1-1-2010

# Bodies of Parchment: Representing the Passion and Reading Manuscripts in Late Medieval England

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BODIES OF PARCHMENT: REPRESENTING THE PASSION AND READING

MANUSCRIPTS IN LATE MEDIEVAL ENGLAND

by

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A dissertation presented to the
Graduate School of Arts and Sciences
of Washington University in
partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree
of Doctor of Philosophy

August 2010

Saint Louis, Missouri

Abstract

In a diverse range of late-fourteenth- and fifteenth-century devotional literature,

Christ's body is metaphorically related to a book or a document at the moment of his

crucifixion. His skin transforms into parchment, whips and scourges become pens, and a

steady flow of blood, of ink, covers his body and the written page. And each word

written onto his parchment body welcomes sustained study, acting as a potential

meditative focal point for the devout reader. Through this metaphor and the

accompanying materiality of the texts that include it, medieval authors and audiences

could imagine intimately interacting with Christ's body during the violence of his

Passion. They could touch it, see it, hear it as it was read aloud, and, in the case of

scribes, write it. This dissertation explores how the object of the text allowed audiences

to participate actively in the events of Christ's Passion and considers how the affective

engagement with Christ's suffering body that pervaded late-medieval devotional practice

informed, in turn, the signifying power of a text's materiality.

The Christ-as-book metaphor often occurs in works that represent the creation and

consumption of books in similar terms – terms that emphasize books not as already

completed objects but as objects that are continuously in the process of being made,

reproduced, edited, and circulated. Manuscript books are shown to function as *loci* for

active and varied acts of interpretation as readers approached them as textual and

material, but also visual and aural, objects. While the Christ-as-book metaphor can

illuminate the dynamic role manuscripts could play in inspiring affective devotion, it has

primarily been examined for the insight it offers into literary or theological trends of mysticism and popular religion. I argue, however, that this metaphor and the texts containing it can be read productively through the lenses of manuscript studies and book history. Building upon the work of D. F. McKenzie, Roger Chartier, and Alexandra Gillespie, I consider how the material form in which these texts occur influenced their reception and status as cultural objects amongst late-medieval lay audiences. The materiality of the manuscript book, I suggest, powerfully guided the ways in which readers approached, viewed, and experienced devotional works and, as a result, Christ's body in late medieval England.

The first chapter presents an examination of how writing, as the literal act of inscription and as a metaphor for the reading process (one remembered what one read, for example, by writing it in one's heart), works to reproduce Christ's suffering body both on the page and within the reader. By highlighting the interactions between pain and reading and between Christ's body and a text's material form, the *Meditations on the Life and Passion of Christ*, the *Orison of the Passion*, and the *Charters of Christ* illustrate that each re-reading of their respective texts constituted a re-writing as well. Every inscription of the text and of the events of Christ's Passion produces a new copy – a new witness – both on the manuscript page and within the reader's heart. Christ's suffering body is not presented in these works as a reified, stable text to be copied out, or read, passively but instead as a text that welcomed readerly and scribal interpretation and reinvention.

In the second chapter, I consider the potential for the material object of the text to function as a type of affective image for the devout reader.  I argue that the *ABC of Christ's Passion*, a text that relates the letters of the alphabet to the wounds inflicted upon Christ's body, demonstrates how even the undecorated manuscript page could function as a potent "image" and focal point for a devout reader's meditative practice.  John Lydgate's Passion poetry further illustrates the value of contemplating the visual aspects of a written text and its material form.  While a reader could be moved to devout thoughts by regarding an image of the crucified Christ, Lydgate explores the potential for the object of the text to interact with and at times even supplant the devotional influence of standard Passion iconography.

The layout of books and rolls can provide further evidence of how these textual objects were read by medieval audiences, and, in the third chapter, I investigate how affective reading practices mirrored the late-medieval devotional preoccupation with Christ's suffering, fragmented body.  The format and narrative structure of the *Symbols of the Passion* encourages readers to consult its text in a discontinuous fashion, as if the reader's engagement with that work were intended to mirror how he or she would have meditated upon the partitioned body of Christ represented in popular *arma Christi* images.  A parity existed, I suggest, between how Christ's body and texts could be approached; both could be productively read in parts, with each fragment operating as an affectively-potent whole in its own right.  Rather than being an idiosyncratic reading style promoted by the *Symbols*, the *Book of Margery Kempe*, *Handlyng Synne*, and a wide-

range of other late-fourteenth and early-fifteenth century works of devotion also encourage late-medieval audiences to read discontinuously, indicating that this method of reading was influential and pervasive amongst a range of late-medieval devout audiences.

