theatre as in life, is a necessary condition of spiritual awareness.*²³

According to Donald C. Baker, Lucifer's argumentation is a reflection on the dramatic clash between literal and spiritual interpretation:

[...] Mind, Will and Understanding yield discretion to the intellectual symmetry and beauty of argument, of intellectual pride, and ultimately worship themselves – Mind, Will, and Understanding, that is to say, the act of interpretation of the letter rather than the spirit. [...]

*But more than this, the play is unique in another sense, in that it is the dramatization of the ancient liturgical quarrel about the meaning of the Song of Songs, the language of which appears in such prominent passages in the play. The tradition of interpretation of the Song has always split the church, another case of the letter or the spirit. Each character, particularly Lucifer, has two characters, represented by a difference of color on the inside and outside. "Nigra sum, sed formosa." Love eternal and carnal, the spirit and the flesh. The carnal interpretation takes over from the spiritual as the letter invites one to do, but, by the intervention of Grace in the form of Wisdom himself, the spiritual interpretation prevails. Lucifer at the end, for all his wit, his subtlety, is left alone with the literal interpretation, with no hope of Grace. Though he has lost the case, Lucifer has not retired from the bar.*²⁴

Bevington and Baker point at issues underlying the debate with Lucifer, i.e. the trust or mistrust in images, especially in those intended for devotion or religious cult, and the tensions over the priority of literal vs. allegorical interpretation - disputes which had intensely consumed the intellectual capacities of English academia for more than a century then, since John Wyclif formulated his criticism of the Church, among others, along these two main ideas. Bevington and Baker's conclusions indirectly suggest that *Wisdom* does not only offer a dramatic elaboration on the ideal late medieval devotion, but contributes with sharp observations to the simmering tensions of intellectual life. It also reveals an audacious gesture of revisiting dangerously suspicious Lollard views in order not to cruelly reject them, but to

²³ Bevington, op. cit., pp. 31-33.

²⁴ Baker, op. cit., pp. 78-9.

vigorously apply them in the play's arguments and experiment with them until the point they cannot be maintained any longer. The reading I propose to scene 2, based on solid textual support in the passage itself, adds a third major aspect to the list of global themes established by Bevington and Baker. The play, and especially Lucifer's argumentation, investigates the problem of the questionable reconcilability of pursuing the science of logic (in a broader sense, scientific disciplines) and the desire after the innocent – prelapsarian – state of man. The approach to this problem gained new vigour in Wyclif's *De Benedicta Incarnacione*, where he claimed that Lucifer was “the first corrupt logician in that he asked the first *quaestio*, and thereby introduced into the fallen world the desire to dispute and win arguments. ‘Unde omnis quaestio attestatur indubie super ignoranciam vel peccatum.’”²⁵ Hitherto it has been overlooked that the main theme of *The Play of Wisdom* is not simply the dramatization of temptation-contrition-and-repentance, but a re-enactment of the Fall of Man, who, in his innocent (Edenic) state of mind, is exposed to the intricacies of speculative knowledge.

Milton M. Gatch summarized the psychological scope of *Wisdom* as an abandonment of the Prudentian psychological schema for that of the 14th century mystics.²⁶ However, the way Lucifer thematises his opening monologue of scene 2 attests to the opposite. Lucifer's soliloquy places his own role in the context of *psychomachia*:

*My place to restore,
 God hath mad man.
 All cum þey not thore,
 Woode and þey wore.
 I xall tempte hem so sorre,
 For I am he þat syn begane.
 I was a angell of lyghte;
 Lucyfeer, I hyght,
 Presumyng in Godys syght.
 Werfor I am lowest in hell.
 In reformyng of my place ys dyght
 Man, whan I haue in most dyspyght,
 Euer castyng me wyth hem for to fyght,*

²⁵ I am much indebted to Kantik Ghosh for sharing the draft of his article “Logic and Lollardy” with me. The line of thought he pursued with brilliant argumentation and illustration contains implications for the study of *The Play of Wisdom* and affected my reading as well. When necessary, quotations (with his permission) are made to the draft whose publication is forthcoming.

²⁶ Gatch, op. cit., p. 345.

In þat hewynly place that he xulde not dwell. (ll. 327-40)

Lucifer's open purpose is to drag out the human soul from his prelapsarian innocence. At the same time, the play also attempts an investigation to find out what state of mind, thinking and logic belong to the state of innocence, which Lucifer is resolved to crash brutally. In scene 1, Anima is invested with the attributes of innocence in the strictest literal sense. Starting to realise her own being, she appears as a devoted student still with a blank mind. Lucifer launches his attack against the innocent soul with the "knowyng" he possessed when he fell from Heaven. Lucifer's wily lesson begins when he transforms Wisdom's emanations into a misleadingly carefully and didactically constructed course of argumentation.

Lucifer's monologue exactly repeats Wisdom's lesson; he reiterates the main conclusions of scene 1: (1) man is God's figure; (2) the soul is divided into three parts: Mind, Will and Understanding; (3) temptation happens in three stages: suggestion is made to the Mind, Understanding takes delight in it, and Will consents to it; and (4) there is no sin but in the consent of Will. Lucifer's rehearsal of Wisdom's universal truths proves, on the one hand, that the fallen angel preserved the knowledge he was supposed to possess before his defeat; on the other, he also reveals his wiliness by confessing all the means by which he intends to disfigure man and manipulate Wisdom. First, he wishes to use "fals coniecture" (l. 354), and hopes to distract the soul's "reporture" (l. 355) from its due direction to Lucifer. The word "reporture" occurs also in line 265 of scene 1, where Understanding expresses his commitment to "make reporture" of Wisdom's knowing in order to see His sacrificing love and to be able to requite Wisdom's love for the soul. In this instance, the expression of making "reporture" confirms the underlying context of the soul submitting himself to Wisdom's school, since "reporture" implies taking notes. In scene 2, Lucifer slyly counts on Understanding's continuing efforts to pay heed to the "reporture" of knowledge, even after he had unrightfully appropriated this term for himself: "Yff he [man] tende to my [Lucifer's] reporture, / I xal brynge hym to nought" (ll. 355-6). Lucifer's methods list "suggestyon" (l. 365) also among the didactic tools of misleading demonstration. Finally, he envisions his plan to corrupt the Soul in the context of an "examynacyon" (l. 371) – not merely in the sense of putting the Might's perseverance to a test, but to draw his scheme on the model of a real university course at the end of which the candidates are examined by their masters. By this, Lucifer gives a clear voice to his having expropriated Wisdom's role as a teacher, but with a sharper edge insofar as he transformed this role into that of an examiner.

Lucifer reveals his false intentions in open language, which itself is manipulative. With his entry on stage, the verse pattern changes. Besides the change in the length of the

lines (the earlier 12 syllabic verses switch to an average of 8 syllables per line) and the rhyme scheme (the earlier, “more progressive” scheme of ababbcbc is replaced by a scheme of monotonously repeated rhymes with the intersection of stubbornly returning tail-rhymes: aaabcccb), the most conspicuous feature of Lucifer’s language is a bend to a simpler manner of speech, which culminates in rhyming mostly monosyllabic words of Germanic origin at the end of the lines.²⁷ This counterreaction to Wisdom’s more refined style is, nevertheless, suspended in passages disclosing Lucifer’s scheme of disfiguring man, where, with an almost satirical abuse of aureate language, he seems to take an anticipated verbal revenge on Wisdom and to perversely enjoy the destruction he plans to bring about.²⁸

The real argumentation starts only in line 393. Lucifer’s soliloquy is dramaturgically conceived as a vast aside revealing everything to the audience, but nothing to those concerned. After addressing the Mightes by the much debated expression of “fonnyd fathers” (l. 393)²⁹, Lucifer provokes the faculties of the soul to engage themselves in a dispute by a quotation from the parable of the vineyard: “Vt quid hic statis tota die ociosi?” (Mt 20:6, l. 394). This verse condenses much of Lucifer’s strategy to ensnare the soul. First of all, he again admits to his expropriation of Christ’s words and role, since in Matthew’s parable the same question was raised by the master of the vineyard who went out to hire workers. The use of this Gospel passage also confirms the teleological scope of Lucifer’s plans. The parable of the vineyard is among the most important passages of the Gospels that reveals something about the mysteries of the end of times. What is at stake here is exactly the possibility of entering Heaven, from which Lucifer wants to prevent man in the play. Lucifer’s addressing the Mightes also contains the first false conjecture: he identifies those waiting for work with idle people (who *per definitionem* avoid all sorts of activity); at the same time, he falsely suggests that the idle workers, a metaphoric substitution for Anima’s three parts, are really waiting for an invitation, although they have already received it from Wisdom. This conjecture is coupled with the first false suggestion as Lucifer immediately threatens Mind with damnation, and thus sows the seeds of mistrust: “3e wyll perissche or 3e yt aspye. / The dewyll hath acumberyde yow expres. / Mynde, Mynde, ser, haue mynde of thys” (ll. 395-7). Part of Lucifer’s strategy is to claim the reality by alienating the statements from the actual

²⁷ Cf., e.g., the following groups of rhymes at the beginning of Lucifer’s monologue: “rore-lore-restore-thore-wore-sorre,” “lyght-hyght-syght-dyght-dyspyght-fyght,” or “than-can-man-whan-wan-began.”

²⁸ Cf.: “Wyche I wyll dysvygure / Be my fals coniecture. / Yff he tende my reporture...” (ll. 353-5), or “To þe Mynde of þe Soule I xall mak suggestyun, / Ande brynge hys Wndyrstondynge to dylectacyon, / So þat hys Wyll make confyrmayon. / Than am I sekyr inowe / That dede xall sew of damnacyon; / Than of þe Sowll þe dewill hath domynacyon. / I wyll go make this examynacyon...” (ll. 365-71).

²⁹ Interpretation of “fonnyd fathers”!!!!

situation. He refers to himself as well as to Mind in the third person. Moreover, the latter reference (l. 397) is disguised in a pun, which asks Mind to have mind of Lucifer's warning.

Mind irresistibly slips into the debate probably by his natural instinct to defend himself against unjust accusations. Even if his objection to Lucifer's charge is justified, Lucifer achieved his first success of having forcefully involved Mind in the dispute. In his second speech, Lucifer already loosens up the restraints of logical discourse. His response to Mind is not adequate: he seems to prove his own suggestion, but switches to a new topic. Furthermore, he constructs his speech on a disjointed premise and conclusion. The statement that "[a]ll thyng hat dew tymes - / Prayer, fastyng, labour" (ll. 401-2) should not at all result in the conclusion that "all thes" have to be dismissed. When, in a next step, Lucifer recurs to an example (of the man in the world with a family to take care of) to support this twist of argument, he again commits the mistake of inadequate reasoning. He proposes the withdrawal from prayers (or contemplation, in general) by seemingly ignoring the *vita mixta*. He presents a limited and false alternative to his opponent; he does not even explicitly offer the binary choice between active and contemplative life, but reformulates this opposition in terms of the life that Christ had led and the one which He had not. Therefore, when drawing his conclusion – "Martha plesyde Gode grettly more" – Lucifer ultimately does not only identify Martha's way of life (traditionally explained as an allegory of the active life in medieval exegesis), but turns the hierarchy of the values of the Gospel passage upside down.

Mind is helpful to pounce on this revolting error, and reminds Lucifer of the forgotten (or ignored) premise of his argument: "but Maria plesyde hymm moche more" (l. 414), resuming implicitly that doing more actively is less for God. At this point when Lucifer may already feel quite uneasy vis-à-vis innocent Mind, untrained in logic, he again abandons his previous argumentation and continues with another false logical conclusion: "Yet, þe lest hade blys for euermore. / Ys not that anow?" (ll. 415-6). The interpretation of line 415 is problematic because of the pun on "lest," which derives out of the change of the biblical context. This line is a paraphrase of the first of the beatitudes (Mt 5:3 and Lk 6:20), which thus modifies the connotations of the "lest." If seen from the perspective of Lucifer's previous analogy, the example of Martha and Mary, the expression "least" should logically refer to the one less or least pleasing to God by virtue of their way of life. Martha's hospitality in the Gospel ends with the perplexing conclusion that her enduring work is still less than Mary's perseverance in a seemingly idle contemplation. Yet, by linking the word's associations to the other biblical passage, "þe lest" is invested with connotations of "the least among humanity,

the humble, lowborn,³⁰ which may falsely appear as a consolation to Martha. At the same time, Lucifer ironically refers to those least rigorous in piety, contented with the least degree in heaven, an attitude which was also severely criticised by Walter Hilton in his *Scale of Perfection*.³¹ Although Lucifer's provoking question in line 416 does not manage to get Mind to revise his stance on the priority of contemplative life, he, for the moment, diverted the eventual suspicions of his opponent about his evident failures in persuasion.

So far, Lucifer's skills in logic and argumentation have in no way advanced his case. Lucifer's aim is to incite the three parts of the soul to contemplate less and act more; at the same time, it is known from the story of Martha and Mary that the former was indignant at her obvious disadvantage of doing more, yet being praised less. After the failure of Lucifer's first strategy, he gets entangled in another scriptural argumentation less openly falsifying the literal sense, still denying facts. Finally, his manipulation by omitting details (in the ensuing passage) is more successful than manipulation by ambitiously claiming the opposite (as seen in the analogy of Martha and Mary).

In his exposition on Christ's active life, Lucifer turns to advocate the *vita mixta*, which he supports with scriptural evidence:

And all hys [Christ's] lyff was informacyon

Ande example to man.

Sumtyme wyth synners he had conversacyon;

Sumtyme wyth holy also comunycacyon;

Sumtyme he laboryde, preyde; sumtyme, tribulacyon.

Thys was vita mixta þat Gode here began,

Ande þat lyff xulde ye here sewe. (ll. 423-9)

This is perhaps the turning point of the argument when Lucifer smoothes Mind's resistance by a psychological rather than a logical-argumentative strategy. Lucifer initially entered the conversation with a strategy that led him into a *cul-de-sac*. Narrowing down Mind's choice to an evidently unacceptable binary option mobilised his opponent's awareness to Lucifer's errors on the literal level of arguments. Mind, however, slipped over the fact that his thinking (*ab ovo* or only in the context of this debate) had been conditioned to a binary view of things, i.e. a binary classification of phenomena. First Lucifer adapts himself to Mind's dichotomy: active is black, contemplative is white. Since the negation of this pre-condition of Mind leads Lucifer nowhere, the tempter starts to manipulate the binary categories. He switches to the

³⁰ Riggio, *The Play of Wisdom*, p. 234.

³¹ Riggio quotes *Scale* 2, 18 to illustrate the implications of this line: "For they saye that it is ynough to hem for to be saaf and have the leest degre in heven" (p. 234).

dichotomy of the contemplative vs. the mixed life, at the same time he idealises the latter upon (manipulated) scriptural grounds and starts to denigrate contemplative life as an “ideal” unpleasing to God. But all this argumentation remains formally hypothetical, yet with the abhorring details Lucifer draws on unfulfilled contemplative life Mind is forced into the acceptance of the new alternative, again restricted to good and bad: “Wan þey [those pursuing the contemplative life] haue wastyde by feyntnes, / Than febyll þer wyttys and fallyn to fondnes, / Sum into dyspeyer and sum into madnes, / Wet yt well, God ys not plesyde wyth thys” (ll. 437-40).

When the former white alternative has entirely been blackened, the “grey” alternative does not only whiten out, but actually replaces the place of the earlier white option. The *vita mixta* only had an episodic role in Lucifer’s arguments. As soon as it gains Mind’s consent, Lucifer applies a last daring twist of argumentation by ultimately eliminating the binary alternative from Mind’s choice (mixed vs. active), and concludes his own exhortation to Mind by the imperative: “Be in þe worlde” (l. 442). This last invitation to the world ignores Lucifer’s own push for the *vita mixta* some lines earlier. Lucifer, in his final *tour de force* of logic, feels entitled to metonymically substitute the active life as such for the active components of the mixed life, whereby he concludes his breathtaking persuasion with the formal / literal affirmation of the superiority of the *vita activa*.

The exchange of arguments between Lucifer and Mind finishes with brief conclusions with rich possibilities of interpretation: “[Mind] Truly, me seme 3e haue reson. / [Lucyfer] Aplye yow then to þis conclusyon” (ll. 445-6). Mind’s unequivocal language and thinking metamorphose into ambiguities. “3e haue reson” implies Mind’s acknowledgement of Lucifer’s right in reasoning as well as Lucifer’s taking possession of Mind (the superior reason) as a faculty of the soul. “Attributing *reson* to Lucifer suggests that Mind has been seduced by Lucifer. [...] Lucifer has won Mind, the most intellectual of the three, through ‘reasonable’ arguments – or what appears to be reasonable logic – but is in truth (from the epistemological perspectives of the play) false reasoning.”³² The pun becomes even more surprising as it appears at a crucial turning point of the play: this is the first occurrence of the word invested with the connotation of argument or reasoning. Ironically, as soon as the word gains a new and composite meaning (referring both to mind as the superior part of the soul – a meaning inherited from scene 1 and to the process of argumentation), it immediately loses the first layer of its meanings, since Mind resigns on his innocent state of being by the voluntary act of consenting to Lucifer. The act of resignation, however, enriches Mind with a new

³² Riggio, *The Play of Wisdom*, p. 239.

experience, which is deemed corrupt in the logic of the play. This is the experience of acquiring abstract knowledge on a skill he inherently possessed, but which he also lost at the moment of detaching the instinctive application of the skill from its theory. When Mind identifies the process of argumentation as reason, he actually confesses that he realised an independently existing set of principles that Lucifer pursued in their conversation. But when Mind becomes aware of the existence of the detachment of the theory of science from its practice, and long before he comes to realise that the way he was introduced into theory could only lead through corrupt speculations, he has already lost his Edenic intellectual innocence.

Mind in his Edenic innocence did not exist without the notion of reason, either. But there, following Hilton's discussion of the soul's faculties in the *Scale of Perfection*, it was equated with the superior part of the soul: "That other parte, þat ys clepyde resone, / Ande þat ys þe ymage of Gode propyrly, / For by þat þe sowll of Gode hathe cognycyon, / And be þat hym serwynt and loueynt dully" (ll. 141-4). In this sense, reason is not affected with features of syllogistic thinking. This passage defines reason as the image of God. Reason occupies an eminent role in the play as long as the playwright relies on Hilton's dual division of the soul, where everything appears in a binary opposition: the lower part of the soul is sensuality that is black and foul, while the superior is reason that is white and beautiful.³³ The reason for the gradual disappearance of "reason" from the play is the playwright's shift from Hilton's dual model to the ternary division of the soul. The transition from one paradigm to the other is indicated in lines 297-300, where reason is further divided into a lower and upper part: "No thyng xulde offende Gode in no kynde, / Ande yff þer do, se þat þe nether parte of resone / In no wys þerto lende; / Than þe ouerparte xall haue fre domynacyon." "In the play, Hilton's 'reason,' corresponding to 'ratio' or 'intelligentia,' becomes Understanding, a translation which echoes writers like Thomas Aquinas and Albertus Magnus, who follow Augustine in naming the second faculty 'intelligentia' or its equivalent 'intellectus'."³⁴

After the few mentions of "reason" in scene 1, the expression emerges again in line 445 in a new and unprecedented meaning layered upon its earlier one. From scene 1, it follows that reason is a faculty of the soul, itself being composite (divided into a higher and lower part) and corresponding to Understanding. All in all, it appears as a metaphor for Understanding and possibly also for Mind. Accordingly, Mind's judgment – "3e [Lucifer] haue reson" – can be interpreted in two ways: (1) Lucifer possesses the faculty of reason, or

³³ Cf.: "[Every soul is] wyght by knowenge of reson veray" (l. 155) and "Thus a sowll ys bothe fowlle and fayer: / Fowll as a best be felynge of synne, / Fayer as a angell, of hewyn þe ayer / By knowynge of Gode by hys reson wythin" (ll. 157-60).

³⁴ Riggio, *The Play of Wisdom*, p. 207.

(2) Lucifer has “domynacyon” over reason. The second and new meaning of the word has fewer abstract implications. By Mind’s granting reason to Lucifer, he simply acknowledges that his opponent is right, i.e. Lucifer’s conclusion is right. In Mind’s declaration the meaning of “reason” is applied to acknowledging that an argument is correct. With the burdened connotations of the expression, it is no wonder that the next occasion it emerges (“Dyspute not to moche in Bis wyth reson” l. 482) as Lucifer’s *ultima ratio* to urge Will not to resist carnal temptations, the line may be interpreted both as an encouragement to rely on, and a discouragement from recurring to, logic.³⁵

3.1.3. Uncorrupted Thinking and the Innocent State of Mind

The previous discussion concerning the play’s reflection on the commitment to logic as a science, finally, crystallises two questions that may have an immense purport from the epistemological perspective of the morality. The first is indirectly concerned with the nature of uncorrupted thinking: when Lucifer entraps Mind with his manipulations of binary categories, does Anima (Mind) inherently / necessarily stick to the paradigm of thinking in dichotomies? The second question concerning the inherent corruption of every theory of science after the Fall revisits Wyclif’s preoccupation with the same problem. The answer to both of these questions is disappointingly laconic: there is no solid internal evidence on which to base further discussion. Yet there are some indications that allow conjectures about the way in which the playwright tended to resolve the underlying paradox of both questions.

The paradox of the first problem is that it cannot be examined; the innocent – prelapsarian - mind is not accessible to man. Nevertheless, medieval thinkers were very much inclined to hypothesising on the intellectual state of the prelapsarian man. Mishtooni Bose, in her article on “Vernacular Philosophy and the Making of Orthodoxy in the Fifteenth Century,” pointed out “the medieval line of thought which stressed that animals, children and the laity all have an innate ability to make effective use of the syllogism and form rational arguments.”³⁶ The excerpts Bose quotes to illustrate the horizons of the development of this idea from Aristotle to Boethius, Avicenna, “Alhacen” (Ibn Al-Haytham), Roger Bacon and to Reginald Pecock contrast the paradigms of natural endowments (innate capacities) and learned skills. But when Reginald Pecock extends his observations to some elementary reasoning of beasts, he implicitly establishes another dichotomy, that of the prelapsarian and

³⁵ Cf. the previous discussion in footnote (56) of this chapter.

³⁶ Kantik Ghosh, “Logic and Lollardy,” pp. 9-10

postlapsarian states, in the scope of the problem.³⁷ By maintaining a degree of similarity between animals' instinctive behaviour in moments of decisions and the mechanism of man's uncorrupted and uninfluenced mind, Pecoock indirectly infers that a natural syllogistic thinking characterised the prelapsarian mind. The presentation of Mind in his debate with Lucifer at the beginning of scene 2 of *The Play of Wisdom* also seems to share this conviction of Pecoock's.

The playwright's stance on the question of the intellectual characteristics of the prelapsarian soul is not unanimous, though. The notion of innate syllogistic skills seems to undermine suggestions made in scene 1 concerning the innate blankness of innocent Mind. In this section the playwright does not attribute any innate notions to Anima. She is the only character in the play who does not identify herself, but asks Wisdom to define her identity. Upon Wisdom's request, Anima's faculties present themselves to the soul, after which the soul will be able to reflect upon herself, her own inner division, the dynamics of the relationship of her faculties, and her innate likeness to God. Her blank mind is filled with notions through Wisdom's illuminative instruction (revelations of Wisdom's truths), but this form of teaching entirely lacks the reflection on methodology. Therefore, when Mind confronts Lucifer's reasoning; his ability to describe the situation in a reflexive way is bound to the abstract categories Lucifer establishes for him: Lucifer names his own discourse first "proue" (l. 399), then "suggestyun" (l. 400). Yet it seems that Mind's failure is not due to his ignorance of the abstract theory of logic.

Contrary to what scene 1 suggests about Anima's (Mind's) blank start in the state of innocence, scene 2 advocates the idea of Mind's innate ability to rationally argue and to notice the errors in Lucifer's arguments. Mind is endowed with a healthy and good working (uncorrupted) logic that still collapses when Lucifer switches from the dichotomy of the *vita activa* – *vita contemplativa* to that of the *vita mixta* – *vita contemplativa*. The circumstances of Lucifer's intricate turn from one argumentative strategy to another have already been discussed. What needs to be looked at more carefully is the question: which factors out of the many might have determined Mind's fall to Lucifer? Amongst the factors to be considered,

³⁷ Cf. Mishtooni Bose's summary and analysis of Pecoock's argumentation: "Acknowledging that authoritative academic opinion holds that 'no beest may in his wittes make discurse,' he nevertheless admits that he cannot see why this might not be possible, and is clearly tempted by the theory that 'beestis mowe and kunnen forme proposicions, argue and proue and gete knowyng to hem bi argument of verri silogisme and of induccioun about þo þingis whiche þei mowe bi her outward and inward wittis perceyue.' He concedes that beasts may not reason as perfectly as men, just as some beasts are more capable of reasoning than others, but he maintains that it is easier to hold the view that beasts are capable of some rational thought than that they are not, the latter conclusion 'comonli holden and writen in summe bookis of philosophie.'" (Mishtooni Bose, "Vernacular Philosophy and the Making of orthodoxy in the Fifteenth Century," in Wendy Scase, Rita Copeland and David Lawton, eds., *New Medieval Literatures* 7 (2005), pp. 86-7.

the following seem to be adumbrated by the playwright: (1) Mind's innate or learned self-constraint to perceive and think in dichotomies, (2) Mind's lack of the abstract theory of logic, (3) Mind's limited argumentative competence (or his exposure to an unexpected test), (4) Mind's logical inertia when forced to support a stance that does not concern him personally (as he is committed to the form of contemplation Christ requires from him, Anima is an outsider in arbitrating over the priority of the *vita mixta* vs. the *vita activa*), (5) Mind's having no previous knowledge about his opponent, while Lucifer knows "all compleccyons of man" (l. 343), and finally (6) Mind's being unaware of his own natural inclinations that he is expected to suppress.

From scene 1, we learn that thinking in dichotomies is not Anima's innate ability, but she learns it from Wisdom. The very first lesson about her own microcosm is that it has a dual nature: black and white, fair and foul. At the same time, scene 1 gradually alters the dichotomy into a threefold division so that it does not discard the validity of the dual paradigm, but projects the ternary paradigm onto it. Thinking in dichotomies is, thus, a learned trait of Mind that certainly does not appear as a constraining factor upon his perception. Secondly, Mind's lack of the abstract theory of logic does not cause his failure, either. When Mind epitomises Lucifer's process of reasoning with the very word of "reason," his awareness of meta-logic (the theoretical speculative component of science) is rather a symptom of being initiated into this knowledge. Thirdly, scene 2 confirms Mind's argumentative competence (the innate ability to form good arguments and use syllogisms), which can be activated in both expected and unexpected situations. Lucifer's first approach to Mind is just as unexpected as are his sudden twists of arguments, which practically lay the dispute on totally new argumentative footing. Mind's logical inertia does not belong to his own predisposition, but is actually the result of the change that the course of debate takes. What seems to account for Mind's fiasco can be grasped in the last two factors of my list.

Lucifer's anonymity has a dramaturgical point. The evil, the cosmic threat is perceived by everyone (including Wisdom-Christ and the audience) except for the one directly concerned when personally encountering him. The plot of scene 2 is not only predicted by Wisdom's last speech at the end of scene 1 (in the form of a general warning to be aware of all eventual dangers that may come as a suggestion to Mind),³⁸ but is exactly formulated by Lucifer face to face with Mind: "The dewyll hath acumberyde yow [Mind] expres" (l. 396). Wisdom's admonition about Mind's eventual stirrings and Lucifer's conceited knowledge of

³⁸ Cf. ll. 301-4: "Wan suggestyon to þe Mynde doth apere, / Wndyrstondynge, delyght not 3e þerin, / Consent not, Wyll, yll lessons to lere, / Ande than suche steryngys by no syn."

the complexions of man point towards the same direction: they share the assumption that Anima has innate inclinations to flirt with temptations that could deprive her of the intimate contemplation on Wisdom. Since the temptation appears in the disguise of speculative logic, the discussion of this aspect of the play will bridge my considerations of Mind's innocent state with the question whether the theories of sciences are inherently corrupt.

It has been shown that *The Play of Wisdom* does not detach logic from the prelapsarian innocence of the mind. On the other hand, the fact that the pursuit of the theoretical knowledge of a science would automatically incur the fall from grace is hardly attestable, either. The play, however, establishes an emphatic association of scientific logic with the type of school Lucifer represents. The two school systems crystallising out of the dramatic clash between Wisdom and Lucifer are contrasted on the basis of two features. The first one is the mode of apprehension of knowledge: illumination as the main source of progress in Christ's school is counterbalanced by Lucifer's discursive argumentation. Secondly, the schools differ in their teleological perspectives: in Lucifer's case everything is knowable, but he denies that knowable things would yield any personal fruit for one's own salvation. As Donald C. Baker concludes, "Lucifer at the end, for all his wit, his subtlety, is left alone with the literal interpretation, with no hope of Grace."³⁹ In Christ's school, learning is preparation for an encounter with the divine being (or truth), and is best defined as a personal experience of one's own spiritual progress. The systematically recurring analogy of institutional teaching and learning throughout the play emphasises that learning is not to be exiled from any spiritual quests after wisdom; at the same time, the playwright also phrases his criticism of an educational system that loses sight of the soteriological end of knowledge.

3.2. A Visual Commentary on the Encounter of Mysticism and Institutional Learning: MS BL Add. 37049

While, in the discussion of the manuscripts containing the full text of the English rendering of Suso's *Horologium Sapientiae*, MS British Library, Additional 37049 did not receive my special attention, since it conserved only chapters 4 and 5 of *The Seven Points* (point 5 on ff. 39-43v preceding point 4 on ff. 43v-44v), in this section I will return to this unique manuscript. BL Add. 37049 is the only illustrated manuscript containing Suso's text. The manuscript is an eclectic collection of devotional and mystical material, Latin and English prose and verse, whose composition can be traced back to Carthusian circles.

³⁹ Baker, op. cit., p. 79.

The illustrations accompanying the texts from ff. 85 to 89v seem to be conceived as a consistent iconographic program with the recurring pattern of a doctor/master facing a young scholar on the opposite margin of the page.⁴⁰ The visual representations are very loosely connected to the equivalent textual passages. Their *raison d'être* seems to confirm Jolliffe's conclusion of the analysis of the tract "Of Actyfe lyfe and contemplatyfe declaracion" on ff. 87v-89v, whose beginning and end are marked off from the neighbouring texts by the recurring visual pattern: "[...] some attempt has been made to impose unity on the tract by using the device of the disciple and the doctor."⁴¹ This implies that the visual representations had no other aim but to reaffirm the text's insistence on a "feigned" dialogue between a doctor and his disciple, which was to provide a frame – both textual and visual – to the otherwise monologic tract on contemplative life.⁴² This observation, however, does not apply to all the other texts enriched by a similar visual pattern of the same iconographic program.

The purpose of the visual frame under consideration, as I will argue in this section, is rather to comment, in a very implicit way, on the nature of this eclectic manuscript as well as to channel the consideration of some ideas challenging authority, of whose risks the compiler of the manuscript was certainly aware, into the safe context of a devotional miscellany. Although the iconographic program evoking the institutional forms of teaching and learning accompanies texts unrelated to the fragments of Suso's *Horologium*, its concern is similar to the ones raised by the preface and introduction of Suso's English rendering. This unique iconographic program gives visual statements on what the compiler of MS BL Add 37049 did not involve from Suso's *Horologium*. Unlike most of the scholarly comments on the iconography of this MS, pointing out the very didactic word-picture concordances, I will emphasise that the iconography of academia establishes a more overall referential system within the manuscript and is not only bound to visually duplicate the content of the adjacent texts.

Scholarly attention has been attracted by this manuscript because of its rich store of visual motifs that elaborate on the most popular themes of late medieval devotion. Francis Wormland comments on the visual representations of ff. 23, 32v, 73 and 87 (an iconographic version of the "charter of human redemption," images of the decomposition of the body in the

⁴⁰ For the analysis of the visual program of MS BL Add 37049, I have consulted James Hogg's black-and-white facsimile edition of the illustrated pages of this manuscript: James Hogg, ed., *An Illustrated Carthusian Religious Miscellany BL London Add. MS 37049. Vol. 3: The Illustrations*, *Analecta Cartusiana* 95:3 (1981).

⁴¹ P. S. Jolliffe, "Two Middle English Tracts on the Contemplative Life," *Mediaeval Studies* 37 (1975), p. 114.

⁴² Cf., e.g., the beginning of the tract: "I beseke þe reuerent doctour to informe me þe way of goode lyfing and how I sal dispose me to cum to euerlastyng lyfe þe whilk is ordand for þaim þat here dewly lufs and serfys almyghty god. Þe doctor awnswers [...]" (f. 87v). Hogg, op. cit., p. 137 and Jolliffe, op. cit., p. 88.

tomb and two-page illustration of the Last Judgment with a dragon as Hell Mouth, devouring the damned).⁴³ Caroline Bynum Walker reviews the scholarship on the manuscript, studying the visual representation of dominant themes in 15th-century devotion.⁴⁴ Sara Gorman, in her paper on the relationship between the iconography of this manuscript and the pictorial marginalia of Margery Kempe's manuscript, made references to the critical dispraises of the illustrations in BL Add 37049, which all see the images as didactic (and awkward) visual duplications of the texts: "[Samantha Mullaney] calls the illustrations [...] 'childlike,' and Kerby-Fulton and Despres comment that the text banners in the illustrations are 'comically obvious,' akin to 'cartoon bubbles.' These comments undermine serious consideration of the devotional significance of this illustrative tradition."⁴⁵ In a similar tone, Thomas W. Ross observes that "[t]he drawings in [Add. 37049] are directly related to the verse, and the subject matter of both graphic and poetic treatments is the same. Though no claim for excellence can be made for either the drawings or the poems, both communicate their ideas with a fair amount of crude power."⁴⁶ The focus on the iconographic program of this manuscript, consequently its central role in my argument, certainly indicates the significance I attribute to this composition of texts and images, although it is not the devotional significance, but the intellectual one I intend to discuss in the following.

The iconography of institutional teaching in MS British Library, Add 37049 comprises a series of illustrations that accompany consecutive texts between ff. 85 and 89v.⁴⁷ An isolated recurrence of the figures of a young scholar and a doctor on f. 96 completes this last pictorial unit of the manuscript. As opposed to the dominance of devotional themes in the overall visual program of the compilation, on the last pages (ff. 85-96) the pictorial comments on teaching do not only introduce a new element into the manuscript's iconography, but clearly determine the visual language of this part of the miscellany as different from the rest.

The series of representations that constitute the manuscript's pictorial comment on academia is not conspicuous for its straightforward development of an iconographic program. The elements of this series merely repeat the same or similar visual patterns without any

⁴³ Cf. Hogg's references to Patrick Wormland, "Some Popular Miniatures and Their Rich relations," *Miscellanea pro Arte: Festschrift für Hermann Schnitzler*. (Düsseldorf, 1965) in Hogg, op. cit., pp. 27, 43, 115 and 136.

⁴⁴ Caroline Bynum Walker, "Violent Imagery in Late Medieval Piety," Fifteenth Annual Lecture of the GHI, November 8, 2001. *GHI Bulletin* 30 (2002), p. 33.

⁴⁵ Sara Gorman, "'Sche knelyd upon hyr kneys, hir boke in hir hand': Manuscript Travel, Devotional Pedagogy and the Textual Communities of *The Book of Margery Kempe*," 2006-2007 Penn Humanities Forum on Travel. Undergraduate Humanities Forum Mellon Research Fellow: Final Project Paper, 2002. (Accessible from <http://repository.upenn.edu/cgi>), p. 58.

⁴⁶ Thomas W. Ross, "Five Fifteenth-Century 'Emblem' Verses from 'Brit. Mus. Addit. MS. 37049,'" *Speculum* 32 (1957), pp. 274-5.

⁴⁷ See the reproductions of the images, constituting the iconography of academia in MS BL Add. 37049 in Appendix A.

essential alterations in the basic concept of the representations of the scholar and the doctor. What is still remarkable is the insistence on the priority of this visual theme over devotional ones, even if the related texts would lend themselves much more easily to marginal illustrations recalling the dominant devotional images of the manuscript.⁴⁸

On ff. 85 and 85v a teacher and his disciple appear in the upper half of the pages, the teacher slightly taller than the young scholar. In both instances the figures of the teacher and the disciple, placed on the left and right margins respectively, frame the centrally positioned couplets (10 couplets on f. 85, and 9 on f. 85v) of the upper part of the page. On f. 85 the teacher turns half-way towards the scholar, pointing with his left hand – as a conventional *maniculum of nota bene* icons of contemporaneous manuscripts – to the third couplet in front of him, while keeping a scroll in his right hand. The scholar answers this position with upholding his right hand, while keeping a closed book in the left. On f. 85v the teacher is without a scroll; he gesticulates with both hands. The representation of his right hand with the thumb and index outstretched is a visual *topos* of a master indicating the divisions of the lecture or sermon he delivers to his audience. Obviously, this academic gesture does not fit the content of a simple instructional poem; moreover, the scholar's response is slightly unexpected, or perhaps inadequate: he places his right hand on his bosom on the side of his heart, and leaves his left arm rest elegantly over the pleats of his gown, as if embracing himself in a gesture of self-enclosure and contemplation.