But many audiences "read" medieval works by listening to them being read aloud rather than by personally and privately consulting a text within its manuscript context. In the fourth chapter, I study a unique musical version of the *Short Charter of Christ* and a non-musical (but nonetheless melodic) O-and-I lyric, "Throw hys hond." I examine how these works explore the tension between spoken and written language and suggest that they provide a glimpse of the oral / aural potential latent within the metaphor of Christ's body as a book. While manuscripts might be seen today as offering a silent material witness to the past, medieval audiences conceived of these forms as being imbued with sound, the otherwise dead skin and ink infused with a vocal presence.

Acknowledgments

Without the help and support of colleagues, friends, and family, this dissertation might never have been written. I would like to thank David Lawton, in particular, for his years of guidance and friendship and for his steadfast support of my work. Special thanks also to Jessica Rosenfeld for her insightful and engaged feedback during various stages of this project. My work at Cambridge with Alexandra Gillespie during the Summer of 2007 was crucial in helping me to formulate the beginning stages of this project, and I am grateful for her enthusiastic generosity as she introduced me to the study of paleography and codicology. Conversations with Joseph Lowenstein, Alicia Walker, Dolores Pesce, Steven Zwicker, Courtney Bates, Elon Lang, Rick Godden, Rob Patterson, Katie McKnight-Parker, and Helen Marshall were also invaluable and motivating as I wrote and polished this dissertation.

I would like to extend special thanks to the Institute for Historical Research at the University of London and the Mellon Foundation for granting me a generous fellowship that enabled me to conduct research at the British Library and the libraries of Cambridge and Oxford during the summer of 2008. The librarians at Gonville and Caius College Library (Cambridge), Corpus Christi College Library (Cambridge), the Bodleian Library, Cambridge University Library, and the British Library were all wonderful in assisting me with my research. Sincere thanks also to the English Department of Washington University for six years of academic and financial support and for funding two additional trips to British libraries so that I could conduct the archival research necessary to complete my project.

I am lastly and most especially grateful for the overwhelmingly generous support I have received from my family throughout this process. My deepest thanks to my mother (Mary Biediger Novak), father (Nathan Garner), Jacob Garner, Myron Novak, Deborah Casias Noonan, Jeffrey Noonan, and Nancy Bristol for their unwavering confidence in me and for helping to ensure that I had the necessary time to write and edit this dissertation. And, of course, I must extend my unending gratitude to Brendan and James for filling my home with laughter and love and for providing me with a sustaining retreat during those moments when my computer was turned off.

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Abbreviations

BL              British Library, London

Bodleian        Bodleian Library, Oxford

CUL             Cambridge University Library

EETS            Early English Text Society

    n.s.      new series

    o.s.      old series

MED             Middle English Dictionary

Introduction

Bodies of Parchment: Representing the Passion and Reading Manuscripts

in Late Medieval England

Around 1344, Richard de Bury asserted that wisdom, a divine gift bestowed upon

mankind, had been placed within books and that:

> There everyone who asks receiveth thee, and everyone who seeks finds
> thee, and to everyone that knocketh boldly it is speedily opened. . . .
> Therein the mighty and incomprehensible God Himself is apprehensibly
> contained and worshipped; therein is revealed the nature of things
> celestial, terrestrial, and infernal; therein are discerned the laws by which
> every state is administered, the offices of the celestial hierarchy are
> distinguished and the tyrannies of demons described. . . . In books I find
> the dead as if they were alive; in books I foresee things to come.[1]

De Bury describes books as if they were enormously powerful objects containing, as he

claims, the "nature of things," the "laws by which every state is administered," and

"incomprehensible God Himself." But while these books might house a range of

subjective and concrete types of knowledge, de Bury also suggests that their materiality –

their tangibility – plays an influential role in their ability to function. Before wisdom can

be accessed by readers, the object of the book must be queried, sought, knocked upon,

and opened. To open a book one must touch it, experiencing its solidity as one "knocketh

boldly" upon its surface to receive entry. De Bury goes on to state that the "truth which

shines forth in books desires to manifest itself to every impressionable sense. It

commends itself to the sight when it is read, to the hearing when it is heard, and

moreover in a manner to the touch, when it suffers itself to be transcribed, bound,

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[1] Richard de Bury, *Philobiblon*, ed. and trans. E. C. Thomas (Oxford: Shakespeare Head Press, 1960), 17.

corrected, and preserved."[2]  Books – and the content they contain – have the potential to

appeal to multiple senses depending upon the situation in which they are encountered.

When the page is open in front of a reader, the text could be interpreted visually, and

when a work is read aloud, it could be consumed aurally.  And when a book is held,

edited, or preserved, the sense of touch becomes most prominent – that which allows a

reader to interact physically with a book and, perhaps, to add his or her own mark to it.

Modern scholars at times admit, in revealing moments of honesty, that they

experience a tangible thrill whilst holding a medieval manuscript as they turn the very

pages that were once turned by its original scribes and readers.  Derek Pearsall, for

example, writes that "I am sure that I speak for many when I say that the pleasure of

having a manuscript I haven't seen before newly arrived on the library desk is something

incomparable.  There is the manuscript and there am I, and for a moment I have the vivid

sense that the past is speaking directly to me."[3]  This statement strikingly mirrors de

Bury's assertion that "in books I find the dead as if they were alive," but it also illustrates

how manuscripts are perceived as offering a type of authentic witness to the past,

containing, as they do, apparently verifiable information about literary readership and

culture that can be concealed in marginal comments, marks of provenance, page layout,

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[2] De Bury, 19.

[3] Derek Pearsall, "The Value/s of Manuscript Study: A Personal Retrospect," *Journal of the Early Book Society* 3 (2000): 167-81, at 167.  Pearsall goes on to state that "it is difficult to convey the uniqueness of this experience, or fully to express this sense of historical intimacy, of privileged and immediate access to the past. . . [T]here is the irresistible desire to take it all in, to search every part of it, as if the historical freight that it carried could be concealed in any number of secret compartments" (167-8).

etc.[4]  Manuscripts have a tangible presence, an aura of authenticity, and both medieval

and modern readers have been attracted to the possibility that manuscripts could directly

connect them with a past time or individual.

But while the study of manuscripts can yield profound insights into late-medieval

manuscript culture, it often cannot provide answers to some of our most basic questions,

such as how a manuscript's texts were read, by whom, and for what purpose.[5]  Alexandra

Gillespie has recently pointed out that some book historians act as if "the material

evidence supplied by books is not involved in any 'illusion'" and that "books, unlike

texts, are just true."[6]  But she goes on to caution against this approach, countering that

"books – those ragged objects in our hands, the 'soil' with which we work – are just not

true. . . . [The book] is full of gaps and it has few final answers."[7]  To fill these gaps, we

must often turn to the texts themselves to see what hints they might contain regarding

their intended audience or how and why a reader might have been instructed to consult

them.  While de Bury, for example, makes few references to any of the actual volumes in

his collection, his text nonetheless provides a rare first-hand account of the impressions

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[4] For a fascinating analysis of such fetishistic qualities of manuscript study, see Andrew Taylor, *Textual Situations*, 197-208.  See also Michael Camille, "The Book as Flesh and Fetish in Richard de Bury's *Philobiblon*," in *The Book and the Body*, ed. Dolores Warwick Frese and Katherine O'Brien O'Keefe (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997), 34-77.

[5] For a few key examples of important contributions to our understanding of late-medieval manuscript culture, see: *Book Production and Publishing in Britain 1375-1475*, ed. by Jeremy Griffiths and Derek Pearsall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); *Middle English*, ed. by Paul Strohm (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); and Alexandra Gillespie, *Print Culture and the Medieval Author: Chaucer, Lydgate, and Their Books 1473-1557* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

[6] Alexandra Gillespie, "The History of the Book," *New Medieval Literatures* 9 (2007): 245-77, at 272

[7] Gillespie, "The History of the Book," 272.

of a medieval reader, illuminating how he perceived books to have functioned in general and why he valued them so highly. Through a combination of codicological and literary analysis, then, a clearer picture can emerge as to how books were read, used, and imagined by medieval audiences.

This dissertation makes a focused exploration into how late-medieval lay audiences might have interacted with manuscripts and other textual objects as a part of their devotional practice. I center my analysis on texts that treat the subject of Christ's Passion, particularly those that use as their principle trope the metaphor relating Christ's body to a book or a document. While such depictions of the Passion often include discussions of the creation of books and the role they could play in inspiring devotion, these passages have tended to be examined primarily for the insight they offer into literary or theological trends of mysticism and popular religion. I suggest, however, that these texts can also illustrate – whether through their material form, textual content, layout on the page, or translation into a musical or visual work – the devotional import of the object of the text by showing how it could affect the ways in which readers approached, viewed, and listened to written works and, as a result, Christ's body.