On f. 86v a teacher appears seated in a cathedra and working on the composition of a manuscript page. This is the only occasion when the figure of the teacher is not accompanied by a young scholar. The upper half of f. 87v shows “to the left an inquirer, to the right a learned doctor, [and i]n the bottom right corner, a priest granting absolution.”⁴⁹ Hogg's description of the images relies on the expressions the text between the two figures use to

⁴⁸ Illustrations from f. 85 to f. 89v form an almost uninterrupted pictorial series, elaborating on the theme of academia. This series is interrupted by two unrelated visual comments on the texts to which they are attached. On f. 87 a half-page illustration completes the anecdote taken from Vincent of Beauvais's *Speculum historiale*. “An emperor is shown lying in state in his tomb, whilst underneath his corpse is rotting infested with bugs and worms. A steward leads the emperor's son to the tomb, warning him that he will suffer a like fate. The tomb is decorated with numerous coats of arms.” (Hogg, op. cit., p. 136.) While the picture seems to return to one of the manuscript's main concerns, i.e. the idea of *vanitas mundi* and the abhorring decay of the body after death, in a broader sense, it also elaborates on the idea of teaching as devotional instruction and a guide to good living. Thus Vincent's text, which starts on f. 86v in the second column parallel with the *ABC of Aristotle* with the image of a teacher seated in a cathedra, concludes with a visual reflection on topics that are directly related to the moral content as well as to the manner of conveying this content, i.e. instruction. On f. 88, between two representations of a young scholar and a doctor on ff. 87v and 89v, a minute pictorial series of the practice of the seven deeds of mercy is crammed into a band of the left margin of the page so that the six miniatures (the first uniting the first two virtuous deeds, i.e. giving food and drink to the needy) “roll down” from the left upper corner to the middle of the page.

⁴⁹ Hogg, op. cit., p. 137.

identify the participants of the dialogue. The attribute of inquiring is the very gesture of the scholar, turning to the doctor and raising his hands, while the book in the doctor's left hand becomes the attribute of the idea of reverence. F. 89v is a variation on the previous theme, with the only difference of the scroll that the doctor keeps in his hand. Finally, the last illustration of the manuscript on f. 96 also imitates the pattern of the young scholar on the left and the doctor on the right. In this instance, the gesture of the scholar expresses inquiring, while the doctor again displays the divisions of his answer with his right hand.

Conclusions drawn from the iconographic description of the images of this part of the manuscript would almost logically lead us to the supposition that the genre and characteristics of the parallel texts are supposed to be commensurate with the academic context the pictures reveal. But the texts to which the illustrations are added, mainly popular commonplace material, are incongruent with the pictorial evocation of the higher stages of teaching. The instructional poem on ff. 85 and 85v is published in Appendix B. F. 86v contains a version of the *ABC of Aristotle*, a popular poem in 15th-century commonplace books,⁵⁰ and, in the second column, the first part of the anecdote about Emperor Antiochus from Vincent of Beauvais's *Speculum historiale*. This latter is continued on the following page. FF. 87v-89v contain a tract on the active and contemplative lives, edited by P. S. Jolliffe.⁵¹ “[The tract] distinguishes between active and contemplative lives, describes the active life, principally in verses which have not been recorded elsewhere, but seem to be derivative.”⁵² A longer version of this treatise has been found in MS British Library, Add. 37790 (Amherst MS), another manuscript containing a fragment of *The Seven Points*, which is related to the version conserved in MS BL Add. 37049.⁵³

*The two tracts [on the active and contemplative lives] contain borrowings from the Cloud of Unknowing and its related writings, combined with material taken from Walter Hilton's The Scale of Perfection. Additional borrowings from the Scale, Rolle's Form of Living and A Tretyse of þe Stodye of Wysdome þat men clepen Beniamyn occur in the longer tract. Moreover, the treatment of the threefold way [of the contemplative ascent] owes its structure and some of its content to Hugh of Balma's Mystica theologia.*⁵⁴

⁵⁰ Cf. e.g., “The ABC of Aristotle” in MS Lambeth 853 (from around 1430), edited in Frederick James Furnivall, ed., *The babes book, Aristotle's ABC, Urbanitatis, Stans puer ad mensam, etc.* EETS. (London: N. Trübner and Co., 1868), pp. 11-2.

⁵¹ Jolliffe, op. cit., pp. 88-111.

⁵² Ibid., p. 86.

⁵³ Pius Künzle, ed., *Seuse Heinrich. Horologium Sapientiae.* (Freiburg: Universitätsverlag Freiburg, 1977), p. 269.

⁵⁴ Jolliffe, op. cit., p. 86.

The comparative analysis of the two tracts by Jolliffe demonstrated the significant relationship between the two texts. Jolliffe claims that “there are [several] reasons why [MS Add. 37049] appears to depend upon an earlier form of [Add. 37790].”⁵⁵

The beginning of a new text, commencing after the tract on the active and contemplative lives, is marked by the next illustration of a young scholar and a “reuerent doctour.” Jolliffe identifies this longer tract on ff. 89v-94 with the title “Agayne despayre,” a passage of which between ff. 91v and 94 is one of the less wide-spread second English versions of William Flete’s *De remediis contra temptaciones*.⁵⁶ Benedict Hackett, Eric Colledge and Noel Chadwick provide further specific detail on this text and the peculiar features of its manuscripts in their co-authored article:

*Add. 37049, generally supposed to be the work of a Mount Grace Carthusian, which enjoys some celebrity for its crude and lurid drawings, done by the scribe, of the Imago Pietatis, the Sacred Heart, etc., contains, ff. 91v-93, part of [the second English version of Flete’s De remediis], which merges after ‘Jesus says in þe gospell: Blyssed ar þai þat suffers persecution for ryghtwysnes, for þairs is the blys of heuen...’ into legends of St. Guthlac, of the Blessed Virgin, and then, f. 94, ‘...If any thought creep into your mind of the predestination or the prescience of God, answer to the fiend who makes such suggestion and say: Whatever may become of me, it is certain that you are damned...,’ a locus classicus, which is ultimately from the Stimulus Amoris.*⁵⁷

Finally, the text, belonging to the last illustration of the manuscript on f. 96, is also edited in Appendix B. Since the lower right quarter of the page is missing, the text can be recovered only in an incomplete state.

While some scholarly opinions recognize the “oddity” of this manuscript, the hangover on the atypical seems to be due to the exceptional richness of the material and the style of the illustrations. In his article, Ross attempts to reconcile his recognition of the manuscript being an “odd assortment” with another impression of his: “In its variety, [the manuscript] is altogether typical of its times, of course.”⁵⁸ Lovatt, commenting on the “domestication” and “taming” of Suso by 15th-century devotional manuscripts, containing

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 113.

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 86.

⁵⁷ Benedict Hackett, O.S.A., Eric Colledge and Noel Chadwick, “William Flete’s ‘De Remediis contra Temptaciones’ in Its Latin and English Recensions: The Growth of a Text,” *Mediaeval Studies* 26 (1964), pp. 226-7.

⁵⁸ Ross, op. cit., p. 275.

more standard materials and authors, like Walter Hilton, points out the typicality of such “odd assortments” with an allusion to MS BL Add. 37790, a sister manuscript of Add. 37049:

[The] exploitation of Suso’s work suggests that its presence and availability were taken for granted, so to speak, by English writers but it is otherwise somewhat uncharacteristic. What is more revealing is the way in which the work was employed by the compilers of other devotional treatises. [...] One such work is the Speculum Spiritualium, a long and comprehensive guide to the spiritual life which was compiled early in the fifteenth century by an anonymous English Carthusian. The work is designedly eclectic. Indeed in his preface the author made a virtue of his methods, explaining that he had drawn upon many different sources in order to produce a compendium suitable for those who could not afford a large library of their own. [...] The author of the Speculum was perhaps exceptionally well read but in a number of other devotional treatises, and also in various private commonplace books, the Horologium appears in a very similar context. The implication is that during the fifteenth century Suso’s work came to be accepted in England as a standard text. He could appropriately be quoted alongside Richard Rolle and Walter Hilton as an equally authoritative guide to the life of the spirit, and his Horologium circulated in close proximity to the writings of the English Mystics. The manuscript which contains the unique shorter text of Julian’s Revelations [MS BL Add. 37790] also includes an extract from the English version of the Horologium.⁵⁹

Ross and Lovatt’s observations agree rather upon disclaiming the oddity of this devotional miscellany and limiting this notion only to the manuscripts unusually rich selection of various materials (both textual and visual). What I suggest, however, is to extend the recognition of “oddity” beyond labelling the contents of the manuscript. The reconciliation of texts of solid and relatively recent (and sometimes questionable) authorities, which is expressed not only by reading Suso along with the *Cloud*-author and Flete, but also by the visual design of the collection, may not only be due to the elapse of some time, as Lovatt seems to suggest. MS Add. 37049 is not only a witness of the process of how time shapes authorities, but also an important agent in merging suspicious texts with safe ones by substituting academic claims for the earlier caveats.

As seen from the previous discussion, MSS Add. 37049 and 37790 show close relationships with each other at several points: both of them contain very similar renderings of

⁵⁹ Lovatt, op. cit., pp. 53-4.

the same fragment of Suso's *Horologium*, and secondly, the two manuscripts are unique for their tract on the active and contemplative lives because

[...] only these two tracts and one other extant in Middle English describe the contemplative life in terms of the purgative, illuminative and unitive way. Second, they provide evidence that [Hugh of Balma's] *Mystica theologia* was known in fifteenth-century England, at least among the Carthusians.⁶⁰

On the basis of the above similarities between the two manuscripts, we can attribute a common context of textual transmission to MS Add. 37049 and the Amherst MS. This latter miscellany is "a major collection of spiritual literature in English," containing a wide variety of mystical writings, among others: Mysin's translation of Rolle's *Emendatio vitae* and *Incendium amoris*, the unique Short Text of Julian of Norwich's *Revelations*, Ruusbroec's *De Calculo candido*, portions of Rolle's *Ego dormio* and *Form of Living*, chapter 4 of Suso's *Horologium*, the "M. N." version of Margarete Porète's *Mirror of Simple Souls*, and a note on St. Bridget's visions.⁶¹ The MS was annotated, and according to Kerby-Fulton, also written by James Grenehalgh, a Carthusian from Sheen, who left his monogram on f. 33.⁶² Kerby-Fulton claims that "there is most certainly a Carthusian context for reception here, and likely a Carthusian origin as well."⁶³ In her discussion of the transmission and "tempering" of dangerous texts, like Porète's *Mirror*, she points to the Carthusian circles, which, on the one hand, were "strongly associated with women's mysticism and guidance to the contemplative life for mixed audiences," and were, on the other hand, "important 'safe spaces' for unusual even radical revelatory spirituality," attesting to "both the independence of Carthusian spirituality and its measured caution with texts that would reach a vernacular audience."⁶⁴

Both internal and external evidence supports the view that MS Add. 37049 was also moving in the same circles, and was sharing the same reading community as the Amherst MS.⁶⁵ But, unlike the Amherst MS, in which the less tolerated *Mirror* by Margarete Porète

⁶⁰ Jolliffe, op. cit., p. 120.

⁶¹ For the contents of the Amherst MS, cf.: Jolliffe, op. cit., p. 85; Michael Sargent, "Contemporary Criticism of Richard Rolle," *Analecta Cartusiana* (ed. James Hogg) 55:1 (1981), p. 171 and Kathryn Kerby-Fulton, *Books under Suspicion: Censorship and Tolerance of Revelatory Writing in Late Medieval England*. (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 2006), pp. xlix and 412, note 16.

⁶² Cf. Sargent, "Contemporary Criticism of Rolle," p. 171 and Kerby-Fulton, op. cit., p. 298. For the reconstruction of the activity of this Carthusian as "the best-known Middle English textual critic," cf.: Michael Sargent, "James Grenehalgh: The Biographical Record," *Analecta Cartusiana* 55:4 (1982), pp. 20-54, esp. p. 32 (for his annotations in the Amherst MS).

⁶³ Kerby-Fulton, op. cit., p. 298.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 262, 298, and 296.

⁶⁵ Previously, only external evidence has been taken into consideration in the discussion of the relationship between the two manuscripts. But the Carthusian provenance of the MS is also confirmed by some of the miscellany's contents: e.g., a poem on the Carthusian order illustrated by four drawings on f. 22, which "depict the role of St. Hugh, Bishop of Grenoble, in the founding of the mother-house of the Carthusian Order, the

travelled, “safeguarded by M. N.’s glosses, with Middle English texts of unimpeachable orthodoxy written by and for women,” MS Add. 37049 recurs to images to dissolve the ambivalence of intellectual fears (and self-censoring, as in the case of M. N., who translated and arranged the *Mirror* for the Amherst MS) and intellectual freedom. While the scribe manipulates with two different media of communication, the underlying idea of his strategy may be compared to that of the Amherst MS. The commonplace devotional texts are completed by a visual design that transmits immediately an academic claim over the manuscript’s content. Thus, the miscellany achieves the subordination of writings, alien from the academic context, i.e. a selection of mystics without any regard to their authoritative stance, to the vigilance of academia.

But the encounter of words and images is more complex than that: the appearance of the academic iconography attests to a pretended self-limitation of intellectual freedom, i.e. the visual evocation of academic control and censorship over materials that are free from any suspicion, in order to justify the presence of such texts and their authors in academia. In other words, the scribe actually visualised what he wanted to keep away from the collection (i.e. the self-defined boundaries of academia, from which these texts were most certainly expelled) so that he could empower mystical and devotional writings with academic legitimation and see them incorporated in a newly conceived canon. An almost emblematic picture on f. 52v makes the manuscript’s overall concept palpable. In the lower right-hand quarter of the page, a bearded religious holding a book in his lap, wearing a brown beret, sits on an elevated chair (not visible because of the richly undulating gown of the man), framed by a Gothic architectural element.⁶⁶ The elevation is the rubricator’s note itself in a frame, which identifies the religious as “Richard hampole.” “Above six angels with an open book are singing ‘Sanctus Sanctus sanctus Dominus deus Omnipotens.’”⁶⁷ Rolle’s apotheosis is pictured with the attributes of academic authority: the image of his academic enthronement acknowledges his entry into the canon of authoritative authors, and perhaps also ushers in a new concept of a more spiritually oriented academic world.

Grande Chartreuse,” and on f. 22v represent a Carthusian monk, probably St. Bruno, before his cell. (Hogg, op. cit., pp. 25-6) Furthermore, the recurring images of monks, kneeling at the Cross or praying to Christ, are modelled upon the Carthusian monk on f. 22v, as, e.g., on ff. f. 24 (a monk to whom Christ presents his wounded heart), f. 29v (a monk praing for the intervention of the Virgin), f. 36v (a monk kneeling and praying to Christ crucified to the inscription of “Ihesu”), f. 37v (Benedictine and Carthusian monks to a ladder, stretching up to heaven, whose rungs are labelled “meekness,” “poverty,” and “charity”), f. 45 (a Carthusian in the Crucifixion scene with the Virgin and St. John), f. 62v (a Carthusian kneeling “beside a large heart labelled ‘Contemplacion’”), f. 67v (a Carthusian “in reverent contemplation at the foot of the tree”), and f. 91 (“a Carthusian regarding Christ on the Cross”); cf. Hogg, op. cit., 29, 38, 50, 52, 63, 97, 107, and 140.

⁶⁶ See the illustration in Hogg, op. cit., p. 77.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

CHAPTER 4

THE PLAY OF CHRIST AND THE DOCTORS IN THE *N-TOWN CYCLE*

The notions profoundly linked to late medieval stagecraft, especially to the performance of mystery plays, i.e. the “trinity” of public entertainment, instruction in catechism and communally expressed devotion, strangely contrast to the main concern of the N-Town episode of Christ and the Doctors. As pointed out earlier, the analysis of the N-Town manuscript and the composition of the cycle allow us to place the cycle compilation in the context of private devotion. The marginal glosses fill the narrative gaps with biblical and apocryphal material, which transforms the stage texts into a dramatized narrative. The overall arrangement of the cycle composition, with the important insertions of the Marian and the Passion cycles, closely follow the design of Nicholas Love’s Middle English paraphrase of the *Meditationes Vitae Christi*, and elicit a similar response from the reader as Love’s intended “devoute ymaginacioun” in his *Mirror*.¹ In spite of the evident stage effects the N-Town compilation preserved, the original pageants were incorporated in a context that could be read and interpreted without implying a concrete stage performance.

The shift from public entertainment to private reading, and from community ritual to private devotion, was necessarily completed by the withdrawal from an explicitly instructional mode of presentation to a more individually engendered interpretation of the plays. In this sense, the oscillation between the monologic and dialogic models of theatre William Fitzhenry observed in the plays is not the only source for staging cultural tensions.² The tension he analyses derives from the switches between the “didactic medium” of the stage and the “more dynamic and interactive form of drama”.³ Fitzhenry remains critical towards extending the notion of private devotion and Gail M. Gibson’s “incarnational aesthetic” onto the N-Town Plays.⁴ For him, N-Town’s experiment with challenging the traditional medium

¹ For the indebtedness of Love’s *Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ* to the N-Town Plays, see Block, *Ludus Coventriae*, Introduction, p. xxiii. Block, following the conclusions of early scholarship on the N-Town Plays, especially Hone and Halliwell, ascribes the late 13th-century *Meditationes Vitae Christi* to St. Bonaventure. There is, however, overall agreement on the authorship of the Middle English paraphrase and on acknowledging the *Mirror*’s influence on the N-Town Marian Plays. Cf.: Richard Beadle, “‘Devoute ymaginacioun’ and the Dramatic Sense in Love’s *Mirror* and the N-Town Plays,” in *Nicholas Love at Waseda: Proceedings of the International Conference, 20-22 July 1995*, eds. Shoichi Oguro, Richard Beadle and Michael G. Sargent (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1997), p. 1.

² Fitzhenry, “The N-Town Plays,” p. 22.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 22-3.

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 23-4. For the fully developed elaboration of the idea of “incarnational aesthetic” and its implementation to East Anglian drama, cf. chapters 1 and 6 (“Fifteenth-Century Culture and the Incarnational Aesthetic” and “Mary’s Dower: East Anglian Drama and the Cult of the Virgin”) of Gail McMurray Gibson,

of the “one-way transference of knowledge” and of one “authoritative message” by “an open-ended dialogue between stage and audience” happens exclusively on stage:

In this [dialogic] model, the boundaries between playwright, actor, and audience do not collapse to underwrite a single overarching idea, but rather remain in tension with one another, multiplying interpretive possibilities rather than reducing them. [...] This variety of vernacular drama insists upon the necessity of controlling the interpretation of the plays and respecting the didactic intent of the playwright; but it also creates a space for an intellectually active audience that is capable of constructing divergent and even heterodox interpretations of the plays.⁵

The implications of a devotional text and of “devout imagination” may cast some doubts over the unshakeable stability of the relationship between playwright, actor and audience. The tension which can be added to the underlying oscillation between the two modes is exactly the plays’ transfer from the theatre to the sphere of private contemplation. To continue Fitzhenry’s observation, whatever used to be monologic is now placed in a dialogic context. The understanding of the originally “one-way transmitted” instructional plays also becomes an open-ended dialogue with the play itself.

The schematic and, from a dramatic point of view, an overwhelmingly monologic pageant of Christ teaching in the synagogue in most English mystery cycles is uniquely reshaped by the N-Town compiler. The pageant’s treatment strikingly differs from all the other extant plays on the same biblical episode. Dramatizing the twelve-year old Christ’s teaching, not revealed by the Bible, was the crux of a continuous narrative of Christ’s earthly mission in all the mysteries. Luke’s account of the event (Lk 2:41-52) remains silent on the content of Christ’s revelation. The significance of this episode for the evangelist is that the infant Christ, for the first time in his earthly mission, announced explicitly the purpose of His Incarnation, which only encountered the puzzlement of His parents. Even if this only infancy episode, conserved by the canonized Gospels, contained the germs of dramatic transformation and stage adaptation, the conventional elaborations realized mostly the possibilities of catechetical instruction. Certainly it was not easy to conceive what secrets the twelve-year old Christ might have uncovered so that they were both revealing for, and comprehensible by, human understanding. Yet, the only possibility for the medieval playwright to interfere in this episode was to insert a dramatic conversation between Jesus and the doctors of the synagogue. On the other hand, it was not easy to dismiss this episode, either. The significance Luke

The Theatre of Devotion. East Anglian Drama and Society in the Late Middle Ages. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1989, pp. 1-18 and 137-78.

⁵ Fitzhenry, “The N-Town Plays,” p. 23.

attributed to this event was not let pass unnoticed by the medieval playwrights.⁶ In the cycle plays as well as in the Gospel narrative according to Luke, this episode could bridge the gap between the Nativity and the beginning of Christ's active mission. Moreover, this was also the biblical passage which first attested to Christ's redemptive mission with the testimony of His own words. As a conventional solution to this dilemma, most English mystery cycles "authorized" Christ to expound on the Ten Commandments, paraphrasing a version of a most popular instructional poem, the rhyming Decalogue.⁷

4.1. The Pageant of Christ Teaching in the Temple in the English Cycle Plays

It has been maintained that a common source underlies the English pageants of Christ and the Doctors in the York, the Towneley and the Chester Mystery Cycles, and the Coventry fragment of the Weavers' Play.⁸ Pageant 18 of the Towneley Plays is a borrowing of the York Cycle with only two passages unparalleled by the York play.⁹ The pioneering philological scholarship of the Coventry fragment also demonstrated close links with the York pageant.¹⁰ Similar in scope as these plays are, they all proceed along a similar path to amplify the Gospel account. The pageants strictly rely on the order and details of Luke's narrative. The recital of the Decalogue by the twelve-year old Jesus in the core of each pageant, though not "an astonishing intellectual feat" for a child of His age as asserted ironically by Rosemary

⁶ For the theological significance of this episode, see Robert J. Karris, "Evangélium Lukács szerint" [The Gospel According to Luke], translated by Csepreginé dr. Cserháti Márta, in Thorday Attila and Boros István, eds., *Jeromos Bibliakommentár II: Az Újszövetség könyveinek magyarázata*. Budapest: Szent Jeromos Katolikus Bibliatársulat, 2002, p. 174. [Translation of R. E. Brown, J. A. Fitzmeyer and R. E. Murphy, eds., *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1990.]

⁷ Martin Stevens and A. C. Cawley suggest that the idea of combining Christ's early ministry with the exposition of the Ten Commandments may be traced back to the Latin version of the apocryphal *Gospel of Thomas* 19:2. M. Stevens and A. C. Cawley, eds. *The Towneley Plays. Vol. 2: Notes and Glossary*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 533. The popular collection of religious didactic poems, the *Speculum Christiani*, which circulated widely in the 15th century also contained a version of the Ten Commandments. Brown knows about 33 MSS of the *Speculum*, the earliest being MS Bodley 89 (ca. 1400) closely related to MSS Bodl. Eng. Th. E. 16 and Cambridge, Jesus Coll. Q. G. 3. This latter one agrees with the Ten Commandment passage of the Towneley Plays. Cf.: Carleton Brown, "The Towneley Play of the Doctors and the *Speculum Christiani*," *Modern Language Notes* 31 (1916): 223-4.

⁸ Stevens-Cawley, *The Towneley Plays II*, p. 534. Cf. also Rosemary Woolf, *The English Mystery Plays*. (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972), p. 212; R. M. Lumiansky and David Mills, eds., *The Chester Mystery Cycle. II: Commentary and Glossary*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), pp. 165-6 and Richard Beadle, ed., *The York Plays*. (London: Edward Arnold, 1982), p. 438.

⁹ Stevens-Cawley, *The Towneley Plays II*, p. 534.

¹⁰ 16 identical stanzas in the two pageants led Davidson to the conclusion that the pageant was adopted by the Coventry weavers' guild from the evidently older York Cycle. Cf.: C. Davidson, "The Play of the Weavers of Coventry," *Modern Language Notes* 7 (1892): 92. French argued that the York-Coventry textual transmission could not only be demonstrated for the core of the Coventry Weavers' Play, but for the whole. Cf.: John C. French, "A Note on the Miracle Plays," *Modern Language Notes* 19 (1904): 31-2.

Woolf,¹¹ carries the very transparent message: the incomprehensible mysteries are not to be solved by the revelations of unknown things, but the knowledge is close at hand. Although the emanation of orthodox teaching is indispensably bound to the recognition of Christ's divinity, thus to an illumination by Christ's presence, Christ does not initiate the doctors into secrets, but recites elementary catechism. Moreover, this is the knowledge in which the highest and lowest, the most pretentious and the most humble, and the *magistri* and children in mind are united and weighed equally.

At the same time, the simple statement of the Decalogue was also an authoritative and institutional message to the same audience that had constantly been targeted by the flurry of instructional literature since the 4th Lateran Council in 1215.¹² As such, Christ's teaching was grounded on an entirely orthodox basis suggesting, again in the spirit of Lateran, that Christ had nothing else to teach but the knowledge God and His Son entrusted to people. In his analysis of the extant Middle English metrical poems on the Ten Commandments, A. C. Cawley pointed out a christianising tendency in the expositions of the Mosaic Law.¹³ The York and Chester pageants of Christ and the Doctors replace the first commandment of the Decalogue by the "great commandment" of Matthew 22:36-8.¹⁴ Towneley, elaborating more purposefully on the typological perspective, contrasts the "uncorrupted" Decalogue of Play 7 (*Processus Prophetarum*) with its parallel in Play 18 (Christ and the Doctors), where the first

¹¹ Woolf, *The English Mystery Plays*, p. 213: "The English dramatists evidently [...] preferred didacticism to plausibility, for in the Middle Ages it cannot have been a feat for a twelve-year-old boy to rehearse such a standard piece of Christian teaching. This insistence on didacticism is nevertheless understandable in York and Towneley [?], where the play of Moses had not included the Ten Commandments, but puzzling in Chester, where the Ten Commandments had already been set out before." Rosemary Woolf's very modest appreciation of this cycle pageant needs to be revisited from several aspects. She is wrong to claim that Towneley does not have an Old Testament pageant with the Ten Commandments recited. Secondly, as pointed out by A. C. Cawley, contrasting two versions of the Decalogue in the same cycle has a clear dramatic and didactic bias in the overall interpretation of the cycle. Cf. A. C. Cawley, "Middle English Metrical Versions of the Decalogue with Reference to the English Corpus Christi Cycle," *Leeds Studies in English* 8 (1975): 129-45.

¹² The most outstanding 13th-century advocate of the principles of the 4th Lateran Council was Archbishop Pecham, whose provincial constitutions and sermons attest to the instructional fervour due to Lateran's influence. Cf.: Decima Douie, "Archbishop Pecham's Sermons and Collations," in Richard W. Hunt, W. A. Pantin and R. W. Southern, eds., *Studies in Medieval History Presented to Frederick Maurice Powicke*. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1969), pp. 269-82. The overlaps between the two principal channels of indirect catechetical instruction, preaching and theatre, were analysed by Marianne G. Briscoe, "Preaching and Medieval English Drama," in M. G. Briscoe and John C. Coldewey, eds., *Contexts for Early English Drama*. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), 150-72. John Mirk's *Instruction for Parish Priests*, though intended for the use of the clergy, illustrates how the endeavours inspired by the Lateran Council crystallised in everyday pastoral care; cf.: *John Mirk's Instruction for Parish Priests. Edited from MS Cotton Claudius A ii and Six Other MSS with Introduction, Notes and Glossary*. Edited by Gillis Kristensson. (Lund: Carl Bloms Boktryckeri A-B, 1974) For the didactic background to vernacular texts of the Commandments, see Cawley, "Middle English Metrical Versions of the Decalogue," pp. 129-32.

¹³ Cawley, "Middle English Metrical Versions of the Decalogue," pp. 133-4.

¹⁴ York, Play 20, ll. 145-50 in *The York Plays*. Edited by Richard Beadle. London: Edward Arnold, 1982. Chester, Play 11, ll. 275-78 in *The Chester Mystery Cycle. I: Text*. EETS. Edited by R. M. Lumiansky and David Mills. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974. (All further references to the York and Chester Cycles will be to these editions; verse numbers will be given after citations in parentheses.)

two commandments are replaced by the two precepts of charity based on Matthew 22:36-40.¹⁵ With their unconcealed doctrinal bias, York, Wakefield, Chester and the Coventry fragment demonstrated that revelation and orthodoxy perfectly overlap. Accordingly, all these versions of the Gospel episode avoid staging the doctors' embarrassment, and temper the masters' self-conceited behaviour.

The "proto-pageant" of York¹⁶ keeps the original balanced tri-partite structure of the episode: 1. Joseph and Mary realize the loss of their son, and decide to return to Jerusalem (ll. 1-48); 2. the conversation of the *magistri* interrupted by Jesus' appearance (ll. 49-204) with the insertion of the Decalogue recited (ll. 145-68); 3. Joseph and Mary's quest achieved (ll. 205-88). This symbolic arrangement, reflecting on the episode's underlying concern with failure (loss) and understanding (the quest and its fulfilment), is not, however, paralleled with expected changes on the literal level. The first notion prevailing in the whole play is the masters' superiority. Their initial self-positioning as leaders sitting in a row, supposedly higher than the audience, and uncompromising towards anyone of a heterodox opinion is not only confirmed by Jesus in the central part of the pageant but also by Joseph, who, at the end, complains about his lack of adequately commanding a situation *vis-à-vis* the persons of authority.¹⁷

Secondly, declarations of Jesus' redemptive mission are unrelated to causes. Thus, these rare moments of recognition remain unprepared, and void of the transforming power of illumination. The first testimony to Jesus' mission is made by the second doctor after Christ had already exposed in several statements the "pleyne poure" (l. 103) He was invested with, yet before the real "test" of His vindications: "For certis I trowe þis barne [child] be sente / Full souerandly to salueoure sare" (ll. 135-6). In contrast to the second doctor's initial

¹⁵ The two versions of the Decalogue of the Towneley Plays can be found in Play 7, ll. 50-84 and Play 18, ll. 121-84 in *The Towneley Plays. I: Introduction and Text*. Edited by Martin Stevens and A. C. Cawley. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994. (All further references to the Towneley Plays will be to this edition; verse numbers will be given after citations in parentheses.)

¹⁶ "Proto-pageant" is not necessarily a chronological indicator, but a term coined to express and acknowledge the overall scholarly agreement on a probability of textual transmission established by W. W. Greg, "Christ and the Doctors' and the York Play," in *ibid.*, *The Trial and Flagellation with Other Studies in the Chester Cycle*. (Oxford: The Malone Society, 1935).

¹⁷ Cf. the authoritative self-description of *Magister 1* at the beginning of the central part of the play: "Maistirs, takes to me intente, / And rede youre resouns *right on rawe*, / And all þe pepull in þis present, / Euere-ilk man late see his sawe. / *But witte I wolde*, or we hens wente, / *Be clargy clere* if we couthe knawe / *Yf any lede þat liffe has lente* / *Wolde aught allegge agaynsteoure lawe*, / Owthir in more and lesse." (ll. 49-57, italics mine). Two further speeches indicate that the hierarchical code expressed both verbally and visually by the stage arrangements determines all onlookers' perspective: "Sirs, sen *ze are sette on rowes* / And has youre bokes on brede..." (Jesus in ll. 141-2; italics mine) and "*With men of myght can I not mell*, / Than all my trauayle mon I tyne; / I can nozt with þem, þis wate þou wele, / *They are so gay in fures fyne*." (Joseph in ll. 229-32; italics mine)

rejection of Jesus¹⁸ and his provocative invitation to test His statements¹⁹, his conversion from doubt to understanding seems rather anticipated, especially that Jesus' answers rather retort than answer or convince the masters. The second testimony to Christ's mission comes from Joseph, the only one in the play characterized by a pinch of irony. After Mary's perplexity at Christ's reticence over her grief, Joseph, least purposefully, points out the analogy between this episode and Redemption: "Now sothely sone, þe sight of þe / Hath salued vs of all oure sore." (ll. 265-6) This utterance expressing the relief and joy over the son regained does not have automatic relevance on a higher level of exegetical interpretation for Joseph.

The doctors' reactions to Jesus' words are also incongruent with the turning points of recognizing the Epiphany. Rejection, involvement out of curiosity and acknowledgement mingle in all stages of their conversation with the infant Jesus. Traces of the doctors' characterization by emphasising certain traits of excessive behaviour create a bridge between the profuse irony of the N-Town pageant and the minimalist, though effective, hints of the York play. The only point where the York author may have relied on the apocryphal tradition of this infancy episode is the tentative identification of some of the masters' manifestations with the short-sighted haughtiness of Christ's evil schoolmasters in the apocryphal Infancy Gospels. Jesus has to defeat not only the barriers of age and authority, but also the arrogance the doctors impose on themselves in their degree. Christ immediately encounters the first two masters' rejection, the first turning Him away, while the second degrading His speech to an unserious jest, a motif also echoed by the Towneley and the Chester plays.²⁰ At the same time, the third master offers Jesus the opposite gesture, and invites Him to sit down only to listen to their exposition on the Law. Later, the second master also patronises Jesus in this more reassuring tone, but Jesus' knowledge of the Decalogue is followed by the masters' retrogression into their initial confrontational behaviour.

¹⁸ "Sone, whoso þe hedir sente, / They were nozt wise, þat warne I þe, / For we haue othir tales to tente / Þan now with barnes bordand to be." (ll. 77-80)

¹⁹ "Cum sitte, sone schall we see, / For certis so semys it noght. / Itt wer wondir that any wight / Vntill oure reasouns right schulde reche. / And þou sais þou hast insight / Oure lawes truly to telle and teche?" (ll. 95-100)

²⁰ "Magister 2. For we haue othir tales to tente / Þan nowe with *barnes bordand* to be." And later "Magister 1. Nowe herken zone barne with his bowrdyng." (York, ll. 79-80 and 89). Cf. also the equivalents in Towneley, ll. 55-6 and 65 with almost exactly the same wording, and Chester, l. 239 (the same as York, l. 89). "Bourde" and "bourdyng" have a wide-ranging meaning according to the commentators of the texts. Beadle gives the ModE equivalents of "play", "jest", "speak lightly" and "play the fool" for the verb in line 80, and "jesting" or "facetious talk" for the derived noun in line 89 of the York Plays (Beadle, *The York Plays*, p. 482). Luminasky and Mills explain the same word with "boasting" in Chester, Play 11, l. 239 (Lumiansky-Mills, *The Chester Mystery Cycle II*, p. 424). This interpretation is congruent with other occurrences of the same lexeme in contemporary texts listed by the *Oxford English Dictionary*, which defines the meaning of the verb as 1. "to say things in jest or mockery; to jest, joke; to make fun, make game" and 2. "to play". (J. A. Simpson and E. S. C. Weiner, eds., *Oxford English Dictionary*. 2nd edition. Oxford: Clarendon, 1989, p. 446.)

Ultimately, the inconsequentialities of the play do not contradict at all the main structuring idea. The purpose of Christ and the doctors' verbal contest is not at all related to questioning, or alternatively offering, modes of the acquisition of knowledge, not even to ponder on the interrelation of knowledge and truth. The outcome of the conversation is not turned against its original *propos*. At the outset of the pageant, the doctors challenged anonymous opponents to counter charges of heterodoxy by immediately discouraging any such opinions when hinting at the eventual consequences of such a debate: "Yf we defaute myght feele, / Dewly we schall gar dresse / Be dome euery-ilk a dele." (ll. 58-60) The pageant ends with the (mutual) confirmation of authorities and with the acceptance of the idea that the hierarchical frame of the episode is entirely compatible with the transmission of the divine message.

Closest to York's treatment is the Towneley pageant, almost entirely borrowed from its sister cycle. The two major alterations in the Towneley episode affected the first section of the pageant (incomplete at its beginning) and the recital of the Decalogue. From Jesus' entry to the end, except for the differently worded and more elaborately composed version of the Ten Commandments, the pageant goes parallel with the York play.²¹ A more significant deviation from York's content and compositional principle is the masters' conversation at the beginning (of the extant Towneley episode), which places the encounter of Jesus and the doctors in a markedly different context. Here, the three *magistri* are absorbed in a desperate experiment to reconcile prophecies of the virgin birth with their own reason and comprehending faculties. In several aspects, this introduction shares some common features with the concerns of the N-Town pageant. The masters' dialogue is based on the dichotomy of the highest achievements of human reason, still limited, and wisdom in the full possession of knowledge and mysteries. In spite of the similarity of the doctors' condition, the critical tone in Towneley's approach is entirely missing. The masters appear in a conscientious endeavour to solve the inconceivable prophesies. They do not only recognize the limited nature of their knowledge, but also declare that their understanding of divine truths is of a more moderate scale than the "knowyng" of prophets (l. 47), and ultimately subdue themselves to expectations and the eventual illumination by the "goost of wysdom and of wyt" (l. 22). But it will not come, since most of the rest of the pageant repeats York. Thus, the partial rearrangement of the Towneley episode results in the amplification of York's inconsistencies.

²¹ For the Towneley version of the rhyming Decalogue, cf. Brown, "The Towneley Play of the Doctors and the *Speculum Christiani*," pp. 223-4.

The moments of recognition are misplaced, and the initial quest, announced by the doctors' dialogue, does not find its echo in the second and third parts.

The *Chester Mystery Cycle* includes the play of Christ and the Doctors in a series of three episodes united in one pageant, whose most important message is to attest to the divinity of the infant Christ.²² Thus the doctors' role at the end of the pageant is modelled on the example of Simeon and Anne. The doctors appear primarily because they also make a testimony to Jesus' consubstantial nature with God. As opposed to Simeon's and Anne's inner revelations, the doctors are led in two phases to the firm declaration of their understanding of the episode's significance. The first step is Jesus' answer to the first doctor's provocative boast of their "great cunninge" (l. 228):

*My Father that sitteth in majestie, / hee knowes your workes in thought and deede. /
My Father and I together bee / in on godhead withouten dread. / We be both on in
certayntie, / all these workes to rule and reade.* (ll. 233-8)

Most of Chester's borrowings from the central episode of the York pageant, i.e. the conversation between Jesus and the doctors, are concentrated between this revelation and the recital of the Decalogue (ll. 275-98), but in a most disrespectful way towards the original order of the utterances. Chester condenses the ambiguous reactions of the doctors into some stanzas before the Decalogue, also inserting post-Decalogue passages from the York pageant.²³ When the Chester version of the Ten Commandments is recited, the third doctor briefly concludes in one single stanza, unprecedented in York, about what he learnt from the preceding conversation: "Syr, this child of mycle pryce / which is yonge and tender of age, / I hould him sent from the high justice / to wynne agayne our heritage." (ll. 299-302)

The last extant pageant on the same episode, the Coventry Weavers' Play, the second of the surviving fragments of the mysteries performed in Coventry, also combines the scene of the Presentation with Christ teaching in the Temple. Unlike the Coventry Shearmen and Taylors' pageant, the Weavers' pageant's manuscript escaped the fire devastating the

²² Although Simeon and Anne are both the *dramatis personae* of the Purification scene, they emphatically divide the first half of the pageant into two equally important acts of testimonies.

²³ The following table illustrates the chaotic concordance between the York and Chester episodes. All the Chester passages listed appear prior to the recital of the Ten Commandments, while passages marked with an asterisk in the York pageant follow the exposition of its version of the Decalogue. The table only considers the central part of the episode ranging from Christ's ("Deus") first address to the doctors (ll. 231-8, which has no counterpart in York) to the beginning of the Ten Commandments (l. 275):

ChesterYorkChesterYorkll. 231-8No counterpart263No counterpart239-4289-92264202

(paraphrased)243121265-6133-4244No counterpart267-8No counterpart245-6123-4269-70135-6

(paraphrased)247-50No counterpart271No counterpart251-4101-4 (101 paraphrased)27265 (paraphrased)255-62*193-200273-4No counterpart

Birmingham Free Library in 1879.²⁴ Transcriptions of the original playscripts were made by Thomas Sharp, “whose antiquarian interests were especially focused on the religious plays that had been staged there [in Coventry] prior to 1579, the date of their suppression.”²⁵ In 1817 he published the first edition of the Shearmen and Taylors’ pageant, which he also included in his *Dissertation on the Pageants or Dramatic Mysteries Anciently Performed at Coventry* (1825).²⁶ While modern editions of the first surviving Coventry pageant have to rely on Sharp’s copy, editors of the Weavers’ pageant can take a critical stance in comparing the 16th-century manuscript of the full pageant (Croo’s manuscript) with Sharp’s edition of it.²⁷ Still, the early 20th-century editions of the Weavers’ pageant heavily relied on Sharp’s transcript. Hardin Craig, editor of the text for the Early English text Society in 1902 consulted the manuscript to some degree, “nevertheless he relied heavily on Sharp’s Abbotsford Club edition”²⁸; Holthausen’s edition in the same year in *Anglia* incorrectly maintained that the manuscript had entirely been devastated in 1879.²⁹ Craig’s text was reissued in the second EETS edition in 1957.³⁰ Finally, the first modern reliable critical edition of the manuscript text was published in 2000 by Pamela M. King and Clifford Davidson.

The Weavers’ pageant survives MS Acc. 11/2 of the Coventry Records Office (known as Croo’s MS).³¹ The colophon of the play reads as follows: “T<h>ys matter nevly translate be Robart Croo, in the yere of owre Lord God M^lv^cxxxiiij^{te}, then beyng meyre Mastur Palmar, beddar, and Rychard Smythe an<d> <> Pyxley, masturs of the Weywars. Thys boke yendide the seycound dey of Marche in yere above seyde.”³² The date of revision³³ clearly indicates an early Tudor attempt of saving the theatrical heritage of civic religion into the Protestant era even at the stake of reinterpreting orthodoxy and discarding the play’s Catholic elements. Thus it becomes a markedly political drama in which the doctors step out from their medieval allegorical abstractions and enter the stage as the representatives of the new law, but in this case, not to be understood in the typological sense, but rather literally as the new rules outlining a new political religion.

²⁴ *The Coventry Corpus Christi Plays*. Early Drama, Art, and Music Monograph Series 27. Edited by Pamela M. King and Clifford Davidson. (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2000), p. 2.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 55.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 2-3 and 55.

²⁷ Thomas Sharp, *The Presentation in the Temple, A Pageant, as originally represented by the Corporation of Weavers in Coventry. Now first printed from the Books of the Company*. (Edinburgh: Abbotsford Club, 1836)

²⁸ King-Davidson, op. cit., p. 57.

²⁹ F. Holthausen, “Das Spiel der Weber von Coventry,” *Anglia* 25 (1902): 209.

³⁰ King-Davidson, op. cit., p. 57.

³¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 23 and 286.

³² “The Weavers’ Pageant” in King-Davidson, op. cit., p. 148. (All references to this pageant will be to this edition; verse numbers will be given in parentheses after citations.)

³³ The date of Croo’s translation – possibly revision and alterations of the earlier play – is given in old style. The achievement of his work is thus to be placed on 2 March 1535.

In spite of the pageant's agreements with York's pattern, overall structure and many of its wordings, the three important deviations of the Coventry fragment transform the play into a staged investigation of a church commission, at the end of which Christ is laudably acknowledged the defender of faith. The changes emphasise, at the same time, the shift to a new, legal context of the biblical episode. The doctors' opening dialogue (ll. 850-77) prepares the verbal and interpretative ground for the context of a legal inquiry. This does not only amplify York's hidden gesture of threatening people of heterodox ideas, but also indicates the transformation of the pageant's traditional frames of interpretation. The Mosaic Law or the Ten Commandments are not taken in their typological significance, but as metaphors of contemporary controlling authorities. The danger the play warns against is not religious heterodoxy or pluralism, but clearly political non-conformism. Hence the surprising restructuring of the doctors' knowledge: their "clarge" [teaching] is guided by political science:

*Doctor I. Now, lordyngis, lystun to me a whyle,
 Wyche hathe the lawis vndur honde,
 And thatt no man fawll in soche perell
 Agenst any artyccull for to stand,
 For the comen statute of this lande
 Woll that all soche personys schulde be tane,
 And in the face of peple ooponly slayne.*

*Doctor II. E and the othur wholle decryis ageyne,
 Wyche vnto Moyses wonly wasse sent
 In tabulis of ston only to reymayne
 Vndur an hy and streyte cummandement
 Wyche at this tyme we thynke convenent
 There apon to holde dyssepyssions here,
 Be polatike syence of clarge clere. (ll. 850-63)*

The two verses replacing Jesus' seventh speech of the York pageant constitute the next proof for the systematic revision of the Coventry pageant. Here, Christ expresses His awareness of the underlying legal nature of the disputation with the doctors: "Suris, I woll prove be actoris evedent / Har [higher] mystereis þan eyuer you red or saw." (ll. 950-1) Even the mysteries have to proceed along the way of demonstration by authorities and evidence to reach undeniable proof. The pageant completes this process, and accordingly subordinates the

traditionally concluding episode of the parents' joy to the doctors' lengthy farewell to Jesus, in which the seriousness of the verdict is turned into its own irony by the verbal profusion, the parody of learned language and the ultimately avowed trifling bombast of the doctors' speech:

*Doctor I. Now, ye lordis thatt hathe the lawis to leyde,
Marke well the wordis thatt hathe byn seyde
Be yondur chylde of wysedome grett,
Wyche at this tyme amonge us here
Declarid owre lawis be clarge clere,
Wyche be his actis dothe apere
Thatt of God he ys eylecte.*

*Doctor II. Now surely yt can no nothur be,
For he ys nott levyng þat eyuer see
Soch hy knolegye of exselence
In soo tendur vthe.
For in owre moste hyist dysspecionis,
To them he gawe tru solyssonys,
And also made exposysionis,
Acordyng to the truthe. (ll. 1140-54)³⁴*

As the Coventry fragment points out, the Ten Commandments – and more generally the episode of the twelve-year-old Jesus disputing with the doctors of the Temple – could serve different truths. For the pageants based on York's version – Towneley (or Wakefield), Chester and Coventry – the truth on the literal level constituted the Christianised version of the Decalogue. But more than an invitation to the public rehearsal of this catechetical material, the plays reflected on the inseparable relationship of intellectual authorities and orthodoxy.

4.2. The N-Town Pageant of Christ and the Doctors

Unlike the other cycle plays, N-Town remains indifferent to the dissemination of the institutionally transmitted canon by means of entirely canonical material. The East Anglian

³⁴ After pointing out the conclusions of the case, the doctors set the matter quickly aside, but hesitate for the rest of the play (ll. 1162-86) whether to leave under the urge of nature and of falling night or to obsessively recapture the day's argument and the conditions of their following meeting. Finally, when they run out of words, they bid farewell to each other, and ceremoniously leave the stage: "Doctor III. Now, fryndis, tochyng owre festefall dey, / Ys there oght els þat I ma sey? // Doctor II. No more now bute evyn away, / For the nyght drawis fast apou. // Doctor. And of youre cumpa<n>y I wolde you part, / And hereof my leve at eyuere mon." (ll. 1181-6)

cycle incorporates apocryphal motifs in its treatment of the pageant. The broadening horizon of N-Town's perspective as well as its rearrangement of the pageant's conventional elements and structure rephrase, with utmost sensitivity, issues rehearsed by the other cycle plays. By uncovering the apocryphal layers of this episode, in the first step, and analysing the systematic linguistic reflection of two opposing paradigms of the acquisition of knowledge, in the second one, I will propose that this episode does not simply revisit concerns about the relationship of faith and reason (revelation and knowledge), but attempts to pursue its "experiment" by criticising and removing the limits institutionally imposed on the acquisition of knowledge. The pageant does not overtly add a new gloss to St. Paul's *Noli altum sapere*, still it contributes uniquely to the problems of boundaries and authorities of knowledge. Its anxieties with the self-conceited contemporary *academia* as well as its insistence on vitalising academic studies, instead of discarding their achievements, attest certainly to an exceptional attempt at formulating intellectual concerns in a dramatised form in the vernacular.

While the other pageants of Christ and Doctors emphasise the equality of the teaching authorities with *Christus magister*, N-Town demolishes the implied premise of all the other cycle plays and raises the question of whether institutional authority can have the same validity as divine revelation. Institutional authority and power, however, are not identified with the doctors of the Church, but with representatives of the late medieval academic system, encompassing all cycles of the scholarly career but theology. The doctors of the N-Town pageant appear primarily in the role of teachers; therefore, the purpose of their encounter with Jesus is not only to understand things beyond reason's capacity, but to specify the conditions for teaching, i.e. what it means to be a master besides Christ, *solus magister*; what knowledge may enable someone to vindicate the authority of teaching for themselves, and finally, whether the institutional framework is not rather an impediment to successful quests after a personally reassuring wisdom. These underlying questions of the N-Town pageant required a different treatment of Luke's Gospel episode. The N-Town author relied on apocryphal episodes where the unquestionable respect of the teacher had to yield to Christ. Inevitably, this approach intensified the barriers between old and young age, authority and defencelessness, and knowledge and supposed ignorance. At the same time, the focus of interpretation was shifted to the problems purporting to the meaningful and meaningless possessions of the teaching authority.

4.2.1. The N-Town Play and the Apocrypha

When, in the N-Town pageant of Christ and the Doctors, Jesus surprises the two doctors in their intimidating enumeration “of all cunnyng [they] bere þe maystrye”,³⁵ they abruptly change the tone of their self-exposure and cruelly ridicule Christ by appropriating an infantile manner of speech they attribute to Jesus:

i^{us} doctor. *Goo hom lytyl babe and sytt on þi moderys lappe
and put a mokador a-forn þi brest
and pray þi modyr to fede þe with þi pappe
of þe for to lerne we desyre not to lest.*

ij^{us} doctor. *Go to þi dyner þat be-hovyth the best
whan þou art a-threste þan take þe A sowke
Aftyr go to cradyl þer-in to take þi rest
Ffor þat canst þou do bettyr þan for to loke on book. (ll. 41-8)*

Jesus’ appearance provokes a sudden confusion of roles in the doctors. This passage echoes Luke 11:27 in a perverted context: the joyful expression of appreciation (of the woman in Luke’s Gospel account) turns into scornful despise.³⁶ But Christ’s response to the woman’s exclamation³⁷ can adequately be applied to the doctors’ role, since this missing conclusion is the implicit statement of the whole episode. Indeed, the intermezzo quoted above calls for its models not among the decent representatives of academia, but rather among the apocryphal schoolmaster characters who indignantly brief Jesus on unnecessary rudiments only to see themselves humiliated in their self-esteem.

The interest in versifying apocryphal episodes of Christ’s Infancy (most probably for instructional, or later devotional, purposes as attested by the content of the manuscripts containing such poems) arose in England in the 14th and 15th centuries. Robert Reinsch, in his catalogue of medieval poems about Christ’s Infancy, lists one 13th-century manuscript (MS Oxford, Bodleian Laud 108) containing a longer fragment of 1854 verses and shorter poems about single episodes of the Infancy.³⁸ The Middle English treatments of the Infancy episodes

³⁵ *Ludus Coventriae or The Plaie Called Corpus Christi. Cotton MS Vespasian D. VIII.* Edited by K. S. Block. EETS. (London: Oxford University Press, 1922; repr. 1960), Play 21, l. 28. (All references will be made to this edition; verse numbers will be given after citations in parentheses.)

³⁶ “And it came to pass, as he spoke these things, a certain woman from the crowd, lifting up her voice, said to him: Blessed is the womb that bore thee, and the paps that gave thee suck.” (Douay-Rheims Bible, Lk 11:27)

³⁷ “Yea rather, blessed are they who hear the word of God, and keep it.” (Douay-Rheims Bible, Lk 11:28)

³⁸ Robert Reinsch, *Die Pseudo-Evangeliën von Jesu und Maria’s Kindheit in der Romanischen und Germanischen Literatur mit Mitteilungen aus Pariser und Londoner Handschriften.* (Halle: Max Niemeyer, 1879), pp. 125-9. The Infancy poems of this compilation were edited by Carl Horstmann, *Altenglische Legenden.* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 1875), pp. 3-61 and 64-109. Although it may seem inconsiderate

follow two basic patterns. In the first group, poems elaborate on the apocryphal Infancy narrative according to the tradition set by the *Liber de Infantia* or the Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew.³⁹ In the second group, closer to N-Town's treatment are two shorter poems from MSS Oxford Bodleian Eng. poet. a. 1 (the Vernon MS) and London BL Harley 3954, which transform the episodes into debate poems and insert other non-biblical material to provide for the *secreta* taught by Christ.⁴⁰ Both groups of poems derive from the commonly shared tradition of the apocryphal Infancy narratives, but poems belonging to the second group more deliberately emphasise the topological significance of Christ's humiliations by, and ultimate victory over, his masters.

The common apocryphal ground of the Middle English Infancy poems is versified by the poems of MS Oxford, Bodleian Laud 108, mentioned above, and the 14th-century *Cursor mundi* written in the North of England.⁴¹ Both of them show familiarity with the Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew; they tell the same episodes related to Christ's early school experiences. The first scene is a compound episode: a master (Zechariah in the Laud MS, anonymous in *Cursor mundi*, and Zachias in the Latin *Pseudo-Matthei Evangelium*) demands Joseph to send Jesus to his school, where Jesus lengthily expounds on His own mysterious origin and knowledge to the greatest astonishment of the master and people standing around (as if listening to a sermon). Afterwards, the master proposes to put Jesus in Levi's care. Here, the child remains silent, which annoys the teacher so that he beats Jesus. This insult launches Christ's furious

to base conclusions on Reinsch's late 19th-century findings and evidence, his study established such an encompassing catalogue of manuscripts containing Middle English Infancy poems that modern scholarship has added only one further item to which the N-Town episode could be related. (Cf. Stephen Spector, ed., *The N-Town Play (Cotton MS Vespasian D. 8)* Vol. 2: Commentary, Appendices and Glossary. EETS. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991, p. 480.) Strangely enough, this is a minor poem from the Vernon MS (MS Oxford Bodleian Eng. Poet. a. 1, f. 300) also published by C. Horstmann in Appendix 1 to his *Altenglische Legenden*, pp. 212-4, an edition that Reinsch also consulted.

³⁹ The Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew enjoyed the largest popularity in the Christian West. Latin translations of its two principal Greek sources, the *Protoevangelion* of James and "The Stories of Thomas" (not to be confused with another Gospel of Thomas found among the Nag-Hammadi texts), survived from the 5th century. The final version, uniting the two sources and completing them with a fictitious preface, was composed probably in the 8th-9th centuries. From the 10th century, the Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew became widely known. Cf.: Adamik Tamás et al., eds., *Csodás evangéliumok [Miraculous Gospels]*. (Budapest: Telosz, 1996), p. 150; Montague Rhodes James, ed. and trans., *The Apocryphal New Testament Being the Apocryphal Gospels, Acts, Epistles, and Apocalypses with Other Narratives and Fragments Newly Translated*. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1924, repr. in 1926), pp. 70-9 and Constantius de Tischendorf, ed. *Evangelia apocrypha*. 2nd edition. (Lipsiae: Hermann Mendelssohn, 1876), pp. 51-112.

⁴⁰ Only lines 195-328 of the Harley poem account the episode of Christ in Cayphas' school. Almost all of this passage (ll. 204-328) is a literal borrowing of two sections of the Vernon poem. Lines 204-52 of the Harley poem equal ll. 44-92 in Vernon, while the rest of the Harley poem repeats Vernon, ll. 109-82. The Vernon poem of the "Disputison bi-twene child Jhu and Maistres of þ^e lawe of Jewus" was edited by Horstmann, *Altenglische Legenden*, pp. 212-4; the poem in MS BL Harley 3954 by Carl Horstmann, *Sammlung altenglischer Legenden*. (Heilbronn: Gebr. Henninger, 1878), pp. 104-5.

⁴¹ *Cursor mundi. A Northumbrian Poem of the 14th Century. Edited from British Museum MS Cotton Vespasian A. iii, Bodleian MS Fairfax 14, Göttingen University Library MS Theol. 107, and Trinity College Cambridge MS R. 3. 8*. Edited by Richard Morris. EETS. (London: Oxford University Press, 1875, repr. 1966)

outry against the hypocritical masters who talk about the significance of “tau” without knowing the meaning of “alpha”.⁴² In the second school episode, Jesus kills the teacher who beat Him.⁴³ This passage immediately precedes the one with the opposite outcome: Jesus’ divinity is acknowledged by another teacher.⁴⁴ Finally, both poems concatenate these early school experiences with the twelve-year-old Jesus disputing with the doctors of the Temple in Jerusalem. Unlike Christ’s earlier revelations to His masters, the last episode of Christ’s encounters with institutional learning, in both poems, remains silent on Christ’s teachings.⁴⁵

The overall structure of the four school episodes of the Infancy following Pseudo-Matthew, even if presented in a very schematic way, outlines three situational *topoi* that crystallise in the earliest known apocryphal Infancy narrative, *The Stories of Thomas* or *The Gospel of Thomas* written originally in Greek probably at the end of the 2nd century⁴⁶ The three *topoi* represent three aspects of human behaviour in a situation that requires a drastic revision of one’s conceptions of what constitutes right and wrong or true and false: 1. rejection, 2. recognition of the new which is interpreted as a destructive force, and 3. recognition of the new, followed by the accommodation of mental concepts to it.

Rejection is exemplified by the second school episode of *The Gospel of Thomas* in chapter 12 (according to Tischendorf’s division): the schoolmaster in his rage smites Jesus, but he is cursed and dies:

*Dixit autem ille doctor ad Ioseph: Quales litteras desideras illum puerum docere?
Respondit Ioseph et dixit: Primum doce ei litteras gentilicias et postea hebraeas.
Sciebat autem doctor illum esse optimaee intelligentiae, et libenter suscipiebat eum.
[...] Dixit Jesus ad magistrum: Si vere magister es et vere scis litteras, dic mihi
fortitudinem de a, ego autem dicam tibi fortitudinem de b. Tunc furore repletus
magister eius percussit eum in capite. Iesus autem iratus maledixit eum, et subito
cecidit et mortuus est.*⁴⁷

⁴² *Cursor mundi*, Part II, ll. 12.079-268 and Reinsch, *Die Pseudo-Evangelien*, pp. 126-7.

⁴³ *Cursor mundi*, Part II, ll. 12.415-48 and Reinsch, *Die Pseudo-Evangelien*, p. 128. (I also consulted this passage in MS Oxford Bodl. Laud 108, ff. 19v^b-20r^a.) The reason for this lethal debate is again the ignorance of the master who sticks to the literal interpretation of letters (and words) as opposed to a symbolical interpretation announced by Jesus: “He [the master] badd him alpha for to sai, / Iesus ansuard and said, “parfai, / Bot sai þou me first o betha, / And siþen i sal þe sai alpha.” (*Cursor mundi*, Part II, ll. 12.423-6); “3if you wolt with-oute delay / I schal aleph vndo zif i may / ake formest icholde zif it so mai beo / alre erest iwitene of ye / zwat is beth zif yat yon wite / and zwat is in is strenceye iwrite?” (MS Oxford Bodl. Laud 108, f. 19v^b).

⁴⁴ *Cursor mundi*, Part II, ll. 12.449-86 and MS Oxford Bodl. Laud 108, f. 20r^a

⁴⁵ *Cursor mundi*, Part III, ll. 12.577-658 and MS Oxford Bodl. Laud 108, f. 21r^b

⁴⁶ The original Greek version A and the shorter Greek version B as well as the Latin version were edited by Tischendorf, *Evangelia apocrypha*, pp. 140-80; an English partial translation and summary of all three versions by M. R. James, *The Apocryphal New Testament*, pp. 49-65 and the Hungarian translation of the Greek version A by Adamik et al., *Csodás evangéliumok*, pp. 19-24.

⁴⁷ Tischendorf, *Evangelia apocrypha*, pp. 176-7.

Patterns of recognition represent two aspects of acceptance. In the first school episode (chapter 6), master Zacheus reluctantly confesses Jesus' transcendental origin. Nevertheless, his resignation on his own authority only causes the suspension of his beliefs. He sees himself defeated, and feels publicly shamed. His effortless lamentation clearly summarises Christian dogmatic knowledge he is unable to comprehend, because he is too much obsessed with the loss of his status in the community, and secondly because, for him, the conclusions carry only the intuition of truth, but not demonstrable proofs. He is willing to yield to what he heard from Christ, yet unable to embrace it with absolute conviction, which deprives him of his existential security:

Cum vidisset Zacheus quia taliter divideret [Jesus] primam litteram, stupefactus est de prima littera et de tali homine et doctrina, et exclamavit et dixit: Heu mihi, quod stupefactus sum ego: conduximi mihi turpitudinem per istum infantem. Et dixit ad Ioseph: Precor te valde, frater, tolle eum a me: quia non possum intueri in faciem eius neque audire graves sermones eius. Quia iste infans ignem domitare et mare refrenare potest; nam iste ante secula natus est [Col 1:15]. Quae vulva eum peperit aut qualis mater eum nutrit, ignoro [Lk 11:27]. O amici mei, dimissus sum in mentem meam, illusus sum ego miser. Ego autem dicebam me habere discipulum, ipse autem inventus est magister. Et turpitudinem meam non possum invenire. Unde habeo irruere in validam infirmitatem et de isto seculo transmigrare, aut de ista civitate egredere, quia omnes viderunt turpitudinem meam: infans decepit me. Quid habeo ad alios respondere aut quales sermones recitare, eo quid vicit me in prima littera? Stupesco ego, o amici mei et noti mei: neque primordium neque finem possum invenire quid ei respondeam. (Cap. 6)⁴⁸

Zacheus wants to find the responses to the rhetorical questions and exclamations which the Bible uses to confirm Jesus' divinity. The schoolmaster's recognition remains incomplete: he is not able to see in his experience but a rivalry with a child.

The third school episode of *The Gospel of Thomas* (chapter 13) illustrates the unconditional acceptance of Jesus' wisdom and of a new authority, which uses the school books only to reinterpret them:

Et cum venisset ad domum doctoris, invenit librum in eodem loco iacentem, et apprehendit eum et aperuit, et non legebat ea quae scripta erant in libro, sed aperiebat os suum et loquebatur de spiritu sancto et docebat legem. Omnes vero qui

⁴⁸ Ibid., pp. 169-73.

*ibidem stabant diligenter eum audiebant, et magister ille iuxta illum sedebat et libenter eum audiebat, et deprecabatur eum ut amplius doceret.*⁴⁹

The last attempt to teach Jesus elementary knowledge again turns into an exchange of roles and the removal of institutional barriers.

Chronologically the second apocryphal Infancy Gospel written in Arabic probably at the turn of the 3rd and 4th centuries contains only two school episodes prior to the dispute in the Temple.⁵⁰ The scene of Zacheus's school (chapter 48) condenses motifs of rejection and unconditional acceptance. The aggressive punishment of the schoolmaster is prevented by Jesus' exposition on the forms and interpretation of the letters and by the recital of the alphabet. Zacheus acknowledges that his pupil was born before Noah, and returns Him to Joseph.⁵¹ The ensuing episode rephrases the episode of the schoolmaster cursed by Jesus with slight alterations in details.⁵² The Arabic Gospel reduces the possible behavioural patterns responding to Jesus' intellectual challenges to two: unconditional acceptance and rejection. A more significant deviation from *The Gospel of Thomas* is, however, the treatment of the twelve-year-old Jesus' dispute with the masters of the Temple. While Thomas's account almost literally follows Luke 2: 41-52, interpolating a verse (Lk 1:42) before the conclusion, the Arabic Gospel fuses two biblical passages (Mt 22:41-6 and Lk 2:41-52) into one event, and extends the range of debate topics to all fields of science in frame of a discussion with two representatives of human wisdom, an astronomer and a philosopher:

Caput 51. Cumque adesset ibidem philosophus, astronomiae peritus, rogassetque dominum Iesum num astronomiae studuisset, respondit ei dominus Iesus exposuitque numerum sphaerarum et corporum caelestium, eorumque naturas et operationes, oppositionem, aspectum triquetrum, quadratum et sextilem, cursum directum eorundem et retrogradationem, scripula scripulorumque sexagesimas, aliaque quae ratio non assequitur.

Caput 52. Aderat quoque inter illos philosophos tractandarum rerum naturalium peritissimus: qui cum rogasset dominum Iesum an medicinae studuisset, respondens ille exposuit ei physica et metaphysica, hyperphysica et hypophysica, virtutes quoque corporis et humores eorundemque effectus; numerum item membrorum et ossium,

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 177.

⁵⁰ Tischendorf, *Evangelia apocrypha*, pp. 181-209 and Adamik et al., *Csodás evangéliumok*, pp. 25-46. M. R. James publishes an English summary of the Arabic Infancy Gospel in *The Apocryphal New Testament*, pp. 80-2.

⁵¹ Tischendorf, *Evangelia apocrypha*, p. 206; Adamik et al., *Csodás evangéliumok*, pp. 43-4 and M. R. James, *The Apocryphal New Testament*, p. 82.

⁵² Here, the hand of the teacher with which he smote Christ's head withers. Cf. Tischendorf, *Evangelia apocrypha*, p. 2067 Adamik et al., *Csodás evangéliumok*, pp. 44 and M. R. James, *The Apocryphal New Testament*, p. 82.

*venarum, arteriarum et nervorum; item effectum caloris et siccitatis, frigoris et humiditatis, quaeque ex hisce orientur; quaenam esset operatio animae in corpus eiusque sensus et virtutes; quaenam esset operatio facultatis loquendi, irascendi, appetendi; denique coniunctionem et disiunctionem, aliaque quae nullius creaturae intellectus assequitur. Tunc surrexit philosophus ille et dominum Iesum adoravit, et, O domine, inquit, ab hoc tempore ero discipulus tuus et servus.*⁵³

Among all the apocryphal Infancy Gospels known, the Arabic narrative is the only one to explicitly link the episode based on Luke 2:41-52 with the context of the *academia*. In the Arabic Gospel as well as in the equivalent N-Town episode, Jesus' dispute is reinterpreted as an encounter with a framework symbolising the totality of human knowledge available by and through the scholarly institutions.

The context of the N-Town pageant of Christ and the Doctors can be marked out in the tradition of the apocryphal narratives of Christ's Infancy. Various motifs and elements of the apocrypha and of the Middle English Infancy poems infiltrate the conception of the play. N-Town exploits the possibilities of dramatic tension not merely from the divine revelation and the doctors' puzzled responses to it, but from the loss and redefinition of teaching and teaching authority after they are fundamentally shaken. N-Town carefully selects motifs and images of authoritative self-conceit, abuse of power, and confusion from different versions of the apocrypha. But the mystery episode ultimately dissolves the tensions arising out of its academic criticism in the cooperation between Jesus and the doctors. Although conceived in a similar vein to the 2nd-century Arabic Infancy Gospel, the late medieval elaboration of the disputation scene presents a more hostile academic environment Jesus has to face.

4.2.2. Criticism of the "Academia": Contrasting Paradigms of the Acquisition of Knowledge

The N-Town pageant of Christ and the Doctors starts with a static and most hieratic image of two doctors who "sytt on hye" (l. 29) in the synagogue. The introductory scene shows the earthly authorities of knowledge expropriating, both verbally and iconographically, the attributes of the divine. Their claim of being the wisest clerks (l. 4) and their physical position on the highest seats of the Temple turn out to be relative when measured to Christ. Later in the pageant, the doctors' gesture to offer Christ a seat higher than theirs expresses, on the visual level of the play, the recognition of the divine revelation as superior to all the

⁵³ Tischendorf, *Evangelia apocrypha*, pp. 207-8.

knowledge man can attain.⁵⁴ The central gesture carefully detaches “high and low,” or more appropriately “high and higher;” at the same time, the verdict claiming the superiority (and priority) of divine revelation does not disqualify the doctors’ way of attaining knowledge. From the crisis of the purposeless accumulation of sciences, the masters are led out by divine illumination.

The doctors’ paradigm of knowledge resists all attempts at a definition: the content of their knowledge is an impressive list of numerous fields of sciences that represent the educational stages in the late Middle Ages, from elementary education to university.⁵⁵ The alternating monologues of the two doctors are exhaustive enough to astonish people of modest education, or no education at all, but too accidental and selective to convince the more erudite of their attachment to the academic world. The intimidating list contains some disturbing features. The frame the playwright chose to encompass the totality of institutional knowledge, which he does not fail to emphasize in line 28 (“of all cunnynge we [the doctors] bere þe maystrye”), falls short of a complete vision of the contemporary academia. Moreover, he struggles to find an adequate structuring principle to cover the wide range of intellectual activities pursued in elementary schools, higher *studia* and the university faculties. The order of the items is only superficially hierarchical; some sciences recur several times as, e.g., the “lower” arts that tend to be doubled or substituted by some of the most popular works representing the respective field of studies. Since the list is predominantly “arts-oriented,” most problems of interpretation are related to this group of sciences. Ambiguous readings, however, do not only derive from textual difficulties (obscure meanings, expressions with a wide range of connotations as well as ambiguous syntax), but also from the apparent confusion the playwright displays in combining different theoretical and literary conventions of the classification of sciences. On the one hand, the author insists on categorizing the world of human knowledge in frames of the seven liberal arts (completed only by law, politics and metaphysics); on the other one, he struggles with the difficulty of accommodating this more limited scope to the broader perspective of philosophy in the sense early and high medieval authorities labelled all knowledge.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ Cf. the stage direction following l. 144: “Hic adducunt ihesum inter ipsos et in scanno altiori ipsum sedere faciunt ipsis inferioribus scannis sedentibus.”

⁵⁵ The elements of the list are the following: redynge, wrytynge, ortografye, gramer, cadens, prosodye, versyfyng, musyke, dyaletyk, sophestrye (logyk and phylosophye), metaphesyk, astronomye, calculacion, negremauncye, Augrym, asmatryk, jematrye (lynycion), phesyk (dyetis and domys), caton, gryscysme, doctrinal, retoryke, canon and cevyle lawe, scyens of polycye (ll. 5-29).

⁵⁶ While on the elementary level the teaching of rudiments practically coincided with the *trivium*, on the higher levels the categories of the liberal arts could not be maintained any longer because of the need of a broader spectrum of scientific categories.

The playwright of this N-Town pageant is absorbed in a similar intellectual problem that challenged the authorities of the late Antiquity, and the early and high Middle Ages in their attempt to create an all-encompassing classification of sciences, including not only the seven liberal arts, but also theology and the sciences which were based on the scant knowledge of Aristotle before the 13th century. He, however, does not follow any of the classifications the high Middle Ages acknowledged as authoritative, i.e. Cassiodorus's bipartite division of philosophy into theoretical/speculative and practical/active and Isidore of Seville's tripartite system, which he calls the Stoic tradition, branching into physics, ethics and logic.⁵⁷ Yet, the pageant's intellectual endeavour cannot be compared with the ambition of the influential theoretical works that laid down the medieval foundations of scientific thinking.

Although the doctors' monologues are implicitly founded on the notion that the seven liberal arts sufficiently structure the *theoretica*, their enumeration of the sciences proves that the ancient legacy of the *artes liberales* "was not operative any more."⁵⁸ The legacy of the liberal arts turns out to be insufficient to provide for a skeleton of the whole range of human knowledge. While the doctors' enumeration of sciences seems to broaden the limits of the seven liberal arts as wide as possible, the list of "all cunnyng" still fails to be all-encompassing. No mention is made of the *artes mechanicae*, which "in the course of the Middle Ages [...] gradually lost their negative connotation [and] by the end of the thirteenth century [...] were viewed not as the highest form of learning, but nevertheless an essential kind of knowledge, which shared the ultimate aims of natural philosophy or theology."⁵⁹ The way the second foundation of medieval learning, Aristotle's non-logical works (and the respective sciences), are incorporated in the list also resists systematic classification. Items

For the late medieval arts curricula of English universities, cf.: James A. Weisheipl, OP, "Developments in the Arts Curriculum at Oxford in the Early Fourteenth Century," *Mediaeval Studies* 28 (1966): 151-75, and J. M. Fletcher, "Developments in the Faculty of Arts 1370-1520," in J. J. Catto and Ralph Evans, eds., *The History of the University of Oxford. Vol. 2: Late Medieval Oxford*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), pp. 315-45.

⁵⁷ For the medieval development of the classification of sciences, cf. James A. Weisheipl, OP, "Classification of the Sciences in Medieval Thought," *Mediaeval Studies* 27 (1965): 54-90.