A number of recent studies have focused on Passion poetry in late medieval England, exploring its relationship to affective meditational practices, devotional imagery, practices of visualization, and the devout laity's religious experience.[8] But the

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[8] See, for example, Jessica Brantley, *Reading in the Wilderness: Private Devotion and Public Performance in Late Medieval England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007); Sarah McNamer, *Affective Meditation and the Invention of Medieval Compassion* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010); Jennifer Bryan, *Looking Inward: Devotional Reading and the Private Self in Late Medieval*

numerous texts that feature the trope relating Christ's body to a book, I suggest, demand

more sustained attention as a group since they can offer new perspectives on the status

and uses made of books as objects in late-medieval devotional practice. Through this

metaphor and the accompanying materiality of the texts that contain it, medieval authors

and audiences could imagine experiencing – by touching, seeing, hearing, and, in the case

of scribes, writing – Christ's body during the violence of his Passion. The materiality of

the manuscripts containing these texts should be taken into account in any study of these

texts since this trope, in its most elaborate renditions, highlights the shared physicality

thought to have existed between Christ's body and textual bodies. When Christ's skin

and bones are described as writing surfaces, nails etch words into his bones, whips lash

letters into the parchment of his skin, and a steady flow of blood, of ink, covers Christ's

body and the written page, manuscripts would seem to function as devotional objects in

their own right, even apart from the texts they might contain. To best examine the

rhetorical and cultural implications of this trope, then, it is necessary both to analyze the

literary elements of these Passion poems and also to consider the materiality of the

manuscripts in which these texts are included.

 Although I do not consider a broad range of texts across numerous genres, the

poems and prose that I examine nonetheless illustrate with particular acuity the potential

intersections between readers and texts, books and bodies, and aurality and literacy that

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*England* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008); Sarah Stanbury, *The Visual Object of Desire in Late Medieval England* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008); Sarah Beckwith, *Christ's Body: Identity, Culture and Society in Late Medieval Writings* (London: Routledge, 1993); and Kathleen Kamerick, *Popular Piety and Art in the Late Middle Ages: Image Worship and Idolatry in England 1350-1500* (New York: Palgrave, 2002).

were preoccupations of medieval readers and authors in general throughout the late

Middle Ages.  Images and literary depictions of Christ's Passion were ubiquitous in late

medieval England, and those texts which relate Christ's body to a book merely make

explicit the cultural belief in Christ as the incarnate Word, a belief that permeated all

levels of society.  H. Leith Spencer comments that "by studying Christ crucified (perhaps

by meditating upon an image of the scene), the ignorant people receive their first lessons

in spiritual literacy, while those attending grammar schools acquired both spiritual and

actual letters by the same study."[9]  The Passion offered both learned and unlearned

audiences their foundational lessons in how to interpret and understand images, written

texts, and the object of the book.  As a result, the examinations of the practices of writing,

reading, viewing, and hearing texts that I lay out in the following chapters present

methods of interacting with the written word that could have extended beyond the

specific religious texts I use as the basis for my investigations.

The trope relating Christ's body to a book or document developed wide-spread

popularity towards the close of the Middle Ages – a period that also witnessed an

increasing number of books in circulation amongst an augmenting readership.  The

frequent juxtaposition by medieval writers of Christ's body with a book derived its initial

inspiration from biblical texts.  As Ernst Robert Curtius so succinctly remarks,

"Christianity was a religion of the Holy Book," and the many metaphors pertaining to

books and writing implements found within the Old and New Testaments demonstrate

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[9] H. Leith Spencer, *English Preaching in the Late Middle Ages* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 141-2.

how the religious implications of book metaphors "intersect[ed] and interpenetrate[d]"

late-Classical and medieval understandings of the book as a literary form.[10]  Christ, in

particular, epitomized the melding of the flesh and the word.[11]  Catherine Müller writes

that, for high- and late-medieval audiences, "Christ the Logos is seen as an incarnation of

divine words and a bodily re-enactor of prophetic words inscribed in the Old Testament:

he is therefore both the Text and its most perfect Performance."[12]  While Christ is

described as the Word made flesh in the Gospel of John, many medieval authors and

audiences perceived this relationship between the word and flesh as a two-way street.