⁵⁸ The doctors' opening speech of the N-Town pageant is an excellent literary summary of the process at the end of which the late medieval world of learning accommodated the notion of the seven liberal arts to a broader spectrum of sciences. As Jacques Verger pointed out, this also meant the dissolution of the ancient legacy: "La formation initiale des gens de savoir ne se limitait pas; au Moyen Age, à l'apprentissage du latin, elle était normalement complétée, pour quiconque dépassait le niveau le plus élémentaire, par l'initiation à la "philosophie": L'usage s'est maintenu jusqu'au XV^e siècle, pour désigner le contenu des enseignements de base, à la manière antique; des sept "arts libéraux"; répartis entre *trivium* (grammaire, rhétorique, dialectique) et *quadrivium* (arithmétique, musique, géométrie, astronomie). En fait, cette classification traditionnelle a cessé dès le XIII^e siècle d'être vraiment opératoire." (Jacques Verger, *Les gens de savoir en Europe à la fin du moyen âge*. Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1997, pp. 17-8)

⁵⁹ Mariken Teeuwen, *The Vocabulary of Intellectual Life in the Middle Ages*. Etudes sur le vocabulaire intellectuel du moyen âge X. (Turnhout: Brepols, 2003), p. 369.

related to the “Aristotelian canon” appear under various (mostly unequal) categories. What is more surprising is the lack of two of the traditional “Aristotelian threesome” - *ethica*, *oeconomica* and *politica*⁶⁰ - only the third being mentioned in the pageant. Finally, while the enumeration of sciences pretends to include all possible intellectual careers, the inflated doctors show an awareness only of the curricula of elementary schools and the university faculties of Arts and Law.⁶¹

But instead of the tempting literal reading of the pageant’s enumeration of sciences and the doctors’ function as a reflection on any late medieval English school curriculum or on any scholarly career, I will propose the opposite premise: in spite of the author’s intrusion into the academic world, he remains an outsider critic in the self-portrayal of the institution.

Satisfied with the methods of a contemporary literary convention of allegorising sciences (as will be demonstrated on the example of John Lydgate in the following chapter), the playwright pursues a different experiment than the theoretical classifications of sciences. N-Town’s enumeration is rather rhetorical, which simultaneously achieves two purposes: it alludes to the totality of knowledge by relying on the unambiguous message of a literary pattern; at the same time, it covertly criticizes some evident lacks in the institutional system and the pride of its representatives by subverting the seriousness of the same literary convention with irony and ambiguity. Staging an overall mentality to the acquisition of knowledge, the author focuses on the problem of the utility of knowledge. His criticism is built up so that it may point out the limitations of the world of academic learning, but the details reveal more about the playwright’s vision of the academic way of acquiring knowledge than about contemporary academic concerns.

The list of sciences of the N-Town pageant has proportionally the most items related to the three arts of the *trivium*. “Grammar,” in the late Middle Ages, hid a variety of notions; accordingly, it appears in the pageant disguised under various names. This science implied (1) the ability to read and understand Latin, (2) the *ars grammatica*, “which set out the rules of proper writing and speaking and which was taught at a basic level, often in grammar schools,”⁶² and (3) *grammatica speculativa*, the philosophical approach to language whose “attention focused on what was beneath the surface of language, the construction of the abstract grammar scheme (in theory universal, independent of the actual language in question)

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 382.

⁶¹ Though the two specificities mentioned in connection with physics, “dyetis” (diets prescribed to cure maladies) and “domys” (symptoms that provide a basis for the judgment of a disease), seem to restrict the field of this science to medicine, one of the missing higher university faculties in the list, it is more probable to interpret physics as a synonym of natural sciences in antithesis to metaphysics.

⁶² Teeuwen, *The Vocabulary of Intellectual Life*, p. 387.

as opposed to the concrete forms of the words themselves.”⁶³ Various elements of the list refer to one of these categories. “Redynge,” “wrytynge,” and “ortografye,” heading the list, belong to the very restricted interpretation of “grammar” corresponding to our second category. Grammar as a subject of the *trivia* is also evoked by the references to the most popular elementary grammar schoolbooks, which emerge only towards the end of the list. Two of these, Alexander of Ville-Dieu’s *Doctrinale* and Évrard of Béthune’s *Grecismus* replaced the works of the late-Latin grammarians Priscian and Donat in the 13th century. The *Distichs* ascribed to Cato (*Disticha de moribus Catonis*) contained short maxims and proverbs, which together with compilations of some other classical authors like Aesop or Theodule constituted the first readings of medieval pupils.⁶⁴ Speculative grammar does not figure explicitly in the list, but “sophestrye” (l. 14) may be an allusion to it. This term is perhaps the most elusive in the pageant, since it occurs in a syntactically ambiguous context,⁶⁵ and secondly because its meaning became too general by the end of the Middle Ages. In its original sense, *sophismata* or *sophistaria* did not denote a field of science, but methods of discussing abstract questions of grammar and logic in the Arts Faculties.⁶⁶

Mention of the second art of the *trivium*, rhetoric, is postponed to the end of the list. Some of its “newer” branches that developed in the 11th and 12th centuries as “applied” arts of rhetoric, e.g. “cadens” (for the skill of using rhythm or rhetorical periods), “prosodye” (for *ars prosandi*) and “versyfyeng” (for *ars versificandi*),⁶⁷ precede their mother art on the right place immediately after grammar.

⁶³ Ibid. In the late Middle Ages, “grammar” appeared occasionally, due to the influence of the connotations of the OF “gramaire”, in the meaning of “learning in general,” which in popular usage became synonymous with the knowledge of magical arts and occult sciences. The *Oxford English Dictionary* (VI, 741) explains the Middle English form of the French borrowing, “gramarye” first as “grammar; learning in general”, secondly as “occult learning, magic, necromancy.” Although this latter meaning is not evidenced by the immediate context of the word “gramer” in the N-Town episode, it should be noted that, some lines later, the playwright uses more explicit puns to associate the doctors with occultism. (Cf.: “calculacion and negremauncye” in l. 17)

⁶⁴ “Several of the standard Latin textbooks used by English masters and their pupils down to the early sixteenth century were the products of twelfth- and early thirteenth-century authors working on the continent. Alexander of Ville-Dieu’s comprehensive grammar, the *Doctrinale*, Evrard of Béthune’s combination of grammar and dictionary, the *Grecismus*, and the simpler works on homonyms and synonyms ascribed to John of Garland, were all enabled to take root in England because of its close links with mainland Europe.” (Nicholas Orme, *Education and Society in Medieval and Renaissance England*. London: The Hambleton Press, 1989, p. 8) Jacques Verger rephrases the idea with a more general conclusion for all the occidental elementary schools: “[Le] matériel pédagogique assez hétérogène, qui datait soit du haut Moyen Age, soit du XII^e siècle, n’a guère évolué du XIII^e au XV^e siècle et on le retrouvait, avec une étonnante uniformité, dans toutes les écoles d’Occident, depuis l’Angleterre jusqu’en Italie.” (Jaques Verger, *Les gens de savoir*, p. 57)

⁶⁵ Cf. note

⁶⁶ “A *sophisma* was a statement with twofold implications, a puzzling sentence which provoked a discussion on some abstract issue, usually in the field of grammar or logic. Discussions of *sophismata* were intended to illustrate or verify certain grammatical or logical principles. Further, the term *sophisma* could be used either for the statement itself, or for the whole of the discussion which developed from the initial statement. Collections of *sophismata* were also called *sophistarie*.” (Teeuwen, *The Vocabulary of Intellectual Life*, p. 340.)

⁶⁷ Cf.: Teeuwen, *The Vocabulary of Intellectual Life*, pp. 404-5.

The third of the *trivia*, logic or dialectic, figures confusingly with both synonyms in the list. Moreover, because of the syntactic ambiguity of the clause mentioning the sciences related to logic, it can be decided only arbitrarily whether the text considers “dyaletyk,” “sophestrye,” “logyk” and “phylosophye” as four distinct and equal categories, or only distinguishes between the categories of dialectic and sophistry (logic and philosophy being subordinated to the latter one as its constitutive elements).⁶⁸ Complications of interpretation arise not only out of the accumulation of synonymous or metonymically interchangeable expressions in this clause (like logic-dialectic as a synonymous pair or sophistry as a metonymical reference to logic/dialectic), but also out of the problematic definition of philosophy. Philosophy, on the one hand, continued to denote a certain discipline whose materials were expounded in different academic subjects, and thus “hid [...] under a variety of terms: *logica, dialectica, physica, metaphysica, ethica*, etc.”⁶⁹ On the other hand, philosophy remained a label for a larger group of disciplines whose subdivisions were again determined by different traditions.⁷⁰

Elements of the *quadrivium* are also scattered in the list with significant reinterpretations of the roles originally assigned to them. Music, which in the ancient tradition crowned all other liberal arts, is deprived of its eminent stance as a theoretical science and referred to the company of versifying and dialectic in the N-Town pageant. This context evidently marks the turn of the art of music into a solidly practical art focusing on the performance of liturgical songs. Arithmetic is present in the almost unrecognisable word “asmatryk,” a distortion of the Latin derivative of the Greek “arithmétiké,” which popular etymology interpreted as “ars metrica.” In the same line, “Augrym,” a distorted form for “algorithm,” soon became synonymous with “arithmetic” after the works of the Arabic mathematician Muhammed ibn Musa al-Khwarismi had been translated into Latin in the 12th century. Though calculation (“calculacion”) in the previous line (l. 17) could be regarded as the extension of “asmatryk” (thus the first item representing the mathematical sciences), its association with necromancy (“negremauncye”) undermines this interpretation. Moreover, the

⁶⁸ For the ambiguous syntax, cf. ll. 13-6: “Of dyaletyk we haue þe hyz excellence / of sophestrye logyk and phylosophye / Ageyn oure argemente is no recystence / In metaphesyk ne astronomye.” This passage can be divided into two clauses of two verses each. The predicate of the first clause (“we haue þe hyz excellence”) governs both “dialectic” and “sophistry”, “logic” and “philosophy”. It is, though, not at all evident how these latter sciences are related. Are “logic” and “philosophy” appositive to “sophistry”, denoting only one science, or are all the three coordinated as equal fields of sciences?

⁶⁹ Teeuwen, *The Vocabulary of Intellectual Life*, p. 396.

⁷⁰ Ibid. Since this umbrella term of “philosophy” included all the seven liberal arts, and as long as schools practically ignored the teaching of the rest of theoretical sciences, philosophy had remained, until the 13th century synonymous with sciences in general. Cf.: Weisheipl, “Classification of the Sciences,” pp. 57-67. For the Greco-Roman heritage of scientific classification, see Ilsetraut Hadot, *Arts libéraux et philosophie dans la pensée antique*. (Paris: Etudes Augustiniennes, 1984).

fact that astronomy is not mentioned in the enumeration of the four higher arts is also a warning sign that calculation and necromancy are substitutes for the missing science. Contemporary linguistic evidence, however, does not provide sufficient ground to claim that, because of the overlap of their semantic fields, “astronomy” became interchangeable with “necromancy” or “calculation.” On the contrary, due to the very controversial connotations of all of these sciences and crafts, they do not specify each other’s meanings, but activate new layers of meanings when they are drawn into a reciprocally referential circle. As a result of this, the playwright tilts out the literary convention towards occult sciences.

Calculation, the skill of counting in general, started to be used in a more restricted context in the Middle Ages; “the meaning of *calculus* seems to have been influenced by that of *computus*, for it was also used in the specific meaning of ‘time reckoning’, and some of its derivatives acquired similar connotations.”⁷¹ Because of the eminent role and very specific use of calculations in astronomy, this word gained a more restrictive second meaning exclusively referring to the “lower” practices of astrology: “the process of making a horoscope; the art or science of astrological computation; also, a computation in geomancy or other kinds of divination.”⁷² Interestingly, occurrences for this usage of “calculation” abound in texts of East Anglian origin with a remarkable dominance of John Lydgate among them.⁷³

The second notion associated with astronomy in the N-Town pageant, necromancy, was conditioned by opposite semantic changes to those affecting “calculation.” Originally, it only meant divination from corpses, but in the late Middle Ages, this meaning was extended to refer to all sorts of “sorcery, witchcraft, black magic, occult art; divination, [and] conjuration of spirits”;⁷⁴ moreover, occasionally, it was also applied in a neutral context to allude to the high magical arts or to the more suspicious, still tolerated, practices of astrology. Jeffrey Burton Russell also points out the unsolvable duality of “necromancy” in later medieval usage. His analysis of the overlapping semantic fields of the categories of “religion,” “low magic,” “high magic,” and “science” investigates the dimensions of necromancy in two distinct categories. High magic comprises (1) divination or necromancy, and (2) the investigation of the natural universe, which are certainly of a much higher prestige than “necromanticus,” one of the many names referring to witches or sorcerers.⁷⁵ The diverging lives of the same word are also illustrated by two unrelated occurrences within the

⁷¹ Teeuwen, *The Vocabulary of Intellectual Life*, p. 375.

⁷² Hans Kurath and Sherman M. Kuhn, eds., *Middle English Dictionary*. (Ann Harbor, Michigan: The University of Michigan Press, 1959), II, 15.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, II, 16.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ Jeffrey Burton Russell, *Witchcraft in the Middle Ages*. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1972), pp. 4 and 16.

N-Town Plays. Outside the pageant of Christ and the Doctors, one of the soldiers arresting Jesus in the Betrayal scene of the first Passion Group urges His death with charges of sorcery and necromancy: “On to his [Jesus]’ deth I xal hym bryng / Shewe forth þi wyche-crafte and nygramansye / What helpyth þe now Al þi fals werkyng” (ll. 1022-4). Even if the Passion Group is an insertion into the earlier stratum of the cycle, and therefore cannot be paralleled with the linguistic characteristics of the Proclamation episodes, after the compilation of the surviving cycle, N-Town attests to two different interpretations of the idea of necromancy. The pageant of Christ and the Doctors suppresses its abusive connotation, and elevates it to the rank of other sciences. Yet, suspicions linger over the stigmatised word in the new context.

Of especial interest are cases when “calculation” and “necromancy” appear in each other’s immediate context. Stephen Spector glosses these two terms as closely related items that were sometimes linked because of their common allusion to astrological computation.⁷⁶ The *Middle English Dictionary* brings altogether three illustrations to the combined occurrence of “calculation” and “necromancy” as synonyms for either the positive or the negative aspects of astrology: (1) in the N-Town episode of Christ and the Doctors, (2) in the entry of July 1435 of a 15th-century *London Chronicle*, and (3) in the passage of Lydgate’s *Siege of Thebes* in which Amphiorax is sent to Hell for his idolatry.⁷⁷ N-Town and the *London Chronicle* deviate from Lydgate’s more conventional judgments on the engagement with necromancy. These three examples of a seemingly rare constellation of lexical elements could be completed by two slightly similar cases. In Lydgate’s last work, the *Secrees of Old Philisoffres*, completed by Benedict Burgh, calculation is matched with another art of divination – geomancy – in the enumeration of secret crafts.⁷⁸ The romance of *Kyng Alysaunder*, written ca. 1400, correlates “astronomy” and “necromancy,” providing the most positive example in the semantic career of the latter one.⁷⁹

⁷⁶ Spector, *The N-Town Play*. Vol. 2, p. 481, note to line 17. Spector, following Burton Russell, also remarks that necromancy was “associated with high magic and divination, rather than diabolism.”

⁷⁷ (2) “They hadde ffounde by calculacion and nigremancye that he schulde be distroyed” in *Middle English Dictionary*, II, 16. (3) “lo here the mede of ydolatrie, / Of Rytys old and of fals mawmetrye. / lo what auayllen Incantaciouns / Of exorcismes and coniuirsouns; / What stood hym stede his Nigromancye, / Calculacioun or astronomye; / What vaylled hym the heuenly manciouns, / Diuerse aspectis or constellaciouns?” in John Lydgate, *Siege of Thebes*. Edited from all known manuscripts and the two oldest editions by Axel Erdmann. Part I: The Text. EETS. (London: Oxford University Press, 1911; repr. Millwood, New York: Kraus Reprint, 1960), ll. 4047-54.

⁷⁸ “With othir Crafftys which that be secre, / Calculacioun and Geomancye, / Difformaciouns of Circes and meede / lokyng of ffacycs and piromancye, / On lond and watir Crafft of Geometrye, / Heyhte and depnesse with al experience” in John Lydgate and Benedict Burgh, *Secrees of Old Philisoffres: A Version of the ‘Secreta Secretorum.’* Edited from the Sloane MS [BL] 2464 by Robert Steele. EETS. (London: Kegan Paul, 1894; 2nd repr. Millwood, New York: Kraus Reprint, 1981), ll. 498-503.

What the semantic observations reveal about the development of “calculation” and “necromancy” makes it questionable whether their meaning was entirely deprived of their stigmatised history as pretended by the N-Town context. The allusions to magical practices, inherent in the words’ primary meanings, suggest rather that the boundary of knowledge is beyond what the Aristotelian syllogisms are able to support. The very presence of “necromancy” - and to some extent – “calculation” opens up the horizon of knowledge towards the occult and magical arts. The “puns” or double meanings are not without risks. The playwright engages in a play where the primary meanings of words referring to illicit and condemnable intellectual activities counteract the intended scientific discourse. The playwright evokes the traditional suspicions of popular belief that combined astronomy with more obscure astrological practices. This implicit “popular criticism” targeting the doctors’ boasts is only a damped reminiscence of the harsh rejection of astronomy in the A Text of *Piers Plowman*: “Astronomye is [...] evil for to knowe; Geometrie and geomesie is gynful of speche.”⁸⁰

The suspicion of occultism lingers also on the last member of the *quadrivium*, geometry. Explained by its most essential skill of drawing lines (“lynyacion”) probably to measure land, the meaning of “jematry” is also shadowed by one of its connotations given by the *Middle English Dictionary*: “an occult art related to geomancy.”⁸¹

While the point of departure of analysing the doctors’ enumeration was to look for the principles structuring the classification of sciences, it is by now clear that the playwright endeavoured to disintegrate the possible frames that could unify the intellectual activities of the academia. Firstly, the list of the fields of knowledge cannot be equalled to any classification of sciences in the authoritative tradition of the Middle Ages. Secondly, the strict boundaries between the commendable and damnable intellectual activities, between the authorised and unauthorised (or illicit) ways of acquiring knowledge, or between the rational and occult ways of learning are blurred.

The controversial tendencies at the depth of pageant’s introduction - gaps limiting the range of sciences counterbalanced by a tentative and ambiguous extension of the horizon of knowledge towards the illicit – evidently jeopardise the academic authenticity of the scene only to amplify its only real academic concern: the lack of theology in the doctors’

⁷⁹ “He is an astronomyen, / For of astronomye and nygromancye / Coupe non so mychel.” in *Middle English Dictionary*, VI, 986.

⁸⁰ An example provided by the *Middle English Dictionary* to illustrate the usage of “geometry” in the sense of an occult art. IV, 58. Cf. *Piers Plowman A Text*, 11. 158.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

monologues, and its implications for the criticism of the academia.⁸² Although in the very first (Latin) line of the play, the doctors announce being learned in the Holy Scripture, it seems that all their efforts turned to the study of the divine science are lost in the multitude of the “inferior” and auxiliary sciences. The image of the clerk, deepened in complicated theorizations about rhetoric and grammar, evokes the traditional arguments against clerks directing their intellectual powers in the wrong direction, and embodies the image of paralysed institutional education much criticized by contemporary reformers.⁸³ The attacks on clerks who are at a loss in the labyrinth of linguistic categorizations when looking for the spiritual meaning of the Scripture contain examples of the same *topos*: the clerk of sufficient knowledge is tempted by his curiosity to go astray from the trodden paths to seek for more hidden knowledge in the Bible.⁸⁴ The idea appearing in this pageant is the development of this core image. The doctors identify the comprehension of the Bible with the sciences that should only prepare the way to the study of the Bible. The content of the doctors’ intellectual activity as obviously incongruent with their original determination and mission questions their status, which is, in return, justified by their knowledge. The sudden appearance of Jesus shatters the foundations of the doctors’ self-justification.

⁸² “Metaphesyk” figures in the enumeration of the doctors, but most probably not as a synonym for theology. From the 13th century metaphysics started to be distinguished from theology, the former applied to “the speculative study of the physical world,” while the latter one exclusively reserved for the study of the Christian Sacred Scripture and doctrines. Cf.: Mariken Teeuwen, *The Vocabulary of Intellectual Life*, p. 379. Furthermore, passing over the mention of theology “hidden” insignificantly in the very middle of the list would demolish one of the pageant’s clear statements concerning the superiority of the studies of the *Sacrae Scripturae*.

⁸³ In the 15th century the universities underwent a crisis which resulted from an overall institutional and intellectual crisis. The core of the problem was the self-definitions of the institutions of education and of the mission of their professionals. Furthermore, the university curriculum, especially in the case of the arts subjects, got more and more distant from the evident utilities of sciences. The pragmatic uselessness of most of the formerly prestigious academic subjects and exercises provoked a tension between the leaders of the institutional hierarchy and the social demands of a functional (pragmatic) approach to knowledge. Many educational reform projects launched by academic people themselves criticized the professorial apathy and absenteeism, and attacked the fossilized educational methods and drills especially in the fields of grammar, rhetoric and theology. For a concise description of the state of university education in the late Middle Ages and for an analysis of the crisis, cf.: Jacques Verger, “Les professeurs des universités françaises à la fin du Moyen Age,” in Jacques Le Goff and Köpeczi Béla, eds., *Intellectuels français, intellectuels hongrois. XIIIe-XXe siècle*. Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1985, pp. 23-39 and Verger, *Les gens du savoir en Europe*, p. 42.

⁸⁴ Already in the 13th century, the blossoming period of the vernacular sermons, Roger Bacon attacks the clerks who are lost in the technical details of the art of making sermons: “Et quia praelati, ut in pluribus, non sunt multum instructi in theologia, nec in praedicatione dum sunt in studio, ideo postquam sunt praelati, cum eis incumbit opus praedicandi, mutantur et mendicant quaternos puerorum, qui adinvenerunt curiositatem infinitam praedicandi, penes divisiones et consonantias et concordantes vocals, ubi nec est sublimitas sermonis, nec sapientiae magnitudine, sed infinita puerilis stultitia, et vilification sermonum Dei...” J. S. Brewer (ed.) *Fr. Rogeri Baconi Opera quaedam hactenus inedita. I: Opus tertium, Opus minus, Compendium philosophiae*. London: Longman, Green, Longman and Roberts, 1859, p. 309.

4.2.3. Experimenting with the Vernacular

The Latin verse opening Jesus' first speech retorts directly the Latin of the doctors;⁸⁵ the justification of authority based on knowledge may only come from God. "Omnis sciencia a domino deo est," a paraphrase of Eccl 1:1 shatters the doctors' intellectual foundation and replaces it with a different perspective in which wisdom and knowledge emanate from God. This Latin phrase together with its English interpretation (ll. 33-4) also refutes the doctors' attempts to define their worldly knowledge, and proposes an alternative. The word "sciencia" is rendered by "wytt and wysdam" in English, which unites for the first time two conceptions of knowledge in the pageant. Christ introduces two new terms to describe ways of acquiring knowledge (as opposed to "cunnyng" used until this moment to define the doctors' paradigm). Still in the same speech, Jesus reveals that He measures all levels of knowledge by the perfect unity of "wytt and wysdam" from which the doctors are able to see only a part ("wytt"). Christ characterizes human knowledge, from a dynamic approach, as an endeavour to accumulate knowledge ("learnynge"). He also confirms that any stage of knowledge thus attained cannot be anything else but "connyng" (l. 40). Christ verbally identifies the "all-encompassing" knowledge of the doctors with a fragmented and unfinished knowledge from the divine perspective. Thus the intellectual perfection of the doctors in the opening scene is undermined and seen as pride. In the remaining part of the pageant, the author elaborates on the contrast of wit and wisdom, and constantly clashes the words, whereby "wit" gradually and symbolically surrenders to "wisdom" and takes on humility as its ideal attribute instead of pride.

The permanent attempt to define and redefine words and contrast them to each other on the literal level of the play covers a struggle of concepts in the depth, in which, ultimately, the role of illumination in knowledge is at stake. The doctors are led to admit that their knowledge has certain limits. They realize through Christ's words that, in order to have full possession of the human intellectual capacity, they have to accommodate divine inspiration into their epistemology. First, Christ's words elicit a very inadequate response from the doctors. Their academic language degenerates into a cruelly mocking speech making the infant Christ ridiculous (ll. 41-9). Christ then challenges the doctors' supposed wit and wisdom (l. 49), inquiring about the irrational mysteries of the Christian faith. The doctors' first surrender is also the first instant of the verbal subordination of "wit" to "wisdom": "Nay

⁸⁵ "Omnis *sciencia* a domino deo est / Al *wytt and wysdam* of god it is lent / Of all *zour lernynge with-inne zour brest* / thank hyghly þat lord þat hath zow sent / thorwe bost and pryde zour soulys may be shent / Of *wytt and wysdome* ze haue not so mech / but god may make at hese entente / of all *zour connyng* many zow lech." (ll. 33-40; italics mine)

all erthely þat telle can nought / it passyth oure wytt þat for to contrive / It is not possible A-
bought to be brought / þe worldys ending no man kan dyscryve” (ll. 53-6). Although the
doctors admit to the limitedness of their knowledge, they still lay claim to their intellectual
superiority, since they are unaware only of those things that are inaccessible to all others. In a
second step, the second doctor identifies Christ’s wisdom as “wytt of so hyz cognysion” (l.
63); this verbal gesture elevates Christ onto the same level as the doctors, but denies Him
intellectual perfection and only recognizes Him as an associate of a similar intellectual
capacity. Christ’s unfolding of the mystery of the Holy Trinity urges a response from the
second doctor, which suggests that a fuller intellectual experience can derive from the
involvement of faith in reason: “In very feyth þis reson is right” (l. 85). The ambiguity of this
acclamation resides in the structural ambiguity of the phrase “in very feyth,” which can be
taken both as a dramatic acclamation confirming someone’s opinion (close to the expression
“to my faith”) or as an adverbial phrase modifying the whole sentence: the reason(ing) is only
right in the context of faith. After this point, the play also changes into a quest for the reality
of knowledge and for the attainable reality. Immediately after the second doctor’s
spontaneous remark, Christ expounds on the persons of the Holy Trinity, and identifies
Himself as “sone of wysdam and wytt.” Christ’s essence encompasses both the human and
divine dimensions of knowledge only one side of which is accessible to human reason. The
other side, wisdom, is the divine essence which can only be manifested by God and
experienced spiritually by humans.

The reactions to Christ’s twofold knowledge (originating from His twofold nature) are
shown in very different ways in the pageant. After Christ’s verbal epiphany in line 90, where
He sums up His being as the unity of wit and wisdom, the word “wisdom” does not occur any
more in the play. The revelation, a unique and hardly repeatable experience, makes it
redundant to reiterate the word in an attempt to grasp its meaning more exactly. On the other
hand, “wyt” and “connyng” return very frequently to signify the core of all human
knowledge and the basic human experience in connection with it. The doctors speak of the
insufficiency of their wit to comprehend the truths exposed by Christ (ll. 105 and 134). When
Christ, however, explains the necessity of His Incarnation and evokes the Fall of Man, He

consequently uses the word “connynge.” It is in this passage (ll. 115-32)⁸⁶ that a subtle distinction is made between two kinds of human knowledge.

The interpretation of the Fall states that Adam was tempted by the serpent in his “connynge,” which belongs to the Son of God as an attribute. The serpent’s words also lure Adam to the divine “connynge.” The word in the passage describes both Adam’s innocent knowledge before the Fall (as a reflection of the divine wisdom) and its perverted concept from the mouth of the tempter. Neither are concrete realizations of knowledge; they only appear as potentialities of using the human intellectual faculty. “Connynge” is a state in which the intellectual capacity is not yet paired with moral responsibility. Any decision coming out of this state means a move towards the good or bad. The doctors are also placed into the state of “connynge” at the beginning of the play: their knowledge is useful and useless, full and empty, depending on their decision of its use. After the failure of their wit, i.e. the unsuccessful attempt to insist on a rational understanding of faith, they elevate Christ to the highest seat and acknowledge Him as the source of all knowledge. Thus Christ’s opening quotation about the origin of science is justified by a non-verbal gesture: “*hic adducunt ihesum inter ipsos et in scanno altiori ipsum sedere faciunt ipsis in inferioribus scannis sedentibus*” (stage direction after l. 144). On the literal level this appears in the acknowledgment of Christ as the wisest clerk (l. 143), which finally establishes the new hierarchy of stages of knowledge brought by Christ. This acknowledgment is completed by a second verbal identification, this time coming from Christ. In his further speech He talks about His own wisdom in terms of “my wytt and my learnynge” and “my wytt” (ll. 149 and 152), entirely taking on the role the doctors played in the first part of the pageant. After the revelation of Christ’s real essence and of the real purpose of knowledge, and after the gesture expressing the acknowledgment of this purpose, there are no obstacles to see into Christ’s wisdom.

The passage following the gesture of understanding the nature and the capacity of human knowledge by the help of Christ is an illustration of how to live with a freshly acquired intellectual capacity (and of a spiritual experience) in the cognition of truth. In this conversation, Christ exposes a model of contemplating on His essence from a double point of view, on His divine nature and on His human genealogy. Thus the discourse on knowledge is

⁸⁶ “this is þe cawse why serlys and non other / Ageyn þe secunde þe trespas was wrought / Whan þe serpent adam to synne browth / He temptyd hym nowght be þe faderys myght / Of þe gostys goodnes spak he ryght nowght / but in *connynge* he temptyd hym ryght. // Myght is þe faderys owyn propyrte / to þe gost apperyd is goodnes / in none of these tweyn temptyd he / mankende to synne whan he dede dresse / To þe sone *connynge* doth longe expres / ther wyth þe srpent dyd Adam A-say / Ete of þis Appyl he seyde no lesse / and þou xalt haue *connynge as god verray*.” (ll. 115-28; italics mine)

gradually shifted to a discourse on meditating on the truth, at the end of which the first doctor expresses the need for divine inspiration to surpass human knowledge and to attain truths belonging to the divine wisdom: “All þe clerkys of þis worlde trewly / can not brynge this to declaracion / lesse þan þei haue of god Almyghty / Sum influens of informacion” (ll. 189-92). The quest for the truth turns, at this moment, into a collective prayer to Christ, soliciting Him to tell the whole truth. The main part of the pageant discussing paradigms of knowledge finishes with a devotional act, asking Christ to uncover all the doubts that may arise while studying. Christ promises His help, which is the assurance of His guidance through learning and the guarantee of the truth through this activity. Christ turns the doctors back to the books to revise their knowledge in their new spiritual state. The author of the pageant arrived, after a seeming condemnation of learning, at the justification thereof from a new point of view. The scene in the synagogue is here interrupted and the focus switches abruptly to the doubting Virgin looking anxiously for her Son.

4.2.4. The Moral and Theological Implications of Knowledge

The loosely connected sections of the pageant, the conversation in the synagogue and the dialogue between Mary and Joseph, form a unity. They both cast light upon the acquisition of real wisdom and the nature of Christ’s wisdom. Christ’s exposition of the truths of faith is not only a collection of stock elements to illustrate the mysteries of faith, but also a passage to advocate a specific devotion. Christ exposes in his teaching some crucial points of theology: the Trinity, Mary’s virgin birth, and Christ’s Incarnation. All of the presentations of these tenets have very close echoes in other contemporary literary pieces of devotion. The demonstration of the Trinity through the simile of fire, splendour, and heat can be traced back to Augustinian origin, and the image was wide-spread in the late Middle Ages both in visual representations and in literature.⁸⁷ A similar explanation of the Trinity can be read in the *Cursor mundi*, which served as an important source of inspiration for the mysteries.⁸⁸ Closely

⁸⁷ Spector, *The N-Town Play*, p. 482.

⁸⁸ “Par for es he cald þe trinite, / For he es an-fold god in thre; / And if þu wenis it may noght be, / Bihald þe sune, þan may þu se, / In þe sune þat schines clere / Es a thing and thre thinges sere, / A bodi round, hote, and light, / þir thre we find all at a sight; / þir thinges threw id nankin arte / Ne may noght be fra oþer part, / For if þu take þe light away / þe erd it has na sune parfay, / And if þe hete away be tan / Sune forsoth ne has þu nan, / On ilk a maner ilk man wate, / It es þe kind of sune hate.” *Cursor Mundi*. Vol. 1, Part I, ii, ll. 287-302.

related passages appear in the C version of *Piers Plowman*⁸⁹ and the Digby *Candlemas Play* (this latter certainly from the same East Anglian origin as the N-Town Cycle).⁹⁰

The idea of the virgin birth is encoded in iconographic density: the sunbeams piercing through the glass. The common 15th-century iconographic *topos* has its antecedents in the 14th century in the two anonymous poems on Christ's childhood already mentioned in connection with the apocryphal tradition of the N-Town pageant,⁹¹ and also its contemporary echoes in another passage in the "Announcement to the Three Maries" episode of the *N-Town Play*⁹² and in Lydgate's *Life of Our Lady*.⁹³ What the analysis of the textual relationships of Christ's teaching can reveal to us is that the pageant shares the characteristics of devotional poems whose principal aim was to transmit theological notions in a way easily adaptable to private spiritual practices. The indebtedness of this play to the devotional meditative readings of the age implies, ultimately, that it also seeks to explore the same religious experience: instead of the communal experience of a theatre performance, the pageant seems to speak for a solitary religious experience. Christ sends the doctors to follow their path of uncovering the truth by reading and meditating on their doubts already in the spirit of the truths manifested.

At this moment, all the characters of the temple scene and Mary are in a state of doubtful and anxious quest for the essence. The doctors want to reach illumination by the understanding of the secrets surrounding the Incarnation. All of their questions after the inserted dialogue between Mary and Joseph will relate to the concrete genealogical descent of Christ. Mary, on the other hand, makes the same quest on the literal level; she looks for her lost son. The two quests are intertwined; Mary's complaints are interrupted by the

⁸⁹ "For to a torche oþer to a taper the trinite is likened, / As wexe and a weke [were twyned] to-gederes, / And fuyr flaumed forth of hem boþe; / And as wex and weke [and warm fuyr] to-gederes / Fostren forþ a flaume and a fayre lye, / That serueþ þese swynkeres to seo by a nyghtes, / So doþ þe syre and þe sone and seynt spirit togederes, / Fostren forth a-mong folke fyn loue and by-leyue, / þat alle kynne crystene clauseþ of synne." *The Vision of William Concerning Piers Plowman together with Vita Dowel, Dobet et Dobest Secundum Wit et Resoun. Text C*. Edited by Walter W. Skeat. EETS. (London: Oxford University Press, 1873; repr. in 1979), XX, ll. 168-76.

⁹⁰ "Symeon. O Iesu, chef cause of our welfare, / In yone tapir therbe thing iije, / wax, week and light, whiche I shall declare / to the appropriid by moralite; / lord, wax beteknyth / thy soule most swete; / yone light I lykene to the godhed of the, / brighter than phebus for al his fervent hete." F. J. Furnivall (ed.) *The Digby Plays*. Edited by F. J. Furnivall. EETS. (London: Oxford University Press, 1896; repr. in 1967), ll. 485-92.

⁹¹ "ffor as þe sonne ziveþ his leem / zif he wiþ cloudes is not let / So com crist as sonne Beem / In to þat Buirde þat Bales bet / zif þou take wel good zeem. / hou þe sonne Beem euere is set / Vndeþarted so is þe strem / Of crist wt God mid knottes knet." (ll. 125-32) Horstmann, *Altenglische Legenden*, pp. 212-4. The author of another poem on Christ's childhood in MS Harley 3954 (also from the 14th century) seems to have borrowed the same passage from the Vernon MS. Cf.: Horstmann, *Sammlung altenglischer Legenden*, p. 105 (ll. 269-76).

⁹² "Maria jacobī. My systerys sone I woot he [Jesus] was / [þe] lyth in here as sunne in glas." *N-Town Play*, Pageant 36, ll. 18-9.

⁹³ "And whanne þe angelle from her parted was / And she aloon in hir tabernacle, / Right as the sonne perseth through the glas, / Through the cristall, byrell or spectacle / Withoutyn harme, right so by miracle / Into hir closet the Fadres sapience / Entrede is withoutyn violence / Or any wemme vnto hir maydenhede / Or any side, in party or in all." *John Lydgate. Poems*. Edited by John Norton-Smith. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966), p. 35.

reappearances of the doctors in the temple. The two parallel scenes are united after Christ has explained the abuse-of-power theory of salvation, when Mary enters the temple. In Christ's explanation of the divine scheme of Redemption, the last reference to knowledge is "To blynde þe devil of his knowlache" (l. 245), the only time that some form of wisdom is referred to by the word "knowledge". The dramatic point of Redemption is the overturn of this dangerous and suspicious knowledge and to deceive it. "Knowledge" is the maximal extension of the intellectual power of evil, which must be broken in order to save men. It is, finally, the real antithesis of wisdom, never to be reconciled with this latter one. In the moment of the verbal defeat of evil knowledge by wisdom, the victory of the latter is evoked by Mary: "A dere childe dere chylde why hast þou þus done / ffor þe we haue had grett sorwe and care / thy ffadyr and I thre days haue gone / Wyde þe to seke of blysse ful bare" (ll. 257-60). Christ's absence for three days is a period which means the absolute void of bliss and joys. His return to the sight of His parents is the reversal of this state into the very opposite, as well as the conclusion of His ideas on Redemption. Christ's wisdom is thus completed by a prefiguration of salvation, and it is inseparably linked to Christ's redemptive power.

The pageant of Christ and the Doctors in the *N-Town Cycle* is a dispute not only between the doctors and Christ, but also between philosophical and spiritual concepts of cognition and truth. The pageant performs an experiment with words, expressing different forms and stages of knowledge, and puts them into different contexts. The initial superiority of "wit" and "connyng" is subordinated to Christ's wisdom. Though, in its opening vision of academia, it takes a critical stance towards the institutional world and its representatives, it does not reject this way of acquiring knowledge. The science of the doctors is disintegrated because of the lack of an all-pervasive interpretative frame which will be offered by Christ through His "rational epiphany" communicating the divine mysteries in words. The play advocates intellectual activity accompanied by a deep spiritual understanding of the Christian faith, but it does not favour either the purely rational theorizations and arguments or the exclusively emotional and spiritual approach to knowledge. The doctors are discouraged from being contented with the accumulation of information not pertaining to the essence of the Scripture; on the other hand, they are encouraged to return to the books in an illumined state of mind. The subtle balance between the two approaches to knowledge is created by their union in a devotion acknowledging both the necessity of divine inspiration and of human effort in sciences and in the acquisition of the truth.

CHAPTER 5

THE PECKOCK CONTROVERSY

The analysis of the extant writings of Reginald Pecock, bishop of St. Asaph (1444-50) and Chichester (1450-8), as well as of their context, has led to many interpretations of the downfall of the prelate. All of them revolve around the tragic, at the same time almost incomprehensibly bizarre, turn in Pecock's life: the bishop, endeavouring to defend orthodoxy from Lollard heterodoxy, encountered the charges of heresy for which he had to answer at a series of trials. His examiners and his judges found him guilty in spreading errors and heretical thoughts, and offered him the choice of death or life with correction. Reason, and not faith in his own arguments, saved his life: under the grave verdict of heresy, Pecock escaped execution only with his recantation, after which, in spite of the papal rehabilitation, he was condemned to an even more frightening decay: intellectual idleness. Until his death, he was kept under surveillance in Thorney Abbey, deprived from parchment and pen. Thus he became the only pre-Reformation clergyman to be declared a heretic in such a high position.

There remains hardly anything to add to the aspects preparing Pecock's fatal destiny that have been disclosed by his biographers and scholars of 15th-century English church history. Although many details are still missing (or forever lost) for a reassuringly satisfying reconstruction of a "Pecock-narrative," the lines along which his narrative as a problematic has been treated represent the completeness of questions relevant to be asked in connection with 15th-century English historiography and literature. These aspects encompass Pecock's role in the contemporary power struggle both in the secular and ecclesiastical spheres, his place in the contemporary church, his ecclesiastical career, his relations with Lollardy, his intellectual indebtedness to earlier authorities as well as living models, his fashioning himself as author writing in the vernacular, his innovations with any perceptible theological, literary or intellectual purport that might also be reflected by any contemporary reception. Evidently, making any of these aspects exclusive (or even dominant) in explaining Pecock's fall would only impoverish the complexities underlying the paradoxical career of this man.

The place of Pecock in this dissertation on the responsibilities and dangers of reconsidering the meaning of, and the taboos on, knowledge in late medieval extramural texts cannot simply be justified by the surface parameters of Pecock's life. He was a man of intellect (in spite of the misgivings of Thomas Gascoigne, one of Pecock's harshest

contemporary critics); his writings were either addressed to an academically mostly untrained lay audience or sought alternatives to the academically conceived theological discourse in an attempt to defy Lollardy; he worked out a system of classifying human intellectual activities, including faith, reason, science, opinion, crafts and wisdom, in order to establish a common ground for all arguments, i.e. the doom of reason; he was entrusted authority, at the same time, he also consented to the demolition of the limits set by the Church Fathers or church censorship of the early 15th century; finally, his clash with authorities brought him to the brink of physical and intellectual annihilation. Yet, these alone do not justify the choice of Pecock's figure to virtually embody the complex phenomenon under my scrutiny. His person and his works on themselves are more indirectly related to the issue of knowledge and the reconsiderations of the Paulian warning in 15th-century England. It is rather the reflections on Pecock's endeavours by his critics and the controversy that survives even Pecock's condemnation and death that veil the "real narrative" - whatever it was about - with the authorities' simultaneous and retrospective censoring it. The shift of my emphasis from Pecock's works to the perception of those works by contemporary authorities crystallises also the main argument of this last chapter: the consecutive "recensions" of Pecock's writings by his opponents had the ultimate aim of forcing Pecock's thoughts into the context of the Paulian discourse, and consequently, of easily dismissing them as fruits of overmuch pride.

5.1. Perceptions of the Pecock Controversy by Contemporary Sources

5.1.1. The Official Version of the Narrative

To understand clearly what actually was at stake in the Pecock controversy, I will immediately evoke the end to elucidate the precedents. A letter of Thomas Bourchier, Archbishop of Canterbury, written to the rectors and preachers of his province probably in March 1458 (or later that year), at least five months after Pecock's public recantation, warns the students of the province reading Pecock's books or Lollard writings with sanctions to be taken against them¹:

¹ F. Donald Logan, "Archbishop Thomas Bourchier Revisited," in Caroline M. Barron and Christopher Harper-Bill, eds., *The Church in Pre-Reform Society: Essays in Honour of F.R.H. Du Boulay*. (Dover, New Hampshire: The Boydell Press, 1985), p. 170-88. He dates the letter to March 1458, while Wendy Scase, in her reedition of the text in the appendix to her study on Pecock, says "[the date] must be 1458, possibly late in the year, or early 1459." Cf. Wendy Scase, "Reginald Pecock," in M. C. Seymour, ed., *Authors of the Middle Ages: English Writers of the Middle Ages*. Vol. 3: 7-11. (Aldershot: Variorum, 1996), p. 124.

Cum itaque multorum querela ymmo euidencia facti quod dolenter referimus nostrum deduxerit ad auditum quod nonnulli nostre prouincie Cantuariensis plus sapere conantes quam oportet libros habentes diuersorum operum non solum confratris nostri Cicestrensis episcopi in uulgari anglico compositos quos coram nobis exhibitos et per nos examinatos tanquam errorum et heresum suspectos quantum ad usum suspendimus et dampnauimus [...] sed alios e latino in anglicum ex sacra scriptura traductos siue translatos in ipsislibris student et laborant, sanctorum patrum sanccionibus, dictis et decretis que alma mater ecclesia hactenus approbant spretis pariter et neclectis.² (emphasis mine)

The letter obviously ranks Pecoock's works with the (Lollard) vernacular translations of the Bible, and warns the possessors and readers of these works with restating the intellectual taboos by a phrase cited from St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans (Rom. 12:3). This biblical passage in whose shadow also Rom. 11:20 was conventionally interpreted stigmatised Pecoock and his thoughts with vain curiosity and overmuch pride, and reestablished the seemingly loosening constrains on intellectual quests. Bouchier's overall judgment of the case not only distances itself from the "historical" details of the controversy when he borrows St. Paul's phrase, but he reinterprets it as a new chapter in the exegetical struggle with the aim of invigorating Paul's warning against "altum sapere" in the sense of a universal and immutable limit to bind human intellect. Bouchier's words evoking St. Paul seem to echo an earlier letter of his, dated 9 March of the same year, and written to Thomas Bekynton, bishop of Bath and Wells:

[V]ti querela multorum imo euidencia facti quod dolenter referimus ad nostrum deduxit auditum quod sunt nonnulli nostre Cantuariensis prouincie vtriusque sexus subditi et subiecti plus sapere quam oportet, libros diuersorum operum habentes, non solum confratris nostri Reginaldi Cicestrensis Episcopi in vulgari Anglicos compositos verum eciam alios nonnullos per eundem confratrem nostrum et alios contra prohibiciones ecclesiasticas et sanctorum patrum decreta, e Latino in Anglicum ex sacra scriptura translatos; quorum certos coram nobis iudicialiter pro tribunali sedente exhibitos et diuersimodi examinatur hereses, errores; et contra determinacionem sancte matris Ecclesie male sonantes ac fidei orthodoxe contrarientes, continentes, dampnauimus et eosdem iusticia exigente decreuimus comburendum.³

² Logan, op. cit., p. 187. Cf. also Scase, "Pecoock," p. 124.

³ Letter from Thomas Bouchier to Thomas Bekynton, 9 March 1458, published by Scase, "Pecoock," pp. 123-4.

Within half a year of Pecock's condemnation, the initially hesitant highest church authorities sealed the Pecock case with the obdurately recurring Paulian formule ("plus sapere quam oportet"), and used its memory as a deterrent from uncontrolled and uncensored intellectual inquiry. This label is the surprisingly exact "biblical translation" of the earliest secular concerns about Pecock's dangerous role and writings that might actually have launched the series of ecclesiastical actions against the bishop. Some reconstructions of the backstage machinations against Pecock emphasise the political motives, and thus the primary role of secular lords and the royal court, behind Pecock's trial.⁴ A letter, written by Viscount Beaumont to Henry VI and dated 24 June 1457 (?), describes the state of the realm as threatened by the disunity of faith (as pernicious as the faith of "Mahomet"), and names Reginald Pecock the main instigator of the disorder:

And yt ys so now þat grete noyse rennyth that þer shuld be diuerse conclusyons labored and subtilly entended to be enprented in mennis hertis, by pryvy, by also vnherd, meenes, to the most pernycyous and next to peruercyoun of our faith – yf yt be as the fame renneth – þat was sith Makamete was. Werfore, souuerain lord, folowe the steppes of the most faithfull and most Cristen princes, your most notable progenitours (and in speciall of your owne fadyr of most noble memorie, þat first began with mighti punischyng and suppressyng of enemies of the faith and Chirche, and aftir all his dayes had victoryes of his enemies and did gret thynges.)

And yt is sayde þat this Pecok, this Bisshop of Chichestre, thurgh presumpcioun and curiosite demed by hym in his owne wytte, but it soner be extincte and vndirstond and by your myght and comaundment to the archiebissop and prelatys and doctours examined, and yf yt be prouid, so assisted and punishid by you (of all pepill thought to be that so shuld be of temperall princes he by whom the Chirche shuld in tyme of nede fele hem so releved and born vppe by).⁵ (emphasis mine)

The letter does not simply suggest an investigation to censor Pecock's works and thoughts of questionably orthodox content, but goes as far as to propose a pre-conceived verdict on the bishop, who, according to Beaumont's claims, has been found guilty for his presumptuous thoughts and vain curiosity. The letter's ultimate purpose is to urge the king to help create a legal (or purely authoritative) frame in which the charges, following the conventional grievances against "vana curiositas," could be invigorated against Pecock.

⁴ Scase, "Pecock," esp. pp. 103-6; V.H.H. Green, *Bishop Reginald Pecock*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1945), p. 49; Jeremy Catto, "The King's Government and the Fall of Pecock, 1457-8," in Rowena E. Archer and Simon Walker, eds., *Rulers and Ruled in Late Medieval England. Essays Presented to Gerald Harriss*. (London: The Hambledon Press, 1995), pp. 202-3.

⁵ Letter from Viscount Beaumont to Henry VI, 24 June 1457 (?) published by Scase, "Pecock," p. 121.

Wendy Scase points out that Beaumont's letter itself contradicts the simplified conjecture of a Yorkist plot behind the events, since the Viscount was a Lancastrian.⁶ Furthermore, she suggests that, in the beginning, Pecock's prosecution could be hampered by the lack of overall disagreement on the predispositions against Pecock between the highest secular and ecclesiastical authorities. "It is significant that Bourghier [in his response to Pecock's complaint over preaching against him as a heretic while the case was still being tried] appears to have taken care not to prejudge the case against Pecock, and to uphold his legal rights. But it is also clear that, if Bourghier was not over-anxious to prosecute Pecock (as Beaumont warned might be the case), there were clerics upon whom the crown could count for support against Pecock."⁷ In spite of the reluctance of some of Pecock's main arbiters, the concord over the verdict at the end cannot be drawn into doubt. Bourchier's monitions evoke the case with the imitation of the secular discourse, and attribute the same causes – overmuch pride and vanity – to Pecock's fall. The outcome of the trial coincides with the birth of an official and authoritative narrative of Pecock's case. This is, however, only one of the many versions that documented this unprecedented heresy trial.

5.1.2. The Repercussions of Pecock's Prosecution in Chronicles

Pecock's prosecution found a lot of repercussions in contemporary sources. The fullest account of the events appears in scattered passages of Thomas Gascoigne's *Liber Veritatum*, a contemporary theological dictionary, whose entries range from 1433 to the moment of burning Pecock's books on 17 December 1457.⁸ Gascoigne's account will be treated separately from the other sources that represent a more historical approach to the events, and do not overtly transform the surface historical account into polemical material. The variety of the length, style and tone of the comments on Pecock's public condemnation proves a vigilant public concern over the event. The shortest remark can be found in a 15th-century London chronicle, where the entry to 1457 also lists the burning of Pecock's books among the most outstanding events of the year:

In this yere Sandwich was robbid and dispoilid by Frensshemen. And this yere was a grete watch in London, and al the gates kepte every nyght, and ij aldermen watchyng:

⁶ Ibid., p. 103.

⁷ Ibid., p. 106. Cf. also Catto's claim that the Pecock's prosecution was not a concerted attack by the whole government: "[T]he ecclesiastical power showed no sign of independent initiative in pressing a charge of heresy." (Catto, "The King's Government," p. 202.)

⁸ Passages of the *Liber Veritatum* were edited by James E. Thorold Rogers in *Loci e Libro Veritatum: Passages Selected from Gascoigne's Theological Dictionary Illustrating the Condition of Church and State, 1403-58*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1881).

*and withyne a while after the kyng and lordes were accorded, and went a procession in Paulis. And this yere was bisshop Pecock abiurid, and his bokes brent.*⁹

The *London Grey Friars' Chronicle*, written by a last survivor of the Franciscan order at the dissolution of monasteries under Henry VIII, emphasises the Franciscan links with Pecock's abjuration:

*Thys yere [the 36th year of Henry VI's reign] the xxvij day of November, that tyme was sonday, Pecoke that was byshoppe of Chechester stode at Powelles crosse, wych was apeched of dyvers poynttes of eryses, and there he abjuryd and revokyd them in the prechyng tyme in the presens of the byshoppe of Cauntorbury, the byshoppe of London, and byshoppe of Durham, and other prelattes. And also there in the prechyng tyme ware many bokes of eryses of hys makynge, that cost moche gooddes, damnyd and brent be fore hys face. And doctor William Goddard the elder, that was provinciale of the Greyfreeres, apechyd hym of hys erysys.*¹⁰

These shorter chronicle entries, though unable to provide a narrative of the details of the trial barred from the public eye, attest to the fact that Pecock's public abjuration of the end of 1457 became an event of public significance in the collective memory.

The longer narratives conserved different attempts at reconstructing the details of the prosecution evidently inaccessible to the authors. Wendy Scase analysed the interrelation and contradictions of these sources also in the light of a manuscript containing documentary pieces related to Pecock's trial.¹¹ The point here will not be to revisit the comparison of the longer narratives, and to point out divergences that undermine their reliability. "Reliability" as an analytical category of the sources will hereafter be dismissed, since I will examine how the discourse on Pecock's heresy and recantation – even if bound to circulating written, verified or unverified documentary, material – was conditioned by the collective memory constrained under the pressure of authorities. The manuscript containing *John Benet's Chronicle*, whose authorship has been debated, preserved two different versions of Pecock's abjuration and confession: the first one is inserted in the continuous narrative of the entry to 1457, and lists five points of heresy (Pecock's denying of the necessity of believing in Christ's descent to Hell, the Holy Spirit, the community of saints, the compelling authority of church councils and the infallibility of the church), while another version with only four points of heresy, written in the same handwriting, appears on f. 193 among miscellaneous historical material by

⁹ *Chronicle of London, 1089-1483. (Edited from MSS of the British Library: Harley 565 and Cotton, Julius B. i) Photoreduced reprint. (Felinfach: Llanerch Publishers, 1995).*

¹⁰ *Chronicle of the Grey Friars of London.* Edited by John Gough Nichols. Camden Society, 1852. (Reprint: New York, Johnson Reprint Corporation, 1968), p. 20.

¹¹ The MS in case is MS Oxford, Bodleian Library, Ashmole 789. Scase, "Pecock," pp. 103 and 106-9.

later hands.¹² Even though Benet must have realised the discrepancy between the two “authentic” documents establishing Pecock’s guilt, the presence of the diverging texts did not undermine the point of Pecock’s confession: he confessed having thought and taught erroneously “preferryng the iuggement of naturall’ resinz befor the holde and new testament and auctoryte and determinacyon’ of owre moder holy chyrche.”¹³

The tenor of the canonical confession and abjuration marks the overall tone of all the long narratives of Pecock’s prosecution. Furthermore, all the short and long narratives have the same aspect of treating Pecock’s fall: the perspective from which they report the public abjuration permits them to shift the emphasis from the unique charges brought against Pecock (that definitely distinguish the case from any other Lollard trial) to the fact of his being a heretic. In the sources, Pecock metamorphoses into a common Lollard. *John Benet’s Chronicle* blurs Pecock’s case with the immediately ensuing abjuration of a heretic from Essex. The abrupt turn from the direct report of Pecock’s confession to the events of “nex Sunday after this” juxtaposes the two heresy cases in a way that the reader hardly notices the transition from the one to the other. The abruptness of the narrative turn can only be perceived with some delay as the chronicler introduces the following episode with a floating transition that could be related, both grammatically and logically, to the previous case, i.e. Pecock’s trial.¹⁴

Satire and mock verses are also instrumental in shaping Pecock’s Lollard image. The *English Chronicle* and Whethamstede’s *Registrum* insert mock verses to ridicule Pecock’s efforts to glorify reason over faith. These satirical verses belong to the stock elements of contemporary chronicles to take verbal revenge on the demonised Lollards.¹⁵ In the *English*

¹² *John Benet’s Chronicle, 1400-62*. Edited by G. L. Harris and M. A. Harris. Camden Miscellany 24. London: Offices of the Royal Historical Society, 1972, p. 163; the first version of Pecock’s confession is printed on pp. 219-20. The MS is a typical commonplace book showing its collector’s keener interest in political and historical issues. The *Chronicle* itself appears between ff. 132 and 188r, and abruptly ends in 1471.

¹³ *John Benet’s Chronicle*, p. 219. Cf. other versions of Pecock’s abjuration and confession: “I reigolde Pecock [...] confesse and knowlage that I haue before tyme, presumeng of myn owne natural witte and preferring the natural iugement of raison before th’Olde Testament and the Newe and th’auctorite and determinacion of oure modre Holy Chirche, haue holden, feeled, writen and taught otherwise than the Holy Romane and Vniuersal Chirche techeth...” (MS Ashmole 789, ff. 303v-304 edited by Scase, “Pecock,” p. 133). Cf. also *An English Chronicle of the Reigns of Richard II, Henry IV, Henry V, and Henry VI. Written before the Year 1471*. Edited by John Silvester Davies. Camden Society, 1856. (Reprint: New York, Johnson Reprint Corporation, 1968.), pp. 75-6 and the Latin versions in MS Ashmole 789, f. 303v (Scase, “Pecock,” p. 132) and in the *Registrum Abbatiae Johannis Whethamstede, Abbatii Monasterii Sancti Albani, Iterum Susceptae; Roberto Blakeney, Capellano, Quondam Adscriptum*. Edited by Henry Thomas Riley. *Rerum Britannicarum Medii Aevi Scriptores* 28/6. 1. Wiesbaden: Kraus Reprint, 1965, pp. 285-6.

¹⁴ The sentence immediately following Pecock’s confession sounds as follows: “*Than folowyng the nex Sunday after this was oon that was brought out of Essex, A lewd felaw abjurdyd was at hys opyne penaunce for heresyis in hys shert stondyng at the cros...*” (the clauses in italics indicate the blurred transition from Pecock’s case to that of the Essex heretic). Cf.: *John Benet’s Chronicle*, pp. 220-1.

¹⁵ Cf., e.g., the Latin verse commentary on the burning of John Badby in a vernacular London chronicle: “Hereticus credat ve perustus ab orbe recedat / Ne fidos ledat satel hunc baratro sibi perdat.” (*A Chronicle of*

Chronicle, Pecock's public confession is concluded with a satirical verse comment on the vain effort of all those who try to turn the natural hierarchy of faith over reason upside down: "Wythe wondrethe that reson nat telle can, / Howe a mayde ys a moder, and God ys manne, / Fle reasoune, and folow the woundre, / For beleue hathe the maystry and reasone ys vnder."¹⁶ Whethamstede's *Registrum* reveals the profuse inspiration of the chronicler from the vein of his venomous Muse. The author crowns his highly rhetorical allegory about Pecock having vomited the poisonous drink of perfidy with a verse interlacing the prose narrative:

*Sic etiam intoxicator ille impissimus, qui perfidiae venenum imbiberat, ut ipsum, imbibitum, effunderet iterum, ac populum simplicem in fide infective informaret, expuit ipsum modo, taliterque evomuit, quod "Dum Sol dat redium, Mars gerit aut gladium," ipsum rebibere, seu reglutire, nullatenus ausus erit.*¹⁷

The same document inserts a satire making pun on Pecock's name; at the same time, the poet deprives the heretic from his true name, and rebaptises him an owl ("bubo"). The description of the deplumed wretch that tried to enchant people with his raucous voice gives rise to a heated attack in the vein of *The Owl and the Nightingale*. Yet this debate ends with an explicit conclusion which emphasises the golden mean, especially the warning against seeking too high. Pecock's case becomes synonymous with divine punishment on human *hybris*:

*Sic deplumatus pavo fuit, et spoliatus,
Sique sibi siluit, vox quia rauca fuit.
Sic dudum volucris, quae nomen habebat honoris,
Bubo, non pavo, dicitur esse modo.
Nomine privari vult, atque gradu spoliari,
Qui violat fidei dogmata, sive Dei.
Ne sic priveris, haec qui legis, aut spolieris,
Nec basse tendas, nec nimis alta petas.
Dum medium tenuit, currum patris bene rexit;
Alta sed ut petiit Pheton, ab arce ruit.*¹⁸ (emphasis mine)

A common device of the further "Lollardising" of Pecock is to accommodate the charges against the bishop to the Lollard fallacies. It has been mentioned that Pecock's trial was unique in the sense that the defender unequivocally detached himself from the set of ideas that contemporary authorities identified simply with "heresy" or "Lollardy." Even if some of

London, 1089-1483, p. 92.)

¹⁶ *An English Chronicle*, p. 77.

¹⁷ Whethamstede's *Registrum*, p. 288.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

the charges against Pecock, conserved in different versions of the abjuration and confession, echo tenets of Wycliffite origin, they are conclusions deriving from an entirely different argument than that of the Lollard thinkers. Nevertheless, many of the sources of Pecock's prosecution amplify the points which may suggest Pecock's indebtedness to Lollardy. Writing in the vernacular as well as circulating uncensored vernacular material among the laity is one of the most frequently recurring charges in the evaluations of the Pecock case. John Benet's *Chronicle* starts the list of grievances with writing in the vernacular only to mention Pecock's fabricating his own *Paternoster* and Creed in the second place: "[...] Reginaldus Pekok episcopus Cicistrensis accusatus de heresi qui composuit multos libros exponendo sacram scripturam per linguam Anglicanam et faciens novum pater noster et novum credo [...]"¹⁹ The *English Chronicle* blames Pecock for his perseverant endeavour to translate the Bible into English: "Reynold Pocock bysshop of Chichestre a seculer doctour of dyuynyte, that had labored meny yeres for to translate Holy Scripture into Englysshe [...], was accused of certayne articles of heresy."²⁰ Whethamstede's *Registrum* seems to hesitate on which mistake to consider more serious: the fact that Pecock wrote in the vernacular or the composition of his own versions of the Creed: "[...] ultra orationem illam salvificam, quam Doctor doctorum doctissimus, Dominus, videlicet, Ihesus Christus, proprio suo ore composuit, ederet in suo vulgari nedum alias tres, et populo dicendum propalaret, quinimmo ulterius, ad tria Symbola Ecclesiae [...] superadderet in vulgari etiam suo quartum."²¹

The second most important common feature shared by all the narratives is related to the authorial intention of profiling Pecock according to the demonised image of Lollards. The focus on the most visible part of Pecock's prosecution, his public recantation, does not allow any supposition concerning the deeper causes of the bishop's condemnation that could reach further back in the past. Pecock's heresy is detached from his earlier controversial activity (his scandalous preaching at St. Paul's Cross in 1447/9, which, as revealed by Thomas Gascoigne or by archival documents recording Pecock's opinion on bishops' duties in response to John Stafford, Archbishop of Canterbury, infuriated ecclesiastical circles²²). Moreover, in none of

¹⁹ *John Benet's Chronicle*, p. 219. There is though no evidence for Pecock's own version of the *Paternoster*.

²⁰ *An English Chronicle*, p. 75. Wager's study on Pecock's quotations of the Bible confirm Babington's observation: "In the majority of Scripture citations, Pecock employs the version ascribed to Wiclif, in that form of it, however, which is the later of the two." Exceptions to this are "mostly confined to short texts quoted apparently *memoriter*, such as occur in the first sixty pages." Wager adds that "quotations show divergences in the whole work [*Repressor*]" but he also concludes that the quotations become more accurate towards the end. Babington quoted by Charles H. A. Wager, "Pecock's 'Repressor' and the Wiclif Bible," *Modern Language Notes* 9 (1894), p. 97.

²¹ *Registrum Abbatiae Johannis Whethamstede Secunda*, p. 280.

²² As will be seen in the following section on Thomas Gascoigne's version of the Pecock case, the *Liber Veritatum* persistently traces Pecock's accumulating blunders to his misconceptions concerning bishops' duties in his sermon preached at St. Paul's Cross in 1447 (or 1449). Documents related to Pecock's hearing in front of

the narratives is this outstanding earlier episode of Pecock's career mentioned. Apart from this, the sources also remain silent on Pecock's concrete achievement: no title of any of his books or shorter writings is given; nowhere is it pointed out where exactly his errors or heresies appear. The lack of sufficient support for the justified charges against Pecock is due to the loss of many of his works. Some of the articles of heresy find their literal equivalents in the *Book of Faith*, but others are unsupported by Pecock's extant works.

Finally, the repercussions of Pecock's prosecution in contemporary – or close contemporary – narratives, though elaborating on different versions of the case, borrow the central element of the discourse on heresy from the official version. The parabolic function of Pecock's fall due to his quest of illicit and high things underlies all the narratives, but two of them, Whethamstede's *Registrum* and the *English Chronicle*, also explicitly construct their argumentation on the dominant idea of the official version. Whethamstede uses an almost literal quotation of Rom. 12:3 as a rhetorical amplification of Pecock's corruptness to anticipate his miserable fall:

*Sicque pastor ille perditissimus, qui in quanto plus sibi sapuit, in tanto plus desipuit, quantumque in se sanioris opinionis videbatur sibi fuisse, tantum magis insaniit, insaniorisque opinionis convincebatur extitisse, humiliter modo de se sentit, humiliter in se sapit, humiliterque, immo humillime, fatetur se errasse, ac quod apud se sapuit a plius quam oportuit ipsum sapuisse.*²³ (emphasis mine)

In an earlier passage of the same *Register*, the author paraphrases Rom. 11:20 when he ponders on the nature of heresies similar to Pecock's: "In tantum etenim *in suo sensu de sua scientia superbierat, taliterque se supra se in altum elevabat [...]*."²⁴ The *English Chronicle* substitutes the allusion to Rom. 11:20 for a gloss on the definition of "altum sapere": "Reynold Pocock bysshop of Chichestre a seculer doctour of dyuynyte [...]; *passing the bondes of diuinite and of Crysten beleue*, was accused of certayne articles of heresy."²⁵ The memory of Reginald Pecock kept by two of the most exhaustive narratives of the end of Henry VI's reign, written very close to each other and originating from influential monastic milieus,²⁶ seemed to perpetuate the authoritative verdict on the bishop's life. This also means

the Archbishop are conserved in MS Oxford, Bodleian Library, Bodley 117. The *Abbreviatio Reginaldi Pecok* (a title corrected by Wendy Scase to *Abrenunciatio Reginaldi Pecok*) was edited by Churchill Babington in his appendix to Pecock's *The Repressor of Over Much Blaming of the Clergy by Reginald Pecock*. (London: Longman, 1860), II, 615-9 and Scase, "Pecock," 130-2.

²³ *Registrum Abbatiae Johannis Whethamstede Secundae*, pp. 287-8.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 280. (emphasis added)

²⁵ *An English Chronicle*, p. 75. (emphasis added)

²⁶ The *Registrum*, though assigned to the second abbacy of William Whethamstede, was most probably compiled and copied between Whethamstede's death (1465) and the death of his successor, William Alban (1476). Nevertheless, the provenance of the compilation from St. Albans is not dubious. The *English Chronicle* is

that the keepers of collective memory overtly subscribed to the official version of the narrative of Pecock's prosecution. Avowedly, the "Paulian paradigm" (more exactly, the paradigm bequeathed onto the 15th century by the traditional expositions on Rom. 11:20 and Rom. 12:3) seems to have provided a compelling and restraining scheme of thought for discourses on intellectual or religious heterodoxy lacking the support of the actual ecclesiastical or secular authorities.

5.1.3. The Academic Counter-Version of Thomas Gascoigne's Narrative

Thomas Gascoigne's *Liber Veritatum*, "a massive collection of theological and topical memoranda, provides a major – albeit hostile – contemporary narrative source for Pecock's career."²⁷ Although the genre of a dictionary does not impose on its author the constraint of creating a continuous narrative, the *Liber Veritatum* surprises its reader with Gascoigne's evident "attempt to construct a plausible narrative [of Pecock's life] from very little more hard information than was available to the chroniclers."²⁸ Nevertheless, the narrative obeys the constraints of the dictionary; the progress of Pecock's career is fragmented and scattered in various entries, but there *is* a sense of advancement in the separate blocks of the narrative. At each return to Pecock's activity, the entries do not only repeat earlier reflections by Gascoigne, but also add new details. The spiral growth of the core narrative recasts Gascoigne's vision of Pecock's career in gradually lengthening passages. The author's additive technique of narrative elements as well as personal and emotional comments on the narrative convinces the reader that, in this text, the omissions of known details in earlier passages of the same narrative have a significant role in the interpretation of Pecock's case. Although Gascoigne is clearly hostile on the surface, he manipulates more and in a more subtle way with his silences and with his invisible censoring of his own silences.

On the surface, Gascoigne faithfully borrows the frame of the official version for his own narrative. The overall tone of his writing is dominated by the satirical verse and prose comments that echo Whethamstede's *Register*. The method of Pecock's transformation into a ridiculously haughty figure is similar to, or almost identical with, that of the contemporary chronicles:

conjectured to have been composed in the last decade of Henry VI's reign (1461-71); scholarship is divided on the question of its provenance, proposing both Canterbury and Malmesbury as possible places of composition. Cf.: *Registrum Abbatiae Johannis Whethamstede*, pp. xviii-xix and *An English Chronicle*, pp. vii and xiv.

²⁷ Scase, "Pecock," p. 79.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 106.

*Fatuus est enim homo qui sagittat ut destruat solem; sic fatuus fuit iste Pecok qui verba evomebat contra sanctos jeronimum, Ambrosium, et alios plures sanctos patres, et eorum scripta, nam sagittae suae contra scripta eorum emissae ceciderunt super caput ipsius sagittantis, quando justo Dei judicio errores suos, et haereses, et libros suos proprios abjuravit, et ipsos comburi optavit.*²⁹

But the moral element in the judgment over Pecock's inconsistent principles seems at least as central in Gascoigne's work as is the intellectual. Gascoigne is unique in constructing a narrative close to the official version upon the claim that Pecock's fall was due to academic abuse, i.e. the bishop of Chichester's subversive disrespect for the immutably authoritative design of the academic institution.

The last and longest passage of the Pecock narrative, summarizing the consequences of the preaching scandal and the process of the prosecution against Pecock from the beginning of his examination to the burning of his books, seems to subordinate all details to Pecock's illicit transgression of the limits set by the Church and the Church Fathers. Among the reasons why many of the royal council (the setting for Pecock's examination according to Gascoigne's version) wished to expel the bishop of Chichester from the court the first was the grievance brought against Pecock's treating profound material in English: "multum infesti erant ei propter diversas causas; una fuit, quia scripsit tales profundas materias in Anglicis, quae magis aptae erant laedere legentes et audientes quam illis proficere."³⁰ The list of charges announced at Pecock's public abjuration also repeats this point: "Scripsit altas materias, i.e. profundas, in Anglicis, quae pocius abducerent laicos a bono quam ex vero simili plures ducerent ad bonum."³¹ The ambiguity of the Latin "altum," which can mean "deep" and "high" at the same time, is dissolved by the former adjective in Gascoigne's interpretation. While, in traditional exegesis, the upward direction was associated with the divine taboo, Gascoigne conceives the transgression of the same taboo primarily as a deep absorption in studies so that the conclusions of such a quest result in contradictory findings to the officially held academic canon. But the reversal of directions only signals a continued effort in identifying St. Paul's warning against reaching too high as a prohibition on intellectual inquiries as such. A still deeper analysis of the *Liber Veritatum* will, however, reveal that the purport of interpreting St. Paul's warning as a taboo on certain intellectual quests was not only a matter of discipline and, especially not of principles, for Gascoigne, but

²⁹ Rogers, ed., *Loci e Libro Veritatum: Passages Selected from Gascoigne's Theological Dictionary Illustrating the Condition of Church and State, 1403-58*, p. 217. (All further references to Gascoigne's *Liber* will be made to this edition; Rogers's page numbers (instead of the original foliation) will be indicated.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 213.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 214.

a question of personal (intellectual) rivalry as well as a need to confirm his own academic stance by claiming the authority to draw the boundaries of academia. If Pecock's doctoral degree in Divinity authorised him to lay his claim on an academic status only to question and criticise the existing system, on what basis could Gascoigne ignore, moreover deny, this claim?

Wendy Scase does not attribute substantial importance to the eventual acquaintance of Pecock with his main contemporary critic. She rather discredits conjectures arguing for the opposite as she has not found any "persuasive" evidence:

It has been said that Pecock must have known his critic Gascoigne personally at Oxford, but the evidence for this is not persuasive. Gascoigne was a generation younger than Pecock. Born in 1404, he was probably still an undergraduate or just beginning his studies for his Master's degree in Pecock's final years of 1424 or 1425. It was not until 1429, some years after Pecock's departure, that he began to rent a room in Oriel College. The two men may never have set eyes on one another. What purports to be a physical description of Pecock in the Liber de Veritatibus [...] is suspiciously linked with his mental depravity which is inferred from his heterodoxy. [...] It may be significant that nearly everything Gascoigne has to say about Pecock concerns his years as a bishop; he never mentions the earlier years of Pecock's career.

Certainly, Gascoigne's narrative traces everything back to Pecock's preaching scandal at St. Paul's Cross; nevertheless, it is also significant how unpardonably he reproaches Pecock for the circumstances of obtaining his doctoral degree. This episode undergoes the most visible alterations in Gascoigne's process of writing. It is evident that Gascoigne was thoroughly concerned with Pecock's academic advancement. Whether this palpable academic jealousy goes back to a personal encounter during Pecock's years at Oriel, or derives from a rivalry with a person who remained anonymous all throughout Gascoigne's life, but haunted his academic advancement at regular intervals, is not even decisive to prove in order to assume some sort of interference between the two "scholars'" academic pursuits. The comparison of Gascoigne and Pecock's careers results in several interesting findings: although Gascoigne was "a generation younger" (to use Wendy Scase's expression), he seems to have set very ambitious aims for himself so that he overhauled Pecock. When Pecock graduated as Master of Arts in 1416, Gascoigne is supposed to have started his studies at Oxford. Pecock's significant advantage over Gascoigne entirely disappeared by the time they obtained their first degree in Theology (Gascoigne in 1423, while Pecock a year later). From then on, it took

slightly more than a decade for Gascoigne to become Doctor of Divinity in 1434, while Pecock got this degree as late as 1444. Gascoigne is known to have fulfilled the function of the Chancellor of the University in 1436, and later in 1442-3 and 1445.³²

Gascoigne recalls the circumstances of Pecock's obtaining the doctoral degree at several occasions, but the fullest version of this event appears in the last entry related to the bishop of Chichester. When the narrative reaches the moment of burning Pecock's books, there is a dramatic suspension which is filled by an insertion of a quasi-obituary of the bishop:

*[C]ombusti fuerunt tunc ante eum [Pecock] ad crucem Sancti Pauli apostoli, in illo cimiterio, libri ejusdem magistri Reginaldi Pecok, Wallici origine, et tunc episcopi Cicistrensis, qui antea fuit episcopus Assavensis in Vallia, et quondam fuit socius collegii de Oriell in Oxonia, et doctor fuit Oxoniensis in Theologia, et nec ante gradum illum nec post gradum illum fecit aliquem actum in scolis pro forma sua, sed recepit illum gradum per dispensacionem, i.e. per dissipacionem seu licenciam ad malum per regentes in Oxonia, ut ego Thomas Gascoigne novi, quando ipse Pecok, provisus tunc in episcopum Cicistrensem per media Willelmi ducis Suthfolciae et Walteri Hart episcopi Norwycensis, incepit in Theologia sub quondam monacho Cisterciensis ordinis, quando ego, praedictus Gascoigne, Eboracensis diocesis natus, fui cancellarius Oxoniae circa annum Dni 1445, et quando libri praedicti Pecok fuerunt combusti Londonii, anno, die et loco praedictis, ipse episcopus Pecok fuit praesens in loco combustionis eorundem, sedens ad pedes episcoporum.*³³

The combustion of Pecock's books is transformed into an allegory of their author's decline (and anticipated death). St. Paul's Cross receives an emphasis not only as the setting for Pecock's preaching scandal, but by virtue of the fact that it was a cemetery. The commemoration whose tone lacks all compassion is a last occasion for Gascoigne to dismiss Pecock for his undignified means to obtain the doctoral degree. The main charges that crystallise from the ultimate review of the narrative are that Pecock had never pursued any academic activity ("in scolis pro forma sua") before or after his graduating as DD; consequently, he did not deserve his degree due to academic merits. Finally, Gascoigne

³² For Gascoigne's career, cf.: Rogers, op. cit., pp. xviii-xix, and for Pecock: Scase, "Reginald Pecock," pp. 78-9. Pronger assumes a later date (ca. 1420) for the beginning of Gascoigne's university studies. Cf.: Winifred Pronger, "Thomas Gascoigne. Part 1," *The English Historical Review* 53 (1938), p. 611. The first evidence to support Gascoigne's presence in Oxford in Emden's biographical register is 1429 when he appears to have rented a room first in Exeter College. In the same year, he moved over to Oriel and remained there a permanent resident until 8 February 1449, "when, 'pro diversis donis que ex largiflua bonitate sue caritatis nostro collegio antedicto contulit,' he was granted the use of his room henceforward free." A. B. Emden, *A Biographical Register of the University of Oxford to A.D. 1500*. Vol. 2. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1989 [reprint of the first edition of 1957]), p. 746.

³³ *Liber Veritatum*, p. 215.

adumbrates the intervention of the Duke of Suffolk and the bishop of Norwich on Pecock's behalf, which permits us to assume a manoeuvre of political colouring that may have compelled the regent masters of Oxford to take a wrong decision.

Both of the main charges have support in the previous fragments of Gascoigne's narrative. In a much earlier entry of the dictionary, relating Pecock's heresies, Gascoigne uses the motif of the intervention of two unknown persons on Pecock's behalf in connection with his appointment to the see of Chichester: "[...] Reginaldus Pecok, Wallicus origine, et episcopus Assavensis in Wallia, postea Cicistrensis episcopus, qui per [H]enricum sextum, regem tunc juvenem, *instancia duorum virorum* factus est ibidem episcopus."³⁴ The same passage also elucidates Gascoigne's misgivings about Pecock's unreliable academic footing:

*[Pecock] doctor fuit in Oxonia per gratiam [absolutam]. Nunquam enim respondit alicui doctori pro forma sua, ut esset doctor, nec aliquem actum in scholis fecit in Oxonia, postquam incepit in theologia. An postea faciet nescitur a nobis. Per omnes annos a die inceptionis suae in Oxonia usque ad diem praesentis scripturae nullum actum fecit scholasticum, nec legendo, nec praedicando, nec disputando, nec determinando.*³⁵

The doubt that Gascoigne casts on Pecock's eventual academic work (which remains unknown to him) vanishes by the obituary section, where Pecock's inaptitude for an academically dignified activity is already certainty for Gascoigne. The claim that Pecock withdrew himself from the obligatory academic exercises prepares Gascoigne's argument that focuses on Pecock's inability to provide due support to defend his own stance. At the same time, Gascoigne also suggests that Pecock's insistence on his academic position cannot be justified by his career, and therefore, the problems raised by his writings are outside the academic spectrum.

Gascoigne invests visible effort in disclaiming Pecock's affiliations with the academic world. Since Pecock was not active at any of the academic institutions, Gascoigne only had to demonstrate (1) that Pecock's preaching could not be measured with university standards, because it belonged to the domain of pastoral care (which in itself was problematic, since Pecock's scandalous sermon disavowed episcopal responsibility for preaching), and (2) that Pecock's writings cannot be debated on academic ground, because their author ignores or rejects the binding laws of academic thought. The second cause of heresy attached

³⁴ Ibid., p. 26. (emphasis mine) Another allusion to political patronage elevating Pecock to an English bishopric appears in a later entry where Gascoigne only names the Duke of Suffolk, William de la Pole intervening on behalf of Pecock: "Anno Dni 1449 praedicavit Reginaldus Pecok episcopus Assavensis, et postea, per media Willelmi Pule ducis Suthfolciae, episcopus Cisestrensis..." (Ibid., p. 41.)

³⁵ Ibid., p. 26. Rogers reads "absurdam" for "absolutam."

immediately to the discussion of Pecock's scandalous preaching at St. Paul's Cross (in 1449 according to Gascoigne) indicates that Pecock's stance on the bishops' share in pastoral care also provoked a markedly expressed rejection of academia: "Secunda causa est, quod non humiliter se retinent infra terminos sanctorum patrum, sed transferunt se ipsos ultra sanctorum testimonia, et philosophiam naturalem false applicant ad suum intentum."³⁶ The discussion of causes found in Pecock's writings occasions a renewed attempt to refute the academic validity of Pecock's writings by evoking the obscure circumstances of taking his degree:

*[I]ste Reginaldus, qui absque forma aliqua debita in Oxonia ad incipiendum in sacra theologia factus est doctor, ibidem per gratiam non rexit post doctoratum nec aliquem actum scolasticum ibidem fecit post doctoratum, sed plures libros Anglicanos per viginti annos edidit et scripsit.*³⁷

Evidently, Gascoigne does not consider writing books in English as serious academic achievement. To underrate the scholastic value of Pecock's vernacular works, Gascoigne simply relies on rumours, i.e. condemning opinions *de auditu*. In spite of his permanent endeavour to distance himself and the academic authorities from Pecock, Gascoigne is ultimately drawn into an academic debate on Pecock's *Book of Faith*.

The criticism of this late work of Pecock's anticipates the longest fragment of Gascoigne's narrative on the bishop's examination and public condemnation, in which academic authorities and, symbolically the scholastic world as such, were entangled. *The Book of Faith*, questioning at a crucial point the ultimate authority of St. Gregory the Great, and consequently that of the Church as well as the academic institutions, justifies the involvement of a large number of doctors in the process against Pecock.³⁸ In the face of such a palpable embodiment of "authority" Pecock's stance is deemed to be crushed. What remains from his claims to be acknowledged as an academic equal, is a miserable collapse under the burden of numerous authorities whom Gascoigne "invites" to defend the idea of the immutable authoritative ground of academia. Gascoigne's voice turns from anger to irony. In the rest of his narrative, all allusions to Pecock's aborted academic career are commented with

³⁶ Ibid., p. 28.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 30.

³⁸ "[D]iversi doctores Theologiae Oxonienses et Cantabrigienses multa fecerunt contra eundem episcopum Pecok, praedicando, scribendo, et determinando publice Londoniis in praesentia archiepiscopi Cantuariensis Stafford, qui fuit civilista, et in praesentia etiam plurium episcoporum, et postea coram archiepiscopo Cantuariensi, Kemp nomine, et postea coram domino Thoma Bouschir, archiepiscopo Cantuariensi inter quos doctores praecipue in causa Dei fuerunt M. Petrus Hyrford, Lincolnensis diocesis; M. Willelmus Myllyngton, Eboracensis diocesis; doctor Thomas Eborall; doctor Johannes Burbach; et doctores egregii etiam iiii ordinum patrum; et doctor Hugo Damlet; qui in diversis scriptis ipsius Pecok Anglicis et Latinis ipsum erroneum et haereticum indicaverunt." (*Liber Veritatum*, p. 208.) Jeremy Catto point out that the "core" of Pecock's critics, as is evidenced by Gascoigne's praise, constituted of the members of a new generation of preachers, educated in the spirit of Arundel's evangelical programme. Cf.: Catto, "The King's Government," p. 205.

self-assured condescension. To refute Pecock's valorising of human reason over faith, Gascoigne explains what constitutes the essence of a doctoral work: "[H]aec est opus doctorale, sc. magis aperire sensum seu intellectum et intentum verborum aliorum doctorum, quam ea frontose negare, vel ea falsa esse asserere, quorum sancta vita et doctrina per catholicam ecclesiam sunt approbata, lecta et praedicta, et magna reverencia digna."³⁹ Further on, a unique detail of Gascoigne's narrative that relates Pecock's wish to be examined by his intellectual equals (and not by his fellow bishops whom Pecock did not consider academically prepared) can only be interpreted – in the context of the whole narrative – as Pecock's fatal disorientation in his positioning as an academic.⁴⁰

Gascoigne's summary establishes a direct relation between Pecock's academic failure and the burning of his books. The public recantation of the heretical bishop is reassessed as an act of purifying the world of academia with a double purpose: Gascoigne restores academic autonomy by rejecting Pecock's example of political patronage in the academic career; at the same time, he subordinates this autonomy to absolute obedience to academic authority.

5.2. Contexts for Pecock's Writings

The constraints imposed by Arundel's Constitutions (1407/9) and the works advocating the archbishop's policies (*Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ* in Nicholas Love's translation, 1410, and Thomas Netter of Walden's *Doctrinale Antiquitatum Fidei Catholicae Ecclesiae*) also created a context for Pecock's writings. The limits set by these works have been studied from various angles, yielding occasionally contradictory conclusions.

³⁹ *Liber Veritatum*, p. 210.

⁴⁰ "Pecok episcopus, exclusus illo anno de concilio regis et regni, optavit et peccit quod non judicaretur secundum iudicium illorum doctorum, sed per sibi pares, quos estimabat esse non episcopos Angliae, qui tunc, ut credebant aliqui, inventi sunt minus habentes, sed optat habere tales examinatores librorum suorum quos ipse vocabat sibi pares in scolastica disputatione [...]." *Ibid.*, pp. 211-2. In his survey of the careers of 15th-century bishops, Joel Thomas Rosenthal argues that the generally high level of education among the bishops "served to blunt the bifurcation between *scholares* and the other bishops, for they were almost all university graduates." (Joel Thomas Rosenthal, "The Training of an Elite Group: English Bishops in the Fifteenth Century," *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society* New Series 60 (1970), p. 18.) Pecock's awareness of an intellectually deeply divided prelate (as revealed by the fact that Gascoigne attributes to him the criticism that bishops lack the qualities of efficient *scholares*) would rather indicate the continued perception of a barrier between the episcopal careers and the academic world. Although Rosenthal relies on the high proportion of well-trained bishops to undermine "the picture of intellectual torpor we are told prevailed at the English universities after the suppression of John Wycliffe and his followers," he also permits to assume that this generally high level of formal education did not result in levelling the intellectual capacities of the prelate: "[The] prevalence of well-educated men serves to emphasize the peculiar and limited nature of university training, in terms of who was being trained, and for what purpose. It is hard to measure intellectualism, but it is not so difficult to count graduates and degrees." (Rosenthal, *op. cit.*, p. 12.)

5.2.1. Nicholas Love

Scholars studying the implications of Arundel's Constitutions, especially the effects of the introduction of strict censorship of vernacular writings on Lollardy, have taken Nicholas Love's translation with predilection as a cornerstone example to illustrate the constraints imposed not only on devotional practices and biblical interpretation, but also on the author-reader relationship and the author's self-empowering strategies. Above all, it has been analysed as an official response to Lollardy confirmed by the recommendation of the Archbishop of Canterbury, Thomas Arundel in 1410. Michael G. Sargent's critical edition approaches the text as witness of a programmatic formulation of an attack against the Lollards.⁴¹ Nagy Zsuzsanna's study of the *Mirror* advances the claim that "the anti-Lollard programme was encoded into the text on a more indirect level [than textual allusions] as well, touching upon more aspects and points of critique exercised by Lollardy."⁴²

Elements of this less explicit Lollard polemic are also crucial in Kantik Ghosh's study on Love's concept of authority and his hermeneutic strategies. While Sargent's and – even – Nagy's analyses emphasise Love's "authoring" in terms of textual creativity (explicit refutations of Lollard thought, textual rearrangements, omissions, and remodelling the original), Kantik Ghosh sees all these efforts channelled into a withdrawal from a "theoretical consciousness of 'text;' [according to him, in Love's *Mirror*] what is of importance is a continuum of 'text' – both biblical and expository – and reader, the latter composing, within the broad outlines of the former, his own variations."⁴³ But the seeming disavowal of notions central to the Wycliffite thought, such as the 'text' carrying its own meaning in the literal sense independently from the reader's interpretive bias, consequently the separation of the text from interpretation, and finally, the role of reason in the reconstruction of a text's meaning, does not serve to construct authority entirely against the Wycliffite ideals.

Love's reactionary response is aware of the importance of the notions raised by Wyclif so that he visibly struggles with the incorporation of Wycliffite terms into his own arguments:

⁴¹ Michael G. Sargent, ed., *The Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ: A Critical Edition Based on Cambridge University Library Additional MSS 6578 and 6686*. (New York: Garland, 1992).

⁴² Nagy Zsuzsanna, "Orthodox Interpretation contra Heterodox Reinterpretation: *The Mirroure of the Blessed Lyf of Jesu Christ*," in Kathleen E. Dubs, ed., "*What Does It Mean?*" Pázmány Papers in English and American Studies. Vol. 3. (Piliscsaba: Department of English, Pázmány Péter Catholic University, 2004), p. 79.

⁴³ Kantik Ghosh, "Nicholas Love and the Lollards," in *The Wycliffite Heresy: Authority and the Interpretations of Texts*. (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 158. The expression "authoring" is borrowed from Mary Carruthers' remark on the genesis of medieval authority: "It is also important to recognize that there are two distinct stages involved in the making of an authority – the first is the individual process of 'authoring,' and the second is the matter of 'authorizing,' which is a social and communal activity." Cf. *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 189.

[...] Love is conscious of what is, in the Lollard context, his reactionary interpretative ideology. His work, while placing itself firmly in the camp of orthodoxy, also shows an uneasy attempt at coming to terms with the theoretical Lollard location of authoritative meaning in the 'literal' sense of the exact words of scripture understood according to the intention of the Holy Spirit. This duality in Love – emphasising the hermeneutic authority of the Church, and of the devout reader operating within the Church, while acknowledging the textual authority of scripture – finds [...] a parallel in the presentation of the text in most of the extant manuscripts.⁴⁴

This duality becomes most problematic in Love's overall concept of "devout imagination." Love's suggested method for the ideal application of the Gospel in private devotion implies an awareness of the "authentic" text of the Bible and distancing from it. Although Richard Beadle emphasises the fact that Love insisted on marking "his divagations from the canonical text," contrasting the paradigms of "scripture autentike" or "opunly preue" with "deuoute ymaginacion,"⁴⁵ there is no clear separation of the spheres, since the "text" is ultimately a continuum of Scripture, apocryphal material and additional "visual" reflections on them. The fusion of texts and materials of various authoritative forces (ranging on a wide spectrum from absolute authority, as the text of authentic scripture, to the additional "literal visualisations" with no authoritative support behind them) creates, however, a multi-layered text, which resists the systematic application of any of the debated interpretative modes of the day. Love's text is inherently closed at one end, since he constructs the pursuit of devout imagination on a given text, i.e. authentic scripture. But, the other – imaginative – end seems to be suspended in an undefined zone between the restricted and the infinite. As soon as Love opens up the way of individual interference in understanding and interpreting the Gospel by visualising any detail to an unlimited extent, he immediately restricts the "reasonable" dimensions of the pursuit of the imaginative method, and delimits them by a caution to the Church's authoritative vigilance in this sphere as well:

Bot now beware here þat þou erre not in imaginacion of god and þe holi Trinite, supposyng þat þees þre persones þe fadere þe son and þe holi gost bene as þre erþly men, þat þou seest with þi bodily eye, þe which ben þre diuerse substances, ech departed fro opere, so þat none of hem is oper. [...] Bot zit maiþ þou not vndirstande by mannes reson ne conceyue with þi bodily wit, and þefore take here a generale

⁴⁴ Ghosh, "Nicholas Love and the Lollards," p. 158.

⁴⁵ Richard Beadle, "'Devoute ymaginacioun' and the Dramatic Sense in Love's *Mirror* and the N-Town Plays," in Shoichi Oguro, Richard Beadle, Michael G. Sargent, eds., *Nicholas Love at Waseda*. Proceedings of the International Conference, 20-22 July 1995. (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1997), p. 10.

doctrine in þis mater now for algate. What tyme þou herest or þenkest of þe trinyte or of þe godhede or of gostly creatours as angeles and soules þe wheche þou maist not se in hire propre kynde with þi bodily eye, nor fele with þi bodily witte, study not to fer in þat matere occupy not þi wit þerwiþ als þou woldest vndurstande it, by kyndly reson, for it wil not be while we be in þis buystes body lyuyng here in erþe. And þerfore when þou herest any sich þinge in byleue þat passeþ þi kyndly reson, trowe sobfastly þat it is sob as holy chirch techeþ and go no ferþer.⁴⁶

The limitation of the imaginative/contemplative faculty empowers reason to extend its authority on a level the control of which is beyond its own capacity. But as Kantik Ghosh pointed out, Love maintains two visions of ‘reason,’ one with positive, the other with negative connotations:

[The] emphasis on reason ties in with Love’s general defensiveness in relation to the devout imagination, which ‘invents’ meanings (in both senses), and forms part of his response to Wycliffite insistence on ‘open reason’ in the interpretation of the Bible. In the passages [where] ‘reason’ is treated positively, [it appears] either as an aspect of the divine ordinance of things, or as an aspect of the ideal devotional mentalité. There is, however, another dimension to his response to ‘reason.’ In this more traditional scheme, the truths of faith transcend mere ‘reason’; therefore what is called for is ‘buxom’ acquiescence in the formulations of Holy Church. Anything in belief that passes ‘kyndly reson’ must be believed as true according to the dictates of the Church. Later, ‘reson’ is coupled with ‘sensualite’ [...] as part of the incomprehension inherent in the fallen human condition.

Reason, in Love’s terminology, becomes synonymous with transcendental truth that cannot be reasoned, but only imposed on man’s wit (which the Church as authority does); on the other hand, it expresses the inherent insufficiency of human intellect in its fallen state. The tension between the opposing aspects of reason is dissolved by passages where Love returns to St. Paul, and rephrases his caution to the Romans (Rom. 11:20). Passages trying to reconcile the two opposing aspects of reason (the fallen one, ever endeavouring to regain perfection, and the other that is given from above in form of a well-defined set of teaching pertaining to faith) borrow St. Paul’s imperative to cut fallen reason’s aspirations to seek higher. Thus Love translates his indeterminate restrictions on the free pursuit of contemplative devotion into the field of intellect.

⁴⁶ Michael G. Sargent, ed., *The Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ*, 22.6-31. (All further references to Love’s *Mirror* will be made to this edition.)

In his comment on the Incarnation (quoted above), the brief theological exposition on the Trinity immediately elicits Love's discouragement of studying too "far in þat matere." He makes this point even more explicit by replacing "the *Meditationes*' exhortation not to seek 'nouas deuociones et amicitias' with 'Seke not by curiosite newe knowleches and frendshipes.'"47 The "Treatise on the Sacrament," attached to the devotional treatise, confirms again the warning against seeking "curiously in ymaginacioun of reson þe merueiles of þis worþi sacrament" (229, 32-3). In the same context, Love, abandoning the cautionary tone of the warning in the Roman Epistle, adopts another passage of Paul's to reinstate the superiority of believing reason over arguing reason (or, with Pecock's term, the doom of reason): "þouh þere came done an Angele fro heuene and tauht þe contrarye [of what we believe by reason after the teaching of the Church], we sholde not 3iue credence to him, bot halde him as cursed" (239, 30-2). Both Love and Pecock apply exactly the same authorial strategy by adopting the same image of St. Paul's to defend their own notions of reason, which, however, are each other's opposites. Love carefully embeds his work not only in the context of the Church's overall supportive authority, but more concretely in a tribute to the implications of the authoritative exegetical approaches to Rom. 11:20. When Pecock argues that "we schulden truste more to the proof of [...] sillogisme, than to the contrarie seying of alle the aungels in heuene, for that alle Goddis creaturis musten nedis obeie to doom of resoun, and such a sillogisme is not ellis than doom of resoun," he is certainly not bound by the limitations that Love's work might have intended to impose

If there is an aspect of Love's *Mirror* that could be authoritative, or at least compelling, for Pecock, it is certainly the concern of the former about shaping his own audience as part of the process of self-authorisation. Opinions differ widely about Love's own concept of his audience. Until most recently, there it has been generally consented that Love's work targeted the lay devout requiring official guidance in their private devotional practices. As Karnes put it: "Because of its official approval by Archbishop Arundel in 1410, Love's *Mirror* has influentially been read as an expression of what the fifteenth-century church wanted lay devotion to be."⁴⁸ Contrary to such "influential readings," she goes on arguing that Love's text was adjusted to the needs of an audience as he perceived them, and which, therefore, was an audience of his own invention.⁴⁹ Karnes's analysis highlights that Love's lay

⁴⁷ Ghosh, "Nicholas Love and the Lollards," p. 249, note 29. For a different approach to this aspect of the *Mirror*, emphasising Love's fear of "excessive speculation on the part of his audience," cf.: Michelle Karnes, "Nicholas Love and Medieval Meditations on Christ," *Speculum* 82 (2007), p. 399.

⁴⁸ Karnes, op. cit., p. 384.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 385.

audience remains in “persisting infancy”⁵⁰; moreover, it is prevented by Love’s conscious projections from graduating to a higher state.⁵¹ As a consequence, she refutes notions which have traditionally emphasised the empowerment of the lay reader, and casts doubt on any supposition that associates Love’s concept of imagination with “promoting higher spiritual activity.”⁵²

The duality of empowering his audience versus projecting on it an infantile picture also emerge in Pecoock’s reflections on the readers he implies or really sees behind his writings. Even if this audience is difficult to grasp because of its volatile faces (Pecoock’s Lollard opponents, the ignorant lay devout, the university fellows and Pecoock’s learned friends), it is clear that Pecoock pursued an authorial strategy that, following Love, gained vigour from the shaping of their respective implied audiences. Love’s tentative experiment with taming a significant number of readers who were suddenly exposed to academic thought outside academic circles yields very dangerous fruits when Pecoock sets off on the same journey without official or academic support. As Kantik Ghosh concludes, [the *Mirror*] “bears witness to orthodox recognition of an important Lollard achievement: the breaking-down of the barrier between an enclosed academic milieu with its own rules and conventions of written communication, and a wider, comparatively unlearned world of lay devotion.”⁵³

5.2.2. The Limits Set by Thomas Netter of Walden

In the second part of her study entitled “Vernacular Philosophy and the Making of Orthodoxy in the Fifteenth Century,” Mishtooni Bose pursues a comparative reading of Netter’s preface to his *Doctrinale* with Pecoock’s prologue to *The Repressor of Over-Much Blaming of the Clergy*, which both elaborate on Paul’s injunction in 2 Tim 4:2 (“argue, obsecra, imprecra in omni patientia et doctrina”). The different treatments of the same biblical passage by the two authors illustrate “the difference between their respective intellectual orientations.”⁵⁴ Bose characterizes Netter’s process of argumentation as “the active disavowal of his own authorial agency [...] [whereby he] invites his readers to believe that a ready separation can be made between the work’s doctrine and its rhetoric, its demonstrations and

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 388.

⁵² Ibid., p. 389. Karnes quotes Sarah Beckwith to debate with the idea of the empowerment of the lay reader: “[The *Mirror*] unwittingly ‘gave an extraordinary dynamism to lay piety, whilst it subtly de-authorized clerical authority.’ [...] Love insists that the meditator’s imagining ‘not confuse what is spiritual with what is bodily, what is high [with] what is low.’” (Ibid., p. 388.)

⁵³ Ghosh, “Nicholas Love and the Lollards,” p. 173.

⁵⁴ Mishtooni Bose, “Vernacular Philosophy and the Making of Orthodoxy in the Fifteenth Century,” in Wendy Scase – Rita Copeland – David Lawton, eds., *New Medieval Literatures 7* (2005), p. 79.

its persuasions,” while “Pecock’s prologue is structured as an extended commentary on this text [...] [in which] he adapts the Pauline injunction to authorize what he intends as the emollient rhetorical tenor of the ensuing work.”⁵⁵

Kathryn Kerby-Fulton also acknowledges Netter’s *Doctrinale* as a significant act of imposing censorship and the voice of authority on intellectual activities; at the same time, she reminds us of cases that cast light on “tensions over intellectual freedom that existed both among and within certain clerical groups and orders.”⁵⁶ Although Netter’s work, written in the 1420s, provides a “clear, important, but rather late evidence for official thinking,” judgments concerning its authoritative status and its impact on contemporary as well as later opinions need to be assessed, as Kerby-Fulton warns us.⁵⁷ Kantik Ghosh’s chapter, analysing the similarities of hermeneutic methods in Thomas Netter of Walden’s *Doctrinale* and in the writings of his strange “hermeneutic *confrère*” Wyclif, may be a first step in this assessment – prior to Kerby-Fulton’s invitation to reconsider “England’s responses to heresy” after the Council of Constance.⁵⁸ Dichotomies perceived by modern scholars are often established to confirm a most luring division of late medieval England into the clashing worlds of orthodoxy and heterodoxy, authority and rebels, or censorship and the illicit. Yet, as Kantik Ghosh’s analysis of Netter’s hermeneutic methods or Pecock’s indebtedness to Wycliffite arguments and interpretations illustrate, the boundaries between methods and approaches attributable to one camp often blur with those of the other side. The complexity of this situation is also emphasized by Kerby-Fulton, who concludes that “the early fifteenth century was not a monolithic world of censorship.”⁵⁹ Furthermore, camps may not unequivocally be identified by their characteristic methods or interpretive premises. The overlaps between the argumentative strategies of Netter and Wyclif did not incur the suspicion of heresy on the former author, who was as determined to defend orthodoxy as the much more unfortunate Pecock some decades later. This uneasy discrepancy between Netter’s and Pecock’s contemporary acceptance may indicate that the notion of intellectual freedom (paired with

⁵⁵ Ibid., pp. 79-80.

⁵⁶ Kathryn Kerby-Fulton, *Books under Suspicion: Censorship and Tolerance of Revelatory Writing in Late Medieval England*. (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006), p. 81.

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 79.

⁵⁸ Kantik Ghosh, “Thomas Netter and John Wyclif: hermeneutic *confrères*?” in *The Wycliffite Heresy: Authority and Interpretation of Texts*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 174-208. The most important points of similarities include the two authors’ use of authorities, their distinction between text and interpretation, and both authors’ endeavour to separate ‘sense’ from ‘our sense’ as well as meaning residing in the text from interpretation (i.e. ‘elucidation’ from ‘addition’). “The academic, sceptical-rhetorical consciousness of the contingency of authorities and interpretations and their implicatedness in the uncertainties and mutabilities of various kinds of politics is rigorously – often uneasily – shunned by Netter: he is very much, like his opponent, arguing for determinate religious truth.” (Ibid., p. 174.)

⁵⁹ Kerby-Fulton, op. cit., p. 81.

intellectual authority) could not be applied collectively to certain groups or fractions of people within or outside academia, but seem to have been individual privileges acquired almost imperceptibly (to modern eyes) due to a unique constellation of intellectual, cultural, social, and political factors.

5.3. Pecock's Discourse on Knowledge

Although Pecock deviates, in many respects, from the models that provided examples for anti-Lollard discourse, he also adopted elements of Love's and Netter's authorial strategies and characteristics of their voices as well as of their authorial dilemmas to attain the same, obvious purpose: the refutation of Lollard heterodoxy. As the bishop admitted in several passages of his writings, he was determined to defeat Lollardy with an efficient argumentative strategy. This also implied his continuing respect for, and acceptance of, the thought the Catholic Church transmitted to those who adhered to it. Yet, all the charges brought against Pecock accuse the Bishop of Chichester with theological heterodoxy and an obstinate rejection of doctrinal tenets of the Church. Certainly, the absolute valorisation of the method based on the "doom of reason," i.e. an uncompromising reliance on syllogistic thinking, led Pecock to antagonistic conclusions whose dissonance with doctrinal axioms could have been dissolved by Pecock himself only in three ways: (1) by admitting the error of his own intellectual footing, (2) by remaining consistent to his own intellectual method and thus claim that some of the Church's axioms cannot be maintained, or (3) by revising his own, purely intellectual approach and, finally, come to the insight that the doctrinal and, more generally, the ecclesiastical crisis of his age cannot be treated from such an intellectually pragmatic perspective. Pecock mainly applied the second way to spare his integrity of argument. It, however, became impossible for him to persuade authorities that his conclusions clashing with orthodox doctrines are compatible with unquestionable loyalty to the Church.

In an overall evaluation of the Pecock controversy, it is very tempting to interpret the case as the clash of alternative paradigms of the acquisition of knowledge, and in general, of a failed attempt to remove the taboos on uncontrolled intellectual quests. The previous analyses of this chapter pointed out that Pecock's contemporaries did not realise in the bishop's endeavour anything close to ushering in a new paradigm. Most of his opponents perceived his challenge only in terms of a power struggle whose aim was the appropriation of status and authority, and forced Pecock into the long-trodden path of an exegetical debate over taboos on intellectual quests (after Saint Paul). Indeed, Pecock's arguments did not represent a break-

through in the history of the concepts of cognition, even if many of his ideas appeared surprising for the contemporaries. On the other hand, he apparently fashioned a new type of authority of knowledge in his own person as author. While the surface audacity of his arguments collapses in crucial instances (revealing that the “doom of reason” is by far not as omnipotent as it is presented), he uncompromisingly deconstructs the boundaries of a closed academic terrain. Although the purposes of the “excluded” scholar sided with current academic urges to change the existing scholastic system (especially the academic study of theology), including also those of his harshest critic Thomas Gascoigne, the proposals for scholastic reforms did not revise the long-standing consensus on the concept of academic authority.⁶⁰

5.3.1. Pecock’s “kunnyngal vertues”

The wide range of manifestations of knowledge and science derives, in Pecock’s system presented in *The Folewer to the Donet*, from what he labels as “kunnyngal vertues.”⁶¹ His ambitious attempt to overarch all intellectual activities (not only human, but angelic as well) in a systematic classification constitutes actually a parallel experiment with scientific classification and vernacular creation. In the exposition of the meaning of “kunnyngal vertues,” Pecock proceeds to the definition of five kinds of virtues he distinguishes in this category: intellect, speculative science, prudence, craft and opinion. For Pecock, intellect is a set of truths, self-evident for reason, that do not require further demonstration. If a truth is indirectly proved by another truth more open to reason, it is called “kunnyng.”⁶² “Kunnyng” is further divided into science and opinion according to the degree of the certainty of the knowledge acquired, while each of these two categories bifurcates into practical and speculative aspects.

⁶⁰ Jeremy Catto outlines the tendency behind the work of individual innovators and reform-minded scholars at Oxford University as follows: “A [...] detachment from academic theology can be detected among the theologians at Oxford. Fitzralph and Wyclif had rejected the ‘frogs and toads, croaking in the swamp’ of vain speculation, and their sentiments were echoed throughout the fifteenth century: by Dr Thomas Gascoigne, who looked to Jerome for a model of plain biblical learning, and rejected knowledge reputed ‘subtle’; by the young chancellor William Gay and his colleague Robert Fleming, who left Oxford to study theology at Cologne and then at Padua [...] by Dr John Colet, for whom it was an arrogance for Aquinas to have ‘defined everything’; and implicitly by Pecock.” Catto quoted by Kantik Ghosh, *The Wycliffite Heresy: Authority and the Interpretation of Texts*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 213.

⁶¹ “kunnyngal vertues ben þo vertues whiche disposen, araien and parfiten þe resoun or þe vndirstondyng or þe intellect, so þat bi hem the hauer of hem, whepir he be man or aungel, is knowyng sum þing, and perfore þei resten and ben placid in þe vndirstondyng or þe intellect or resoun, as in her propir place.” Reginald Pecock, *The Folewer to the Donet*. Edited by Elsie Vaughan Hitchcock. (London: Oxford University Press, 1924), p. 47. All further references to the *Folewer* will be to this edition.

⁶² *Folewer*, p. 48.

Evidently, Pecock's system differs considerably from the early medieval classifications of sciences that had established a binding tradition for later thought.⁶³ Pecock creates an open system which does not insist on labelling all the existing and academically acknowledged fields of science, but attempts to model the dynamism of human reason with the consideration of some of the basic parameters of human thinking: the first category (intellect) is created by the notion of "paradigmatic" versus "non-paradigmatic," i.e. truths self-evident (considered to be unquestionable, unalterable and universal) distinguished from all other pieces of knowledge that are processed by way of demonstrations. The second parameter of knowledge constitutes certainty (science vs. opinion), and the third one the degree of abstraction (practical vs. speculative). The system is almost overanxious to fulfil the scholastic criterion of the symmetry of divisions, since it rigidly advances from the higher categories to lower divisions through binary oppositions. In the end, Pecock is drawn into an automatic generation of categories which he seemingly finds difficult to maintain, let alone to define them. Whether there is any sense in distinguishing "prudential" and "craftial" science from "prudential" and "craftial" opinion must have preoccupied him as well, since in the rest of the definitions he detaches the treatment of opinion from all other manifestations of science (speculative science, prudence and craft).⁶⁴

Even if Pecock struggles with conceiving a dynamic model of intellectual activities, whose shortcomings derive from the impossibility of accommodating the dynamic to a static (and rigid) frame, his first attempt to create a synthesis of the manifestations of the intellect is a feat of creating a scientific language in the vernacular. Similarly to Nicholas Love, concerns about the role of the vernacular affecting the conditions of the reception of the text by an unfathomable lay readership, are also central to Pecock's discourse.⁶⁵ Reflections on his own use of the vernacular do not only focus on measuring the capacities of English to Latin, as Theresa Kemp has demonstrated, but also on distinguishing "the right kind of vernacular," adequate for the purposes of the transmission of his intended message as well as for the uncorrupted reception of the texts by his implied audience, from other inadequate forms of

⁶³ Cf. the review of coexisting classifications in the background of the N-Town pageant in Chapter 4

⁶⁴ Although in Pecock's treatment the categories of prudence and craft permit themselves to be applied for the fields of science and opinion, Pecock evidently resigns on the second implication, and delimits prudence and craft primarily as manifestations of science. This is confirmed by the fact that he created a separate category for opinion in the list of "kunnyngal vertues." Cf. *Folewer*, pp. 48-9.

⁶⁵ Cf., e.g., the prologue to the *Donet*, where Pecock alludes to the other works of his discussing the risks and adventures of composing in the vernacular: "If enye man wole wite whi Y make this book and othire bokis in the common peplis langage, turne he into the v first chapitris of the book clepid *Afore Crier* [a book lost] and into the first prolog of the book clepid *Cristen Religioun* [*The Reule of Chrysten Religioun*], and there he mai see therof the causis, whiche, as Y trust, ben of God and of eche man allowable and preisable." (The excerpt from the *Donet* contributed by Ian R. Johnson to Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, et al., eds., *The Idea of the Vernacular: An Anthology of Middle English Literary Theory, 1280-1520*. (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1999), p. 98.

discourse.⁶⁶ In this distinction, the gendered mode of authorizing his own voice becomes instrumental, as it is inherent in the very genre of the polemical dialogue between a father (or master) figure instructing a young pupil thirsting for the knowledge of the elder:

Nowhere is the vernacular's paradox of potential more clearly seen than in the case of Reginald Pecock's reformist use of English to defend the Church against the laity's growing religious discontent. [...] Pecock does not juxtapose English against Latin, but rather sets up two types of the vernacular, one good and one bad. What distinguishes "good" from "bad" English is a sense of being in its proper place: the mother tongue does not belong outside the home - indeed, outside the nursery. In all his works, when writing about his own use of the vernacular, English becomes the ungendered (and thus implicitly "universally" masculine) "comoun peplis langage." When writing about "tho unsavery bokis" read by "foolish and presumptuous soortis of peple," however, Pecock labels English as the "modiris langage," rendering it at best an immature "baby's" language and at worst the transgressively feminized language of religious error.⁶⁷

The empowerment of the vernacular is not without risks. In the experiment of combining new modes of vernacular expression with persistent reflections on his rhetorical and argumentative methods, Pecock is aware of his exposure to his own vulnerability as author and authority.⁶⁸ To counterbalance this, he projects a dual vision on the vernacular (valorising and discrediting its expressive capabilities at the same time), and proceeds to juxtaposing parallel schemes (one transgressing, or distancing from, conventional conceptions, while the other incorporating them). Such is the case of the dual approach to the classification of sciences.

In the second approach to an overall classification of sciences, Pecock returns to ancient and early medieval models. This approach cannot be reconciled with the previous one, since the first presents a dynamic model breaking with the legacy of the earlier static classifications of sciences, whereas the second indirectly acknowledges that such static models are indispensable for scientific discourse. Nevertheless, Pecock does not discard the

⁶⁶ Theresa Kemp, "The *Lingua Materna* and the Conflict Over Religious Discourse," *Philological Quarterly* 78 (1999), p. 245.

⁶⁷ Ibid. For further discussions of Pecock's use of the vernacular and the interrelations of his vernacular voice with the authorial persona of his writings, cf.: Mishtooni Bose, "Reginald Pecock's Vernacular Voice," in Fiona Somerset, Jill C. Havens and Derrick G. Pitard, eds., *Lollards and Their Influence in Late Medieval England*. (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2003), pp. 217-36; and Lynn Forest-Hill, "Mankind and the Fifteenth-Century Preaching Controversy," *Medieval and Renaissance Drama in England* 15 (2002), pp. 17-42, esp. pp. 19-20.

⁶⁸ Mishtooni Bose asserts that the basis for Pecock's authority is "a calculated but clearly risky investment in the acknowledged vulnerability of the individual 'seier or techer,' a stance that emphasised Pecock's separateness not only from his potential lay audience but also, and more controversially, from his fellow-clergy. [Pecock's self-disclosure] occasionally left him poised between authority and vulnerability." ("Reginald Pecock's Vernacular Voice," p. 223.

first model for the sake of the second. One of the reasons for the juxtaposition of two different categorisations is that Pecock in the first instance elaborates on vernacular technical terminology which he applies to the discussion of classical scientific models. Secondly, he may also suggest that the two models could be used in a complementary way, implying that without the dynamic aspects of the work of the human intellect no encompassing classification can be achieved.

The second scientific model reproduces the tripartite classification of sciences, where “knowing and opinion” is divided into (1) crafts, i.e. truths and opinions belonging to “þings makable”; (2) prudence, i.e. truths and opinions belonging to governance (“þings doable); and (3) speculative science, i.e. speculative truths proved by the intellect belonging to “beholdable” and understandable things. Crafts involve the *métiers*, such as e.g. carpentry, tailoring or masonry. Prudence is an elaboration on the Aristotelian trinity; it branches into five subdivisions: (1) the study of the laws of God (further divided into God’s law and positive law), (2) the study of the laws of clergy (canon law), (3) the study of the laws of princes (civil law), (4) merchandising, and (5) economy / husbandry. The category of speculative science involves metaphysics, natural philosophy, medicine, and the *quadrivium*.⁶⁹ Pecock’s model is very eclectic to derive it from any of the dominant concepts of classification. In traces, we can detect a probable influence of Hugh of Saint Victor’s model explained in his *Didascalía* – with two major and telling deviations from it. Hugh divides philosophy into four branches: theoretical, practical, mechanical and logic. All of these, except for logic, can be paralleled to Pecock’s divisions. Pecock, however, entirely omits the *trivium* from his system, and removes theology from its privileged status (the highest theoretical science) to prudence, which can be equalled with Hugh of St. Victor’s practical sciences.⁷⁰ Both of these alterations reflect upon Pecock’s underlying endeavour to reshape the academic canon, and to claim an authoritative role for himself in the field of sciences that he actually discards from his system. The role and place of theology is wholly linked to the discussion of the intricate relationship between faith and reason in Pecock’s writings, which will be treated in the next section.

A more surprising change in Pecock’s model, which becomes even more emphatic by a comparison of Pecock’s exposition on sciences to other concepts of scientific classification, is the omission of the foundation of all sciences, the *trivium*. In Pecock’s system the sciences related to the art of grammar, rhetoric and logic do not need to be evoked as categories that

⁶⁹ See the full exposition of the classification in *Folewer*, p. 49.

⁷⁰ For a review of Hugh’s classification, cf.: James Weisheipl, “Classification of the Sciences in Medieval Thought,” *Mediaeval Studies* 27 (1965), pp. 65-6.

point to external referents (signified) outside Pecock's works. Pecock's discourse inherently contains the author's demonstration of his "trivial" expertise; moreover, the pragmatic application of the three sciences of the *trivium* serves the purposes of self-authorisation as well as the transfer of scientific discourse to non-scientific (non-academic) contexts. The abstract notion of grammar becomes redundant by Pecock's creation of a scientific language in the vernacular, while logic is internalised in the fact that Pecock chooses the syllogistic method, the alpha and omega of logic, to govern his argumentative strategy. Finally, Pecock's ascribing himself to certain literary traditions by providing an obviously rhetorical frame to his own scientific or devotional discourse uses rhetoric and the concept of the literary author to extend or remove the limits of scientific discourse set by academic authorities. This latter – rhetoricising – technique seems to be operative in the "entre or [...] introductorie" to *The Reule of Crysten Religioun* as well as in the classification of sciences in *The Folewer to the Donet*.

5.3.2. Rhetoric as a Means of Self-Authorisation

Mishtooni Bose, in her analysis of the second prologue to the *Reule*, suggested a comparative reading with Christine de Pizan's *Le livre de la cité des dames* (1405), since "a Boethian frame of reference [which was imitated by Pecock as traditional scholarship has maintained] does not by itself adequately account for the precise terms in which Pecock presents his self-authorisation."⁷¹ In this second prologue following a formal preface to the *Reule*, Pecock as the first person narrator in his "inward turnyng, wiþ bisynes maad to avoide and remove alle obstaclis of outward entermetynge whiche schulde in eny degree schadowe þe soule from þe resonyng illumynyng and from his cleere list into it schynyng,"⁷² experiences a revelation. The truths of philosophy, "longe tyme exilid" from the land of reasonable souls,⁷³ personified by a multitude of beautiful ladies, complain to Pecock that the clerks who have espoused them are more attracted by the daughters of men, and thus they engendered giants, i.e. huge volumes of spiritually dry writings, instead of the "religiouse and goostlie progenye" which should be in accordance with the fruit and dignity of the alliance between the sons and daughters of God.⁷⁴

⁷¹ Mishtooni Bose, "The Annunciation to Pecock: Clerical *Imitatio* in the Fifteenth Century," *Notes and Queries* 47 (2000), p. 173.

⁷² Reginald Pecock, *The Reule of Crysten Religioun*. Edited from Pierpont Morgan MS 519 by William Cabell Greet. EETS. (reprint of the first edition of 1927 by Millwood, New York: Kraus Reprint, 1987), p. 31. All further references to the *Reule* will be made to this edition.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 33.

The women offer themselves to Pecock, commanding that he allow them 'to sette in thee oure charmyng, and as thou schalt receyue so sette thou forth in wrytyng.' The entre thus concludes with an allegorized and explicitly eroticized transmission of philosophical and religious knowledge, as each of the women embraces him in turn. Pecock concludes by making explicit connections between the several sections of the ensuing (and unfinished) work and the 'special' truths which are 'enbrethid' (quite literally 'inspired') by the women.⁷⁵

In the discussion of the way Pecock consolidates his authority by an allegory, (probably) imitating Christine de Pizan's "transformation of the conventional metaphors for textual creation,"⁷⁶ Mishtooni Bose points out an underlying contradiction between the inherently authoritative status of the narrator as a "rising clerk" and his reliance on a *topos* "of obvious value for the empowering of a female writer, but less obviously necessary for a clerk supposedly secure in the authority of his gender, his profession, and his avowed orthodoxy."⁷⁷ Bose's conclusion proposes that Pecock's allegorical entry ultimately serves the empowerment of the vernacular for his own purposes:

In the entre to Pecock's Reule, therefore it is possible to detect a reciprocal process: the troping of the quest for authority by a clerk about to embark on a similarly unprecedented project: the discussion of theology (as opposed to mystical experience) in the vernacular. This was an undertaking for which Pecock had few precedents among the orthodox, and rather more among heretical or otherwise controversial writers. [...] Although it would be unwise to attribute a single purpose to this complex entre, it may also have provided a means for Pecock to articulate an acknowledgement of the fact that by using the vernacular to extend clerical authority into controversial literary territory, he was also courting certain kinds of vulnerability.⁷⁸

Similarly, an allegorical literary tradition seems to underlie the passage on the multiple divisions of sciences in Pecock's *Folewer*. The surprisingly close parallel to Pecock's methods of constructing the total panorama of the scientific world is, this time, not a precedent, but a later literary summary of the process of sciences. The fifteenth-century anonymous allegorical poem, *The Court of Sapience*, embodies an ambitious attempt to visualise, in an allegorical framework, the manifold traditions of the classification of sciences

⁷⁵ Bose, "The Annunciation to Pecock," p. 172.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 175.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

distilled from academic experience for a supposedly non-academic application.⁷⁹ The poem also juxtaposes different concepts of scientific division without attributing priority to any of the models. The first vision of a systematic classification appears in stanzas 220-1 of Book II, which elaborates on a most ancient *topos* of the seven liberal arts serving theology: Dame Theology is escorted by seven ladies, the allegorical figures of the liberal arts; all of them salute Dame Sapience, the queen of the court of all knowledge, in a humble way. This initial vision of a scientific hierarchy enclosing all sciences is, however, immediately stretched out by accessing to a higher perspective, which permits to perceive Dame Philosophy – “[k]nowleche of erthely and eke heuynly thyng; / [y]ioynyd wyth sad study, and [the] fyne / [o]f honest gouernaunce and good lyuyng; / [...] also the probabyll connyng”⁸⁰ – as the figure who introduces new concepts of knowledge. Philosophy appears as an allegorical substitute for Sapience, since she comprises all knowledge (earthly and heavenly) - both certain and uncertain. This model is an alternative schema of the division of sciences, which – similarly to Pecoock – does not insist on a static tableau encompassing all academic fields, but attempts to create a dynamic model on the basis of a concept that derives (certain) knowledge from (uncertain) suppositions and hypotheses.

After the first division of philosophy into science and opinion, the poet of the *Court of Sapience* provides two alternative definitions (and classifications) of the same philosophy. In the first one, philosophy has a tripartite division into “phिसica” (i.e. natural philosophy), “ethica” (moral philosophy), and “logica” (rational philosophy).⁸¹ It comes only as a retarded addition to the scheme, in stanza 232, that this all-encompassing division of philosophy is subordinated to divinity, since the three main branches of sciences are subservient to Scriptural studies. In what follows, the poet presents an alternative static model for the division of philosophy, where the two main branches are labelled “inspectyf” and “actuall.”⁸² In this division, “diuinall” philosophy (which discerns invisible things) is integrated into the schema of intellectual activities as a subdivision of speculative sciences. What has been concluded for Pecoock concerning the irreconcilable duality of the dynamic and static models of scientific classifications is also true for the procedure of the *Court of Sapience*. But, while

⁷⁹ The poem survives in three MSS (two of them from the second half of the 15th century, while the third being a 16th-century copy of Caxton’s print) and two prints by Caxton and Wynkyn de Worde. Robert Spindler, in the prologue to his edition of the poem in 1927, refutes the consensus of early scholarship that ascribed the poem to Lydgate. Cf.: *The Court of Sapience*. Edited by Robert Spindler. Beiträge zur Englischen Philologie. Heft 6. (Leipzig: Verlag von Bernhard Tauchnitz, 1927), p. 7. All further quotes from the *Court of Sapience* will be taken from this edition.

⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 186.

⁸¹ Ibid., p. 187.

⁸² Ibid.

in Pecoock's treatise the juxtaposition of the different divisions seemed to emphasise complementary aspects of the scientific discourse, the *Court*-poet uses the different concepts of scientific classifications as versions of a substantially immutable intellectual tradition in which all scientific inquiries are subordinated to the elucidation of faith.

The descriptions of the different scientific models fulfil only an intermediary role in the overall structure of the poem. The court of Sapience represents an allegorical refuge for the poet – even if temporary and spatially indefinite as the setting for a dream allegory can be – where he is taken by his vision from his worldly meditations whose unstable foundation is expressed with the allegory of playing chess without knowing its rules. But this refuge is only a transitory one, since the allegorical procession of sciences continues in a tract on faith, necessarily implying a change in the poem's allegorical setting. The image of the tower, appearing at structurally determining points of the work (as we could see earlier in a passage preparing Philosophy's entry, suggesting the necessary extension of the vision's horizon to include a broader concept of knowledge), marks here another switch of the allegorical context, and initiates the reader into the supra-rational sphere of faith. The dwelling place of Dame Faith is a solemn and glorious tower; the elevation to new heights emphasises the dynamic progress of the poem from the world towards heaven. The ascent to the region of faith as the coronation of the poetic endeavour to assign any meaningful purpose to the literary rehearsal of the classification of sciences means, at the same time, the impossibility to continue the allegorical journey, since the poet admits to have reached the limits of expression and the boundaries his own authority does not permit to transgress:

*These artycles [the articles of faith] with other poyntes al,
That longeth to the holy Trynyte,
Dame Feyth herself gan telle in specyall,
With al the secretes of the deyte,
[The] whiche in Englysshe not reherced be;
Suche thyng as shold be pryuate and occult
I rede we leue, and take quicumque vult.⁸³*

The poet invokes the prohibition to discuss theological issues in the vernacular, by which he submissively renounces on the continuation of an eventual experiment with the vernacular in the domain of divinity. The Latin conclusion of this macaronic stanza marks the gesture of reinstating Latin in a position where the competence and authority of English have expired. Nevertheless, this gesture also casts doubt on the necessity of this change of guard in

⁸³ Ibid., p. 211.

the scientific discourse. The poet demonstrated the possibility of transposing an academic treatise not only into a non-academic (literary) medium, but also into the vernacular. The poet thus has a contradictory attitude to his own vernacular creation: he seems to attribute only a secondary role to English, and consents to put an abrupt end to his literary experiment under the pressure of the strictest prohibitions on extra-mural discussions of theological matters.

Latin and English are interwoven in the poem in a very intricate way. The treatise that the poet conceived as an academic composition as the heading of the first treatise indicates (“Here begynneth a breue compilyd tretyse callyd by the auctor therof: *Cura Sapiencie*”⁸⁴) is structured by Latin *implicits* and *explicitis*. The internal changes of speakers are most of the time indicated by Latin speech prefixes. Finally, interspersed in the poem, especially at the beginning of Book I, long Latin glosses interrupt the continuity of the English stanzas, and delineate definitions and authorities which the poem is supposed to render in a vernacular poetic diction. The Latin note between stanzas 20 and 21 of Book I and the ensuing English exposition on the distinctions between *sapientia*, *intellectus*, and *prudencia* in stanzas 22-3 illustrate the poet’s real concerns of establishing a close, at the same time artificial, vernacular parallel to the established Latin scientific discourse. The distinction of the three basic epistemological categories goes as follows in the Latin note:

*Differunt tamen sapientia, intellectus et prudencia, quia sapientia valet ad solius eterne veritatis contemplacionem et delectacionem, intellectus vel intelligentia ad creature vel creaturarum inuisibilium speculationem, sciencia [=prudencia in the earlier division] ad rectam administracionem rerum temporalium et ad bonam inter malos conuersacionem. Et qualiter intellectus, sciencia et sapientia, que sunt dona spiritus sancti, differunt ab intellectu, sciencia et sapientia, que sunt naturaliter in anima. Vide per doctores et per Januensem in suo Catholicon in verbo: Sapientia.*⁸⁵

The Latin gloss is either a personal note of the author to outline further possibilities of discussing a question (on which he may elaborate in the English rendering), or is a text that invites an implied scholarly reader to enter into a dialogue that, with its further implications, leads away from the actual poem. The parallel English passage of stanzas 22-3 experiments with the rhetorical possibilities of the same scientific discourse rendered as the monologue of Dame Sapience. This speech, however, does not address the questions that the Latin gloss left open:

‘Hyt is my part to know diuinite,

⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 126.

⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 129.

*My sustyr here hath knowlege diligent
Of creatures in heuen and erthe content,
And Dame Science of thyngis temporall
Hath knowlege pure; thus mayst thou know vs all.*

*'Of vs all thre I am the most souerayn,
And yf the lyst me discryue and defyne,
I am the trew propyr knowlege certayn
Of erthely thyng, and eke of thyng diuynne.⁸⁶*

The context of the vernacular composition for the poet is the allegorical dream vision in which he embeds the English rendering of the classification of sciences. Pecoock also ascribes himself to this safe literary tradition (upon which the *Court*-poet relied as well), but evidently renounces on all its literary associations in his discussion of the division of sciences. As opposed to the poet of the *Court of Sapience*, Pecoock does not append the vernacular version of the scientific models to an implied Latin ideal, but places it in the focus of his argument and reconstructs it to support his self-authorisation. Interestingly, he intends to return to the academic debate on the content, boundaries and authorities of knowledge with literary inventions barred from the modes of academic discourse. Pecoock uses the achievements of a well-established vernacular literary convention of the process of sciences (that culminates in the profuse allegorical poem, the *Court of Sapience*) as a natural bridge between non-academic modes of scientific discourse in the vernacular and academic self-reflections.

5.3.3. Knowledge beyond Its Own Scope? – Wisdom and Faith

Another most conspicuous innovation in Pecoock's classification is his deviation from the conventional and commonsensical treatments of "wisdom" and "faith" in the scheme modelling the manifestations of the human intellect at different levels. To mark this important premise characteristic of Pecoock's approach to sciences and thinking, he invests the naive pupil of the *Folewer* with the capacity of bringing very reasonable and mature objections to the exposition of the father's "kunnyngal virtues." Pecoock exploits the potentialities of the roles the fictional pupil of the dialogue may fulfil, and makes him intervene with remarks

⁸⁶ Ibid., pp. 129-30.

eliciting the author's definitions of "wisdom" and faith" as well as their relation with the five intellectual virtues:

[F]Adir, y muste argue azens zoure doctrine of þe v seid knowal vertues, fforwhi, fadir, y haue herde wijsdom to be nombrið boþe of Aristotil and of doctouris as for oon of þe knowal vertues, and ze setten him not in zoure nombre of knowal vertues; wherfore it myzte seme þat zoure seid nombre is insufficient. Also, fadir, neiþir Aristotil neiþir oþire comune expositouris holden þat opynyoun is a vertu, and ze nombre opynyoun for a vertu; wherfore it semep þat zoure doctrine is not trewe, or ellis þat þei conceyueden as in þat amys. Also, fadir, if opynyoun be a knowal vertu, bi lijk skile feiþ schulde be a knowal vertu, and zit ze nombre not feiþ among zoure knowal vertues; wherfore it myzte seme þat zoure bifore goyng nombre is not sufficient forto comprehende alle knowal vertues.⁸⁷

The ensuing passage of Chapter 12 of the *Folewer* summarises Pecock's response to the objections. Pecock reminds his pupil of the compelling force of a definition previously accepted, thus warns of the relativity of interpretation depending on a set of premises that had been agreed upon. He does not refute the validity of Aristotle's categories, but admits that the philosopher's categorisation is due to his method of division.⁸⁸ Pecock recurs to a definition of "wisdom" that permits to explain this category not as a distinct degree of science or knowledge, but as "þe hizest parti of ech science, for þe hizest parti of ech prudence, and for þe hizest parti of ech craft."⁸⁹ He justifies this use of the term by a reference to a wide-spread practice in "comune speche," according to which the superlatives of "kunnyng," "prudent," and "crafti" are interchangeable with "wise," as illustrated by the examples of "a wise geometrer," "a wise man of lawe" and "a wise carpenter or masoun" describing the same reality as "a ful mych kunnyng geometrer," "a ful mych prudent man [of lawe]" or "a ful

⁸⁷ *The Folewer to the Donet*, pp. 54-5.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 61: "[i]n þilk [Aristotle's] wey of procedyng in which he wente, and in which summe oþire goon folewyng him, wijsdom may be nombrið as oon of þe knowal vertues, *namlich aftir her entent*, which was þat we schulden knowe þe treuþ, þou3 not aftir moost cleer and kunnyngful mynstryng to vs." (italics mine)

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 55.

mych crafti man,” respectively.⁹⁰ Consequently, “wisdom” becomes a quantitative variant of the intellectual virtues of science, prudence and craft, i.e. their fullest achievement.

Following the discussion of wisdom, Pecock proceeds to the definition of faith. This passage revisits his argument presented in the *Book of Faith*, and briefly recaptures the more lengthy expositions of that book.⁹¹ The most general definition of faith encompasses all sorts of knowledge (“knowyng”) in the term which “a man gendriþ and getiþ into his undirstonding, principali bi þe telling or denouncing of anoþer persoone, which may not lie, or which is God.”⁹² Faith is identified as a branch of “kunnyng” or opinion, which differs from the other intellectual virtues in that the acquisition of its truths does not happen “bi naturall witte.”⁹³ Thus, the different kinds of faiths are distinguished only according to the credence necessarily applied when accepting a truth of faith. Although the mechanisms of the acquisition of scientific evidence and of accepting faith (from a full certain source, i.e. God) are inherently different, the results of the two acquisitions meet paradoxically in the same end. As “intellect” is a category, in Pecock’s system, where indefinable truths are stored to provide premises for syllogistic processes, its fruits – if reasonably obtained – cannot be questioned. Similarly, faith that derives from the most certain and unquestionable evidence (i.e. divine revelations) provide premises for human thinking that operate like the self-evident truths of the intellect. Although Pecock does not draw a parallel between the two categories, he basically suggests that faith is as paradigmatic as the content of human intellect.

⁹⁰ Ibid. A similar argumentative strategy appears in Part II, Chapter 3 of *The Repressor of Over Much Blaming of the Clergy*, where Pecock provides linguistic arguments for the defence of images. He refutes charges against the veneration of images (identifying it as idolatry) with pointing out that the object represented is necessarily different from its signified. To prove this, he recurs to analogous linguistic examples, some wide-spread metaphors and cases of “figuratiþf spech,” where the surface identity of the referent and the referred does not confuse anyone in keeping the two aspects apart. The fact that images are often called by the name of the saint they represent is not a proof for Pecock to identify the cult of images with idolatry, since he observes that (1) buried dusts are also referred to as persons (e.g., “Here lays my grandfather.”), and (2) tapestries with figures are also read as historical narratives (e.g., “Here rides King Alfred.”). His justification of images is shifted to the justification of metaphors, which, however, do not need to be argued for with much effort, since they are characteristic of the everyday use of language: “þe ymage or the likenes of a þing mai be clepid bi þe name of þe þing of which he is ymage and likenes, and þat þe parti of a þing mai be clepid vnder and bi þe name of þis hool.” Cf.: Reginald Pecock, *The Repressor of Over Much Blaming of the Clergy*. Vol. 1. Edited by Churchill Babington. (London: Longman, 1860), Part II, Chapter 3, pp. 150-1. All references to the *Repressor* will be made to this edition.

⁹¹ The discussion of *Folewer*, Chapter 12, pp. 62-4 is closely related to the elucidation of premises in Part I, Chapter 1 and Chapter 3 of the *Book of Faith*. Cf.: Reginald Pecock, *Book of Faith: A Fifteenth Century Theological Tractate from the MS in the Library of Trinity College, Cambridge*. Edited by J. L. Morison. (Glasgow: James Maclehose and Sons, 1909), pp. 121-6 and 140-2. All further references to this work will be made to this edition.

⁹² *Book of Faith*, p. 123. Cf. also the definition in the *Folewer*: “ffeþ takun propirli is a knowyng wherbi we assenten to eny þing as to trouþ, for as mych as we haue sure euydencis, or ful notable likli euydencis grettir þan to þe contrari, þat it is toold and affermyd to vs to be trewe bi him of whom we haue sure euydencis, or notable likli euydencis grettir þan to þe contrari, þat þerinne he not lyed.” (*Folewer*, p. 62.)

⁹³ *Book of Faith*, p. 124.

In the *Folewer*, Pecock hesitates whether to redefine and to narrow down the meaning of “science” and “opinion” in the light of the conclusions drawn from the discussion of faith. He admits that “faith” could be treated as the sixth “kunnyngal” virtue, but then the two other categories ought to be redefined in a narrower sense so that we should detract the faith-element from both “science” and opinion.” Thus “sciential feip” and “opynyonal feip” would not be incorporated in the respective categories of “science” and “opinion” any more, but would be reintegrated as a new virtue labelled “faith.”⁹⁴ Yet, Pecock attributes no significance to the difference between his original classification and this alternative, and entrusts the reader with choosing the more sympathetic taxonomy for himself. Whether “faith” is an inherent part of “science” and “opinion,” or represents a separate category, does not seem to modify Pecock’s ultimate finding: the truths of faith are akin to the paradigmatic premises of the intellect that create and delimit the broadest frame of interpretation for human thinking.

It is not by a logical *tour de force*, but rather due to an insight into the implications of this idea, that Pecock turns to the discussion of the relation of faith to evidence and to the natural process of reason in the immediately ensuing chapter of the *Book of Faith*. The process of his investigation is transferred to a more global context, i.e. the truths as revealed by Christianity, Judaism and Islam.⁹⁵ Pecock’s contradictory efforts to free reason from its limitedness to a conceptual frame determined by faith, on the one hand, and to return to the reduction that the Christian faith establishes the truths only accordant with reason, on the other, attest to an argument in which Pecock, in the end, lacks the vision that could integrate the aspects of rationality and faith beyond reason. Pecock struggles with fixing the borders between the realms of reason’s competence and the sphere beyond, which he is not able to set with the help of his definitions. Paradoxically, his view based on the omnipotence of reason is impaired by the signs of Pecock’s deeper doubts in such a system. In the following, the analysis of some crucial passages of Pecock’s writings will elucidate that reason also had its boundaries.

5.3.4. Conclusion: The Boundaries of Omnipotent Reason Redrawn

In Pecock’s system, the categories of “wisdom” and “faith” are only incorporated as qualitative variants of certain stages of knowledge (science, opinion). The real challenge of his system is, however, hidden in the argumentations pertaining to the depth of belief. In Part II, Chapter 8 of his *Repressor of Over Much Blaming of the Clergy*, a voluminous treatise in

⁹⁴ *Folewer*, p. 64.

⁹⁵ Cf.: *Book of Faith*, Part I, Chapter 2, pp. 128-36.

defence of the Catholic Church against Lollard heresies, Pecock enlists arguments why the Lollard refutation of pilgrimages is untenable. Rule 6 claims that, when God chooses particular images for the end of exceptional veneration, it is reasonable that he will work miracles by them. Rule 7 continues the idea, saying that men must not inquire why God chooses one place or image rather than another for the working of miracles.⁹⁶ Pecock seems to abandon his concept of the inquiring doom of reason. Contrary to his insistence on the search of truth by reason (in the Bible), he interprets the case of the miracles from another angle: if a miracle is a miracle, it will withstand any rational investigation. Pecock also reaches the conclusion that miracles have no evidence in reason (or vice versa). But his inconsistency can be grasped in the fact that he authorises the doom of reason to declare if a case in point is a miracle. When can reason ultimately identify a miracle? Or where can one draw the boundary of the authority of reason? Certainly, Pecock did, and thus he withdrew from a paradigm where everything is subordinated to the insight of reason. He only acknowledged that an entirely logical (or rational) system, including faith, can be constructed, if faith itself, and the articles of faith deducible from the Bible, are considered as premises (or axioms) of this system.

Similar is the concern of another argumentation about the merits of faith in Pecock's *Book of Faith*. In Part I, Chapter 4, the dialogue between father and son contrasts Doubting Thomas's example (who sought "overmuch" evidence) to other examples which justify sufficient evidence to gender faith.⁹⁷ Yet, in the previous chapter Pecock discussed and proved, contrary to Gregory the Great's opinion, that the stronger an evidence (to gender faith) is, the more merit one's faith can have. Thus we return to the same question raised in connection with the miracles in the *Repressor*: Is there a limit to seeking evidence, beyond which it will not increase any more the merits of faith? When should reason stop and claim that no stronger evidence may be found or that an event in case is a miracle?

Pecock suggests that reason's horizon is not unlimited; moreover, he claims that its scope of investigation is decisively closed. Reason is *ab ovo* "pre-conditioned" to arrive at certain conclusions, which it cannot rationally explain. Thus faith is also reduced to an irreducible premise of human thought. Pecock does not circumscribe a new paradigm of reason on the basis of which it should decide, e.g., over the authenticity of miracles.

Reaching this dead-end, Pecock reverses the problem: whatever is believed, it has to receive the consent of reason. By this he denies that faith is merely an act of voluntary will.

⁹⁶ *The Repressor* Vol. 1, Part II, Chapter 8, pp. 186-7.

⁹⁷ *Book of Faith*, pp. 152-157.

He, however, opens new ways to construct a personal (and more rational) faith through the criticism of the Church Fathers and many elements of Church tradition. The conscious deviation from the tradition of medieval authorities is first of all admitted by Pecock's remarks in which he "discredits" the conclusions of the Church Fathers, especially those of Saint Augustine or Gregory the Great. As discussed above, recent scholarship has also paid more attention to what comparative approaches of texts written by Pecock and his contemporaries can reveal about their different cultural orientations and authorial self-identifications.⁹⁸ Thomas Netter's *Doctrinale* can be considered as a most outstanding (and typical) representative of a theological-historical thinking which was challenged not only by the Lollards, but also Pecock's individual methods.

The refutation of Church authority, the main charge of both Netter's argumentation against the Lollards and of Pecock's critics, is only one reason why the Bishop of Chichester was seriously dismissed. Netter's definition of Church authority (as an unbroken chain of minds transmitting the Word of God from the earliest testimony)⁹⁹ sharply contrast to Pecock's suggestion that this authority should be born in each individual mind in each period of time. Pecock's contemporary opponents also dismissed him on the grounds of his university education and intellectual capability. Thomas Gascoigne in his *Liber Veritatum* charges Pecock because of his deficiencies in his logical and theological training. A common characteristic of anti-Lollard and anti-Pecock writings was the appropriation of the norms and rules of argumentation (which was claimed to be the only alternative). Therefore neither Wyclif's nor Pecock's arguments were challenged in the field from which they "shot their attacks." Moreover, the opponents refashioned Pecock's endeavors as an internal struggle for the authority of the same paradigm of knowledge. As it has been shown, the mandate of Thomas Bourghier, written to the clergy of his province (probably in 1458), admonishes the priests against the dangers of Pecock's books. In his letter, the Archbishop judges those who are keen on reading the Bishop's books with the ancient ecclesiastical *topos* condemning intellectual pride in terms of a dismissal of those who are "plus sapere conantes quam

⁹⁸ Cf., e.g., Mishtooni Bose, "Vernacular Philosophy and the Making of Orthodoxy" and Kantik Ghosh, *The Wycliffite Heresy: Authority and the Interpretation of Texts (Cambridge Studies in Medieval Literature)*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

⁹⁹ Cf. Liber II, articulus 2, cap. 20 of the *Doctrinale*: "Testimonia itaque huius Christi ecclesiae credibilia facta sunt nimis, et dicta eius reputata etiam sacrae legis scriptoribus gloriosa, ex quibus unus, Gloriosa (inquit) dicta sunt de te civitas Dei. Sunt enim eius dicta gloriosa vetustatis approbatione: a primaevis enim fundamentis in fidem, et robur etiam gestorum, et promissorum Dei, ipsa ecclesia patrum vocabatur in testem. Nam a primo loco scripturae sanctae omnia pene verba eius probant quid per divinam sapientiam, et factum sit, et post ruinas multiplices restitutum genus humanum: et hoc ad probandum adducit sapiens sanctos patres in testes seriatim a primo homine secundum ordinem scripturarum usque ad profectionem filiorum Israel per desertum." Thomas Netter of Walden, *Doctrinale Antiquitatum Fidei Ecclesiae Catholicae*. (Venetis: Apud Vincentium Valgrisium, 1571), f. 198.

oportet,” echoing St. Paul’s warning to the Romans in Rom. 11:20 and its closely related passage in Rom. 12:3. Thus the Archbishop imposes the interpretation of the long medieval exegetical tradition of Saint Paul’s message as a taboo on intellectual activities, and places it in the centre of the Pecock controversy.

As it has been pointed out, Pecock applied new methods without changing the fundamentals of the concepts of sciences and knowledge of his opponents. As a twisted consequence, the clash of different ways of encountering Lollard ideas was transformed into a conflict that put ultimately the question of intellectual authority at stake. This strange and unfocused reflection on Reginald Pecock’s arguments by his contemporaries proves that the deviation from officially authorised methods could reach to the sensitivity of the whole institutional system, very much afraid (but also aware) of the alarming signs of an imminent change of paradigm in the concepts of knowledge and authority.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

The dissertation has examined extramural reflections on academic perceptions of knowledge, authority and wisdom in 15th-century England. The assessments of the intellectual climate of England in this period maintain the image of a culture of censorship, distrust towards the unauthorised and academic fears of changes. But as Kathryn Kerby-Fulton demonstrated in *Books under Suspicion*, the study of censorship issues and of revelatory writings reveals “a more pluralist culture than perhaps we have realized, and a more pluralist view of unorthodoxy.”¹ Similar notions can be applied to 15th-century perceptions of knowledge and the individual risks of reconsidering the nature and purpose of intellectual inquiries.

The contribution of my research to Kerby-Fulton’s important observations has been the discussion of the multiple layers of interpretations that underlie the discourse on knowledge in extramural literary works, which, in spite of their uniformity of argument (by their insistence on recalling the taboo on higher intellectual activity), attest to more or less explicit attempts at recasting the frames of the authorised and legitimate intellectual activities, imposed upon society by external authoritative standards. The analysis of the selected works in a cross-referential context pointed out that the face value of the argument based on the Pauline warning to the Romans (Rom. 11:20), the central theme in all the selected works under my scope, did not serve to indicate the authors’ ascribing themselves to the exegetical tradition attached to this biblical passage. The authoritative interpretation of “Noli altum sapere” provided rather elements of a discourse which, in many respects, intended to overwrite the implications of reading St. Paul’s message as a prohibition of intellectual inquiries.

The Introduction referred to the central role of Rom. 11:20 in shaping medieval perceptions, both academic and extramural, of the limits or freedom of intellectual quests. As Carlo Ginzburg’s inspiring article concluded, moral considerations in defining the boundaries between the human and the transcendental gradually merged with intellectual ones, resulting in the extension of the originally interior and instinctive fears of the *archana Dei* onto the intellectual (and rational) spheres of human activities. In spite of the unwillingness of the authorities, shaping the intellectual outlook of the period – after the Wycliffite alternatives of biblical/textual interpretation and some isolated academic tentatives to counter the Lollard

¹ Kathryn Kerby-Fulton, *Books under Suspicion: Censorship and Tolerance of Revelatory Writing in Late Medieval England*. (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006), p. 396.

challenge – to remove the numbing limits and stereotypical spells cast on the acquisition of knowledge through rational inquiries, a surprising number of late 15th-century (non-academic and vernacular) texts revisit Rom. 11:20 with the less evident aim of reconciling its implications for authorial self-limitation with the new ways of self-authorisation they pursue.

Thus, the selection of the corpus of texts for my analysis was bound to very simple and objective criteria: I have decided to analyse the context of Rom. 11:20 - the way in which it is embedded in the overall structure and argument of the compositions, its role in the authors' or texts' reflections on the acquisition of knowledge and on perceptions of implied boundaries of intellectual inquiries – in 15th-century extramural works which literally quote this biblical passage, or apply some form of a paraphrase to indicate their connection to the same field of considerations. Besides the Middle English translations and glosses of the Pauline letters, as listed in the Introduction, which necessarily had to cope with the problem of translating, and consequently interpreting the phrase of “Noli altum sapere,” the works involved in the “case studies” of this dissertation represent a seemingly uncoherent group of texts belonging to different genres and forms. They, however, represent three large fields of literary activity: mystical writings, theatre and (non-academic) polemical literature.

Chapter 1 presented the corpus, anticipating some problems of textual transmission, composition, and background circumstances as well as the controversial critical assessments related to the main aspect of the dissertation. It has been pointed out already at this early stage that the main pillars of the corpus, the Middle English rendering of Suso's *Horologium Sapientiae*, *The Moral Play of Wisdom*, the pageant of Christ and Doctors from the *N-Town Cycle* and the texts representing the stages of the development of the “Pecock controversy,” outline a wide context of related literary works, with many overlaps between them, whose involvement in the discussion was inevitable. Thus, the interpretation of the Pauline taboo in Suso's *Horologium* and its English translations was connected with a survey of academic *topoi* in the English mystical tradition before the arrival of Suso in England.

In Chapter 3, the analysis of scene 1 of *The Moral Play of Wisdom* has been considered as an ultimate extension of late medieval reflections on Suso and the intellectual taboos evoked by “Noli altum sapere” onto the sphere of visual and staged representations. As Ruth Nisse's recent book has drawn our attention to the power with which 15th-century theatre and civic stagecraft shaped alternative (political and communal) interpretations of the Bible and visionary texts, in general, it may not be surprising to find a mystery pageant in my

corpus.² Yet, in many ways, the N-Town pageant of Christ and the Doctors is unique in its treatment of the episode of Christ's Infancy and its discussion of the nature and mission of human and divine knowledge in the context of academic self-exposure, also staged in the same play. The comparison of this pageant to the equivalent plays of other cycles intended to prove my distinguished approach to the N-Town episode.

Finally, the group of texts, defined as witnesses of the stages of a controversy, crystallising around Bishop Reginald Pecock in the mid-15th century, established the largest field of cross-references, intertexts and parallels, primarily by virtue of the polemical background of the texts included. The issues raised in this extensive analysis of the controversy, in texts like Nicholas Love's translation of the *Meditationes Vitae Christi*, Thomas Netter of Walden's *Doctrinale Antiquitatum Fidei Ecclesiae Catholicae*, Thomas Gascoigne's *Liber Veritatum*, or the extant works of Reginald Pecock, recalled many problematics from the previous chapters (Lollardy and its interpretative alternatives, author and authority, the role of Rom. 11:20 alienated from its exegetical context, and the perceptions of limits in intellectual quests).

The individual, but at several points interrelated, analyses of the literary corpus show that the authors, even if cautious to distance themselves from the exegetical taboos associated with Rom. 11:20, do not share any more the acceptance of this message as valid for the creation of their own authorial or instructional positions. What is, however, at stake is whether the literary evocation of academia, an image borrowed to justify authorial self-empowerment and to represent legitimate intellectual quests, still respects the self-defined borders of the institutional world of learning.. New demands at redrawing or removing the boundaries between the acknowledged scholarly and the unacknowledged intellectual worlds appear even stronger where the authors themselves stand in a transitory zone between the two communities (as seen in the cases of Richard Rolle or Henry Suso). Furthermore, in the Pecock controversy, the discussion of Pecock's thoughts on doctrinal and pastoral issues is impeded because of his opponent, Thomas Gascoigne's reluctance to grant him the attributes and criteria which would enable Pecock to participate in an academic debate.

But the shift in the interpretation of Rom. 11:20 and the related concerns about the nature and mission of human knowledge was not a linear and straightforward process towards the demolition of an earlier intellectual and academic paradigm. The centrality of the theme, derived from Paul's Epistle to the Romans, underlines the sensitivity of the extramural worlds

² Ruth Nisse, *Defining Acts: Drama and the Politics of Interpretation in Late Medieval England*. (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005), passim.

to academic, or institutionally authoritative, dictates in matters of devotion and intellect. As we could see, the mystical visions responding to contemporary academic realities (Suso, Rolle, even the *Cloud*-author) created the ideal antipode to institutional teaching, applying the very imagery of schools. The notion of academia is, thus, by far not an imported and alien experience for these authors.

The dichotomy of academy and the extramural world, however, seemed to be very difficult to maintain consistently in the discussions. As we could see in the analysis of Thomas Netter of Walden's or Nicholas Love's authoritative and modellary works, experiencing with less tolerated (Wycliffite) strategies of textual interpretation took place also with institutional, moreover authoritative, support. The English author-translator of Suso's *Horologium Sapientiae* is also ambiguous in his rendering of Suso's daring revelatory text: he applies contradictory devices in order to temper, and thus delimit, the original freedom experienced in the school of love; at the same time, he seems to experience with the limits of authority on both sides of the implied boundaries. Finally, he does not empower himself to have an own voice as he does not empower the human experience, acquiring wisdom, with the freedom he seems to attribute to it. While the warning against advancing too high remains valid for the whole concept of his translation, the translator (and spiritual guide in the text) recreates the academic vision of authority and of the acquisition of knowledge in the microcosm of his spiritual instruction.

The return from more audacious conclusions to more tempered views was also illustrated in the pageant of Christ and the Doctors of the *N-Town Cycle* and the temptation scene of *The Moral Play of Wisdom*. The pageant's opening criticism of a lukewarm, rigid and self-conceited academic world, finally, integrates illumination and the intuitive way of acquisitions of truth with institutional learning. The science of the doctors is disintegrated because of the lack of an all-pervasive interpretative frame which is offered by Christ through His "rational epiphany," communicating the divine mysteries in words. The play advocates intellectual activity accompanied by a deep spiritual understanding of the Christian faith, but it does not favour either the purely rational theorizations and arguments or the exclusively emotional and spiritual approach to knowledge.

In the morality, the playwright's flirtation with the Wycliffite idea of associating the Fall with the corrupt logic that characterises human syllogistic thinking (and Lucifer's school) is counterbalanced by Christ's school, modelled upon Suso's vision in the *Horologium*. The play establishes an emphatic association of scientific logic with the type of school Lucifer represents. The two school systems crystallising out of the dramatic clash between Wisdom

and Lucifer are contrasted on the basis of two features: illumination versus Lucifer's discursive argumentation. Secondly, the schools differ in their teleological perspectives: in Lucifer's case everything is knowable, but he denies that knowable things would yield any personal fruit for one's own salvation. In Christ's school, learning is preparation for an encounter with the divine being (or truth), and is best defined as a personal experience of one's own spiritual progress. The systematically recurring analogy of institutional teaching and learning throughout the play emphasises that learning is not to be exiled from any spiritual quests after wisdom; at the same time, the playwright also phrases his criticism of an educational system that loses sight of the soteriological end of knowledge.

Finally, Reginald Pecock's trouble with the authorities and representatives of academia could also be taken as an emblematic illustration of, and conclusion to, my investigation on 15th-century reconsiderations of the taboos of knowledge along Rom. 11:20. While the Bishop of Chichester applied risky strategies of self-authorisation and vernacular composition in order to encounter Lollard heterodoxy, his achievement was labelled by Archbishop Bourchier as an attempt at transgressing the Pauline taboos. In his letter, the Archbishop judged those who were keen on reading the Bishop's books with the ancient ecclesiastical *topos* condemning intellectual pride in terms of a dismissal of those who were "plus sapere conantes quam oportet," echoing St. Paul's warning to the Romans in Rom. 11:20 and its closely related passage in Rom. 12:3. Thus the Archbishop imposed the interpretation of the long medieval exegetical tradition of Saint Paul's message as a taboo on intellectual activities, and placed it in the centre of the Pecock controversy. He sealed a long simmering intellectual effort, indicated by the texts analysed in my dissertation, with vain speculation, and clearly reminded the followers of his opponent of the dangers of any initiatives which ignore that the taboos do not affect the "high," but the "horizontal," i.e. the consensus of preponderant views within academia over where to draw its own borders towards the outside.

MAGYAR NYELVŰ ÖSSZEFOGLALÁS (HUNGARIAN SUMMARY)

Disszertációm a XV. századi Anglia akadémiai világán kívül rekedő – „falakon túli”, de az intézményes tanításra közvetlenül reflektáló - szövegekben tanulmányozta a tudásról, tekintélyről és bölcsességről örökölt és kialakított vélekedések korabeli változásait. A szakirodalom e korszakot egybehangzóan a szellemi és kulturális konzerválás és stagnálás fogalmaival jellemzi, melyben különös hangsúlyt kap az egyházi cenzúra, az újdonsággal szembeni bizalmatlanság és a szellemi intézményrendszer burkolt félelmei a reform és változtatás gondolatától. Ezzel szemben Kathryn Kerby-Fulton egy olyan világot mutat be *Books under Suspicion* [Könyvek a gyanú árnyékában] c. művében, melyben – a cenzúra és látomásirodalom bonyolult hálójában - a kultúrának sokoldalúbb és megengedőbb képe sejlik fel, mint ahogy ezt a korszak paraméterei sejtetni engedték, s ezzel együtt az intézményes vallástól elkanyarodó nézetek is többféle megítélés alá estek, mint ahogy azt érzékeltük szeretnénk volna.¹ E gondolatok nyomán megállapíthatjuk, hogy a tudás és a szellemi útkeresés természetének és céljának átgondolására tett kísérletek hasonló, de korántsem azonos sémát követő esetei sem kényszeríthetők be a korszakot leíró kategorikus megállapítások mögé.

Kerby-Fulton észrevételeit munkámban egy rokon terület vizsgálatának tanulmányaival is igazolva láttam, melyekben az akadémiai világon kívül keletkezett, de szorososan annak módszereihez és észleléseihez csatlakozó szövegek tudásról alkotott elképzeléseit tártam fel. E szövegek – az érvelés látszólagos uniformitása ellenére (azaz a diskurzus szervező eleme Szt. Pálnak a rómaiakhoz írt levelének részlete, amely a mérvadó egzegetikai hagyományban a szabadon haladó intellektuális keresés tilalmával lett egyenértékű) – éppen olyan kísérleteknek tekinthetők, melyek átszabják, újraírják, de legalábbis átgondolják e tilalmakat vagy azok mibenlétét. A Szent Pál-i témát (Róm. 11:20) középpontba állító szövegek párhuzamos olvasatából világossá vált, hogy szerzőik a bibliai passzus megidézésével nem egy már konvencionak számító egzegetikai értelmezéshez kívántak csatlakozni, hanem éppen ennek az értelmezési hagyománynak az építőköveiből szándékoztak egy a szellemi tabukat megkérdőjelező diskurzust felépíteni.

Munkám bevezetőjében felvázoltam a Róm. 11:20 jelentőségét a későközépkori szellemi szabadsággal és tilalmakkal szembeni attitűdök kialakulásában. Carlo Ginzburg inspiráló cikke megállapítja, hogy az emberi és isteni szférát szétválasztó, az emberre megállapított kötelező érvényű erkölcsi normák az idők folyamán fokozatosan összeolvadtak

¹ Kathryn Kerby-Fulton, *Books under Suspicion: Censorship and Tolerance of Revelatory Writing in Late Medieval England*. (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006), p. 396.

az ember szellemi magatartását meghatározó alapvetésekkel, melynek következtében a kezdeti ösztönös istenfélelem (a transzcendens titkaitól való borzongás) áttevődött a szellemi útkeresésekre. Annak ellenére, hogy a korszak szellemi légkörét meghatározó intézményrendszer – a Wyclif által javasolt alternatív szövegértelmezési módszerek, illetve e módszereknek az akadémiai közegbe való beemelése tett magányos kísérletek után – továbbra sem volt hajlandó a tudás általuk definiált és határok közé szorított értelmezéséből engedni, meglepő azoknak a szövegeknek a száma, melyek látszólag „biztonságos” műfajokban, formákban és tartalmakban térnek vissza a „Noli altum sapere” intelmével asszociálódott tilalmak újragondolásához. Nem az akadémia és a falakon kívüli világ határainak feszegetése a nyilvánvaló cél, hanem kevésbé kézzel fogható határok, mint pl. a szerzői tekintélyt és önállóságot megkötő láthatatlan tilalmak, átlépése.

A disszertáció korpusza tehát annak az egyetlen kritériumnak a figyelembe vételével állt össze, hogy az akadémiai világon kívül a korszak mely szövegei idézik vagy parafrázálják a kérdéses Szent Pál-i passzust, érveléseikbe ágyazva. Nyilvánvaló, hogy legelőször a középgangol Újszövetség-fordításokban és glosszákból kristályosodnak ki a Róm. 11:20 körüli értelmezési viták, lehetőségek és problémák, hiszen e fordításoknak nemcsak nyelvi-szemantikai szinten kellett állást foglalniuk a „sapere” ige elsődleges tartalmáról (a 11:20 passzus „Noli altum sapere” és a 12:3 passzus „plus sapere quam oportet” kifejezéseiben). A disszertáció fő fejezeteit alkotó szövegelemzések azonban más típusú szövegekkel foglalkoznak, melyeket – a Róm. 11:20 evokációján kívül – látszólag nem sok minden köt össze. Egy műfajilag és formailag változatos csoportról van szó, melyek az irodalmi alkotás három – a korban szabadabb – területét képviselik: a misztikát, a színházat és az akadémiai világon kívül zajló vitairodalmat.

Az első fejezet célja a korpusz bemutatása volt, előrevetítve azokat a szövegváltozatokkal, kéziratokkal és keletkezési körülményekkel kapcsolatos problémákat, illetve a szakirodalomban felbukkanó ellentmondásos értékeléseket, amelyek a későbbi elemzésekhez kapcsolódtak. Már a disszertáció gerincét alkotó egyes művek – Suso *Horologium Sapientiae* c. traktátusának középgangol fordításai, a *Wisdom* [Bölcsesség] c. moralitás, a Krisztus a zsinagógában témáját feldolgozó misztériumjáték az *N-Town ciklusból* és a Reginald Pecock püspök írásai körül fellángoló vita egyes állomásait képviselő szövegek – bemutatásakor nyilvánvaló volt, hogy mindegyik egy olyan tág, a többiekhez is több szálon kapcsolódó kontextust határoz meg, ami elkerülhetlenné tette a közvetlen holdudvart alkotó egyéb irodalmi művek figyelembe vételét. Így Suso angol fordításának háttéréhez segítségül

hívtam a XIV. századi angol misztikus hagyomány kulcsszövegeiben fellelhető iskola-toposzokat.

Hasonlóan, a harmadik fejezetben a *Wisdom* c. moralitás első jelenetét a Susóra reflektáló alkotások tágabb körébe helyeztem, és a vizuális értelmezés lehetőségeit is bevonva értelmeztem a Szent Pál-i tabukat. E fejezeten belül a moralitás színpadi megoldásait részletező elemzését egy XV. századi, Suso-fragmentumot is tartalmazó illusztrált kézirat ikonográfiai elemzése követi. Ruth Nisse közelmúltban kiadott tanulmánykötete hívja fel figyelmünket arra, hogy a későközépkori színház és városi drámai reprezentációk milyen komoly lehetőséget kínáltak helyi szinteken a nagyobb struktúrák által meghatározott (szöveg/Biblia-)értelmezési normák és kódok alternatíváinak megteremtésére.² Ennek fényében nem meglepő, hogy a korpuszban helyet kapott egy misztériumepizód is. Az N-Town epizódot a többi középanyol misztériumciklus megfelelő részleteivel állítottam párhuzamba, hogy az összehasonlítás révén is rávilágíthassak az előbbi különleges témakezelésére és a tudás tematikájának a korpusz többi szövegével összevethető ábrázolására.

Végül a Reginald Pecock alakja és tevékenysége körül kibontakozó vita szövegei tekinthetők a legnagyobb kiterjedésű, intertexteket és kereszthivatkozási rendszereket felhalmozó hálónak, amit talán a vita dialogikus természete is előre sejtetett. A polémia több szövegre is kiterjedő rekonstruálása (mint pl. a *Meditationes Vitae Christi* Nicholas Love középanyol fordításában, Thomas Netter of Walden *Doctrinale Antiquitatum Fidei Ecclesiae Catholicae* monumentális alkotása, melyben a Katolikus Egyház álláspontját foglalja össze az 1420-as években, Thomas Gascoigne *Liber Veritatum* c. teológiai enciklopédiája vagy Reginald Pecock fennmaradt művei) az előző fejezetekben feltárt központi problémákra tért vissza (Lollard értelmezési alternatívák, szerző-szerzőség és tekintély, a Róm. 11:20 tartalma az egzegetikai hagyományon kívüli szövegekben).

A szövegek elemzéseiből kitűnt, hogy a szerzők – még ha óvatosan távolodnak is el a Róm. 11:20 passzusával egyenértékűnek tartott tabuktól – saját alkotásaikra, illetve szerzői stratégiáikra nézve nem fogadták el e tabu érvényét. Bár többségüket nem az akadémia bírálata motiválta, az intézményes világ metaforáinak, allegóriáinak felhasználásával, melyekkel egy hivatalos támogatást nem élvező szerzői tekintélyt igyekeztek megalapozni, közvetve azt a kérdést is feszegették, hogy mennyiben képes az intézményes tekintély világa a maga által meghúzott határokat és normákat kifelé is érvényesíteni. Az akadémia belüli és

² Ruth Nisse, *Defining Acts: Drama and the Politics of Interpretation in Late Medieval England*. (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005), passim.

azon kívüli két szellemi világ határának újradefiniálását erőteljesebben sürgetik azok a szerzők, akik maguk is a határterület keresőinek vallották magukat, vagy a szellemi útkeresés újabb szakaszaiba lépve, intézményes élményeik kitörölhetetlenek lettek (pl. Suso vagy Richard Rolle). Ennél is radikálisabban vetődik fel a két határ problémája a Pecoock-vitában: a püspök egyik fő riválisa, Thomas Gascoigne érvelését azért veti latba, hogy megingassa Pecoock akadémiai tekintélyét (illetve odatartozását), s ezáltal semmissé tegye Pecoock doktrinális vagy pasztorációs állásfoglalásait mint akadémiai disputára alkalmatlan véleményeket.

Ugyanakkor a Róm 11:20 passzusának értelmezésbeli eltolódásai messze nem rajzolnak le egy egyenes irányú folyamatot, mely a tabu elfogadásának megkérdőjelezésétől annak teljes eltüntetéséig, illetve ezzel együtt a korábbi akadémiai paradigmák leváltásáig vezetett volna. A Szent Pál-i témába való beleragadás azt is jelzi, hogy az akadémián kívüli szellemi élet rendkívül fogékony és érzékeny volt az intézményes világ által diktált normák fenntartására a szellemi és spirituális életben egyaránt. Láthattuk, hogy a kortárs intézményes oktatás realitásaira válaszoló misztikus művek (Suso, Rolle vagy a *Cloud of Unknowing* szerzője) éppen ennek a világnak egy ideális ellenpontját teremtik meg, mely azonban képeiben és koncepcióiban ugyanúgy az iskolák világából nő ki. E szerzők műveiben az akadémia megjelenítése tehát egyáltalán nem egy tőlük idegen világ irodalmi integrálását jelenti.

Amint azt – Kerby-Fultonra is hivatkozva – jeleztem, az akadémia és a nem intézményes világ kategorikus szembeállítása nemcsak hogy torzította volna az elemzési észrevételeimet, de teljességgel lehetetlenné tette volna azoknak a részleteknek a feltárását, melyek – bár nem tanúskodtak paradigmaváltásról – az adott paradigmán belül alternatív álláspontokat kezdtek el felvázolni. Még Thomas Netter of Walden vagy Nicholas Love hivatalos tekintéllyel is megtámogatott könyvei is olyan érvelési és szövegértelmezési stratégiákkal kísérleteznek, melyeket ugyanezek a hivatalos tekintélyek más szerzők (pl. Wyclif) esetében nem toleráltak. Suso *Horologium*ának angol szerző-fordítója szintén kettős utat követ az eredeti merész látomás tolmácsolásában: miközben a szöveg eredeti „határtalanságának” korlátozására, az intézményes kritika mérséklésére törekszik, a szerzői tekintély és a tudás megszerzésének és átadásának határait mindkét oldalról – belülről és kívülről – is igyekszik megtapasztalni, ami által éppen az általa fenntartandó határok érzete mosódik el. Ahogy végül saját magának nem engedélyezi a korlátlan szerzői szabadságot, az általa lefordított iskolában sem bontakozik ki a bölcsesség útján járó emberi szellem szabadsága. Fordításának alappillére marad a „Noli altum sapere” szellemi tilalomként való

értelmezése, s így a fordító saját művén belül – a lelkivezetés mikrovilágában - újra megteremt a tekintély akadémiai vízióját.

A merész következtetések előtti megtorpanás nemcsak a Suso-fordítás jellemzője. A bátrabb gondolatfelvetésektől a biztonságosabb konklúziókhöz való visszatáncolás a disszertációban elemzett két drámai (és színházi?) mű alapesztusa. A misztériumepizód, melynek nyitánya egy szellemileg száraz, hierarchikus és öntelt akadémiai világot állít pellengérré, végül integrálja az intézményes tanítást a krisztusi kinyilatkoztatással. A mű állásfoglalásában nemcsak a hagyományos ráció-hit szembenállás feloldására tett törekvés van jelen, hanem a megismerés szinte kizárólagos útjának tekintett, támadható intézményrendszer – legalábbis annak számos elemének – rehabilitálása. A misztériumjáték doktorainak tudománya egy átfogó értelmezési keret híján összedől, ám ezt az „értelmezési” keretet Krisztus „racionális epifániája” pótolja. A misztériumepizód hatalmas erőket mozgat meg, hogy racionálisan – ez esetben nyelvi síkon – érthetővé és átélhetővé tegye a megismerés útjának azt a vegyes paradigmáját, mely elveti a tisztán racionális vagy csak spirituális megközelítés szélsőségeit.

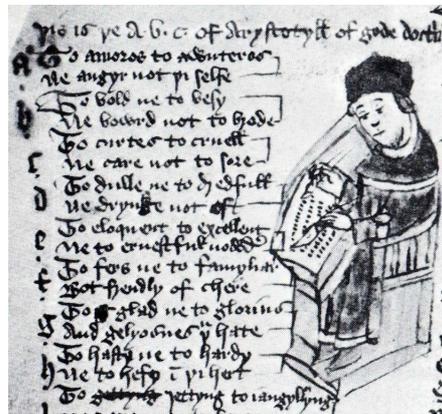
A moralitás írója mintegy a wyclifí gondolatmenetet követve eredezteti az emberi logikát és szillogisztikus gondolkodást Lucifer stratégiájából. Ezzel szembe állítja Krisztus iskoláját, amelyből szembetűnően hiányoznak a logikus következtetések és a rávezetési módszer. Az intézményes tanulás módszerei Lucifer iskolájában vannak jelen. A dráma logikájából következik, hogy a bűnbeesés utáni nyelvre és logikára épülő tudomány nem vezethet a teljes megismeréshez (azaz e módszerek legfeljebb csak leírni képesek a bűnbeesés előtti „tisztá” lélek állapotát), ugyanakkor a bűnbeesés előtti lélek sem találhatja meg helyét abban a nyelvben és érvelésben, ami a tudomány önmagára való reflexiójának képességét tanúsítja. A moralitás a két iskola összeegyeztethetlenségére épül. Nemcsak módszereikben térnek el, hanem teleológiai horizontjukban is: Lucifer iskolájában minden megismerhető, de a megismerés független a lelki gazdagodástól. Krisztus iskolája egy lelki élményre előkészítő út, melyben végül az egyéni előrehaladás tapasztalata határozza meg a tanulás minőségét. A moralitás elválaszthatatlanul egyesíti az intézményes tanulást és a lelki üdvösséget, s ezzel a szerző egyszerre igazolja az intézményes oktatás létjogosultságát, és utasít el minden olyan intézményes rendszert, mely szem elől téveszti a megismerésnek és tudásnak a racionális szint felett kijelölt végcélját.

Végezetül Reginald Pecock több síkon zajló vitája a kor egyházi tekintélyeivel és az akadémia képviselőivel egész munkám emblematisz zárófejezetét alkotja. Bár a chichesteri püspök szerzői tekintélyét és idiómáját meghatározó stratégiáit a lollardok kelléktárából

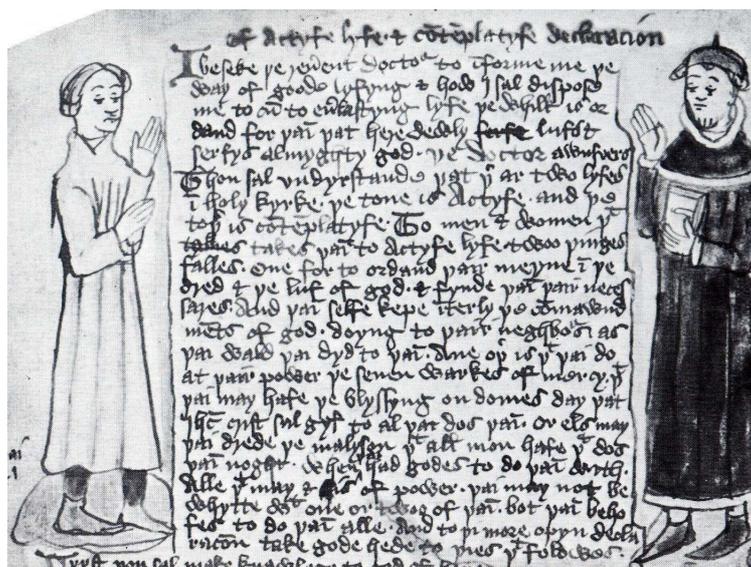
kölcsönözte, Pecoock mindvégig bevallotta is az ortodoxia – és az intézményes vallás és tudás – védelmében írta meg műveit. Tevékenységét Bouchier, canterburyi érsek utólag a páli tabuk átlépésével bélyegezte meg, s ezzel a többféle problémára kihegyezett – sokszor politikai konnotációkkal színezett – vitát az egzegetikai hagyomány keretei közé kényszerítette. Egyháztartománya papjaihoz írt levelében az érsek arra figyelmeztette a címzetteket, hogy Pecoock eretnekpere és hivatalos visszakoosása után is sokan vannak még, akik könyveit tanulmányozva a szellemi hübrisz ősi hibájába estek, mivel „plus sapere conantes quam oportet” (Róm. 12:3), amivel a jelenséget és a püspök nevével fémjelzett problémát a Róm. 11:20 passzusának árnyékába rendeli. Bouchier nem hagy kétséget afelől, hogy a hivatalos értelmezés jottányit sem változott Szent Pál rómaiakhoz írt intelmének kérdésében, s a Pecoock-vitát is egy kései (vagy korai?) egzegetikai fellángolás meddő tetemrehívásának tartja. A püspök álláspontját következetesen a páli passzussal megbélyegző érsek azonban arra a több évtizedes szellemi forrongásra hívja fel figyelmünket, melyről a disszertációmban elemzett művek tanúskodnak. S bár e próbálkozásokat a hiábavaló emberi kíváncsiság kudarcaival teszi egyenlővé, a páli értelmezést akaratlanul is egy új elemmel bővíti: az „altum” keresésére induló erőfeszítések valójában már nem a megismerhetetlen „magasságok” tabuit veszélyeztetik, hanem a tudás és szellemi kiteljesedés kézzel fogható horizontális dimenzióit.



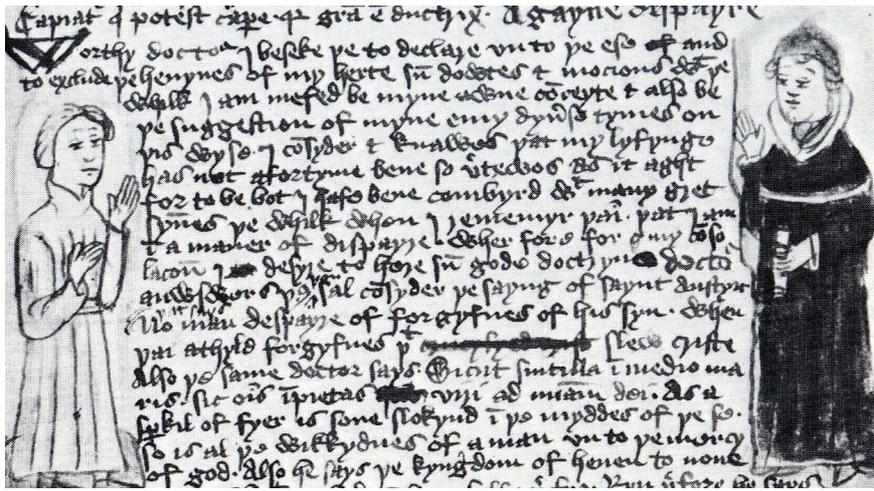
F. 85v. The teacher and his disciple



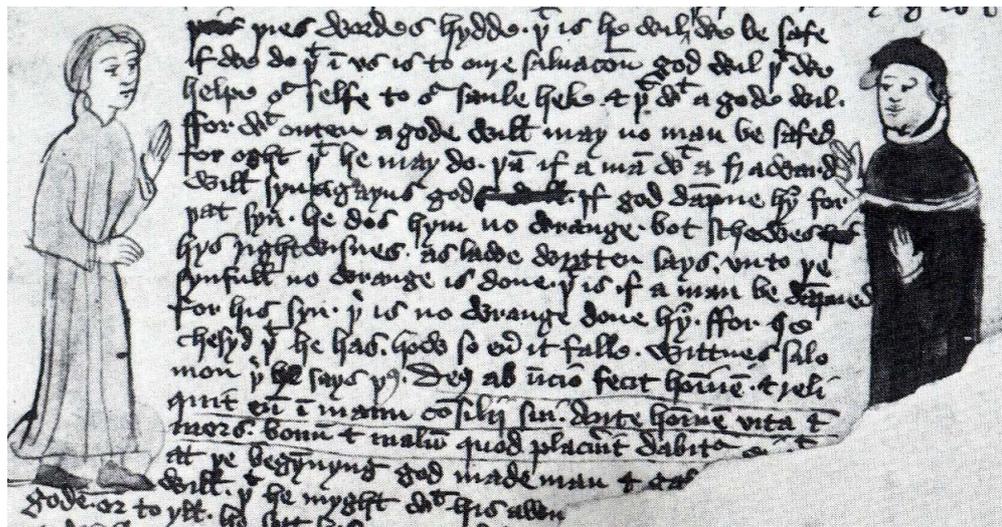
F. 86v. A teacher seated in a cathedra



F. 87v. An inquirer and a doctor



F. 89v. A young scholar and a doctor



F. 96. A young scholar and a doctor

APPENDIX B

TEXTS FROM MS BL ADD. 37049 HITHERTO UNPUBLISHED

Modern punctuation has been added, and contractions have been expanded and indicated with italics. The original arrangement of the couplets (the first ten centrally positioned, and the rest running in two parallel columns) is reflected by the layout of the following edition with the exception of bracketing the rhyming lines. Passages that cannot be recovered due to the manuscript's damages are indicated by [...].

FF. 85-85v: "Fyrst þu sal luf god and drede..."

Fyrst þu sal luf god and drede,
And hym seryf *with* al þi spede.
And lerne to kepe þies wisdomes clere
þat folowes *in* wrytyng here:
Bot witt pas wylle,
Vyce wil vertewe spylle.
þynke on þe ende or þu byn,
And it sal þe kepe fro trobil and syn.
Man in þe wele be war of woo;
Wele is he þat can do soo.
Of þi sorow be noght to sadde,
Ne of þi ioy be nought to gladde.
If þu be greuyd in any seson,
Lat it pas ouer; it is my reson.
Tel not þi priuy counsell
To hym þat may it nought avayle.
A soft worde suages ire,
Suffer and hafe þi deszre.
He þat wreke hym of euere wrathe,
þe langer he lyfes, þe les he hathe.

Lerne þis my lefe broþer:

Als sotyl as þu, als fals is ane oþer.
He is oft disceyfed þat nought wil lerne,

Luf, pes, and charite
Do euere man equitye.
After gret cold cummes hete,

þof he vnthryfe who may *hym* werne.
Lerne of þe wyse,

þe rather þu salt ryfe.
He is litel worth and les gode can

þat makes his *seruande* mayster and hymself
man.

Pride gos before and after *cumes* schame,

Wele is he on lyfe þat has a gode name.
Lat þi neighbor þi frenschip fele

What euer þou say, avyse þe wele.
Euer at þe ende wrong wil out wende,

Or þu hafe nede, assay þi frende.
This world turnes as a balle,

Clym not to hye, lest þat þu falle.
Lat þi wytt pas þi wyll,

Say wele, or els be styлле.

When þe gam is at þe beste, gode is to lete.
God is gode al way to drede,

Of *vertewe* has þu moste nede.
In gode rewle is mykil reste,

Bett is to bowe þan to breste.

Maners and clothyng makes man,

Say nocht al þat þou can.
þat now is sal turne to was,

Ouertaken grace, al þinge sal pas.
Spende þou no mans gode *in* vayne,

Borowd þinge wald hame agayne.
A fayr *vertewe* is gode sufferauce,

And a fowle vyce is hasty vengeance.
In flattyryng wordes lygges [...],

And *in* fyre and watyr gret pa[...]

[F. 85v] Euermore fle discord and hate,

And *with* þi neighbor make no debate.

Mesure is a myry mele,

Aftyr seknes *cummes* hele.

Knaw or þou knytt,

And þan wil men prys þi witt.

Of þi hede be þou hende,

And specially to þi frende.

Sowp þu not to late,

Spende after *þinne* astate.

If þu wil stande *in* grace,

Ffro þe pore turne not þi face.

What euer þou do, hafe god *in* mynde,

And þinke ymauge on þi last ende.

Of speche it is gode to be soft,

And mefe not þi mode to oft.

Do þou wele and drede no man,

Ffor trewthe to kepe is best þu can.

Worschyp ay þi bettyr,

And grotche not agayn þe gretter.

Make not to many festes,

He þat wil *hym* wreke of ylk wronge

May not lyf *in* pes longe.

He þat makes to myche of lytell

Behyght not many behestes.
 To awe nocht and hafe nozt is *better* at ese,
 Couetyse makes many man *in* yll disese.
 Men may say and þat is rewthe
 Þat mede sal spede rather þan trewthe.
 Get and sawe if þou wil hafe,
 Waste and want, len and crafe.
 Who so *in* welthe takes no hede
 Sal fynde defawte *in* tyme of nede.
 Vndyr gret lords men takes gret strokes,
 And *with* gret wynde falles gret okes.
 A foles bolt is son schot,
 Dele *with* no godes euyl begot.
 Deme no þinge þat is *in* dowte,
 To þe trewthe betryed oute.
 [...]þou wil beste *in* pes abyde,
 [...] hyghe hert and stynkand pryde.
 [...] to bold oþir to blame,
 [.....]

It sal be long or he hafe mykell.
Better it is to suffer and abyde
 Þan hastely to clym and sodanly to slyde.
 Say þou wele or els be style,
 Ffor wrethe says al way ylle.
 Do þu ay wele and drede no man,
 And say not al þat þu can.
 Be neder to hasty ne to slawe,
 Fle not to hye, ne crep not to lawe.
 Behold wele and see:
 Þis warld is bot vanyte.
 Who so hopes þe best sal hefe þe [...],
 Tyme is gode *in* euer þinge.
 Be charytabyl to folk þat has nede,
 And be *vertewvs* for þi awne mede.
 Be *merciful*, and pytyful þu be,
 And yll *cumpeny* ay þat þu flee.
 Old syn makes newe schame,
 A wyllyd doyfe is yll for to tame.

F. 96: “Mykil folkes...”

Mykil folkes þat is wait and hopes þat god wil dampne no man, bot þat al sal be safed þorow his mercy; whilk folkes haldes god vnrightewis and lyfes agaynes þe trowthe of haly kyrke, whilk trowthe teches us þat he sal *cum* and deme al both whilk and ded, and zelde to ilkone after þai hafe deseruyd. And *in* þe crede it þus tells þat þai þat wele has done sal wende *in* to euerlastyng lyfe, and þai þat ylle has done sal go *in* to euerlastyng fyre. “Nay,” says þies lewde folkes, “god wil not dampne þaim þat he boght so dere.” And it semys as it wer for þaim þat saynt Paule says: “*Deus vult omnes homines salvos fieri. Þat* is, god wil þat al men be safed.” Bot oþer vnderstandyng is *in* þies wordes hydde; þat is, he wil þat we be safe, if we do þat *in* vs is to oure saluacioun. God wil þat we helpe *ourselfe* to *our* saule hele, and þat *with* a gode wil. Ffor *withouten* a gode will may no man be safed for oght þat he may do. Þan, if a man *with* a fraward will syn agayns god, if god dampne hym for þat syn, he dos hym no wrange, bot schewes his rightwisnes. As lawe written says: “vnto þe synfull no wrange is done; þat is, if a man be dampned for his syn; þat is no wrange done hym.” Ffor he chesys þat he has how so euer it falle. Wittnes Salomon þat he says þus: “*Deus ab inicio fecit hominem*

et reliquit eum in manu consilii [...] hominem vita et mors, bonum et malum quod placuit dabitur [...].”

At þe begynnyng god made man, and gaf[...]

Will þat he myght *with* his awn [...]

Gode or to yll. He sett before man lyfe and [...]

Whilk so he will hafe hym sal begyf[...]

Þe gode and take þe yll. Yf he be damp[...]

Selfe to wyte, ffor he hymselfe chesyd [...]

Is agaynes godes rightwisnes þat [...]

Synful and rightwys illyke. And [...]

Þe god wil not þat it be so, bot if þe [...]

[...]nes hym to helle. Of þis same ma[...]

Þat desyres þat al men war safed [...]

Hys wille dampne þe synful to he[...]

Wondyr sen almyghty god may d[...]

Hym dampne any agayne his will [...]

Þe mercy of god. Ffor as he þat *with* [...]

[...] felle and sterne, so þai þat dos [...]

[...] desyres þat is arett to [...]

[...] to may m[.....]

[.....]

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