While Christ, the Word, might have become flesh at his incarnation, some devotional

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[10] Ernst Robert Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, trans. by Willard R. Trask (New York: Harper & Row, 1953), 310, 311.  Also see Curtius for a compilation of the variety of book-related metaphors found within the Bible and for a discussion of how these metaphors were developed by authors and theologians in the early-, mid-, and late-medieval periods (310-32).

[11] See, for example, John (1:14): "And the Word became flesh and lived among us"; 2 Corinthians (3:2-3): Christ is "our letter, written on our hearts, to be known and read by all; and you show that you are a letter of Christ, prepared by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts."  The link between Christ and a legal document such as a charter is suggested in Romans (9:15-8): "For this reason he is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance, because a death has occurred that redeems them from the transgressions under the first covenant.  Where a will is involved, the death of the one who made it must be established.  For a will takes effect only at death, since it is not in force as long as the one who made it is alive.  Hence not even the first covenant was inaugurated without blood." In the Letter of Paul to the Colossians, Christ's crucifixion is also described as having legal consequences.  Verse 2:13-14 reads: "And when you were dead in trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive together with him, when he forgave us all our trespasses, erasing the record that stood against us with its legal demands.  He set this aside, nailing it to the cross."  In this passage, Christ nails "the record" to the cross, but, as Christ's body is also nailed to the cross, this passage could have reasonably inspired the image of Christ's body as a legal document.  Andrew Breeze sees this passage as one of the "origins of the Charter," even while "its development is typical of the later middle ages, where charters, pardons, and testaments are common symbols, as is the more curious comparison, both in England and Germany, of Christ's crucified body to parchment stretched out to dry, or to the pages of a book."  Andrew Breeze, "The Charter of Christ in Medieval English, Welsh and Irish," *Celtica* 19 (1987): 111-120, at 111.

[12] Catherine Müller, "How to Do Things with Mystical Language: Marguerite d'Oingt's Performative Writing," in *Performance and Transformation: New Approaches to Late Medieval Spirituality*, ed. Mary A. Suydam and Joanna E. Ziegler (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999), 27-45, at 28.

works, particularly of the late-medieval period, play with the idea that at his crucifixion, that flesh reverted, once again, back to word.

It was not truly until the twelfth century, however, that the metaphor relating Christ's body to a book or a document began to acquire widespread cultural purchase – an increase in interest that would peak in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Book metaphors, in general, flourished during the twelfth century, becoming "numerous and bolder," with nature, the world, the wounds of martyrs, the heart, grief, and many other subjects compared to written objects.[13] And metaphors that specifically proposed a relationship between the book and Christ's body flourished in a similar fashion.[14] One

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[13] Ernst Robert Curtius, *European Literature*, 315. For a description of the varied book metaphors that circulated during the High Middle Ages, see 315-26. Ernst Robert Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, trans. Willard R. Trask (New York: Harper & Row, 1953), 302-47. For an analysis of the "book of the heart" metaphor, see Eric Jager, *The Book of the Heart* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000).

      For an overview of some of the intellectual impetus behind book metaphors, see Jesse M. Gellrich, *The Idea of the Book in the Middle Ages: Language Theory, Mythology and Fiction* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985). Gellrich considers some occurrences of metaphors relating nature or history to a book, focusing not on the materiality of the books being discussed but instead on how "the metaphor of writing is the language of mythology, and the idea of the Book, like myth, is preoccupied with a oneness and continuity that is conceived of as natural" (39). Gellrich describes how books functioned as an organizing metaphor for how the exterior world was perceived and understood; he does not, however, extend this conceptual framework to include a discussion about how the actual materiality of books influenced and governed their use and value in medieval culture.

[14] Helen Leith Spencer identifies Odo of Cheriton, a preacher active in the early-thirteenth century, as one of the early propagators of the metaphor relating Christ's body to a book. See H. Leith Spencer, *English Preaching*, esp. 139-42. For an overview of the occurrences of the metaphor of Christ as text in late-medieval vernacular literature, see also Mary Caroline Spalding, *The Middle English Charters of Christ* (Bryn Mawr: Bryn Mawr College, 1914): xlii-li; and Mary Carruthers, "Reading with Attitude," 4. Another instance not mentioned in these two sources where Christ's body is related to a book or a document can be found in the "Disputation between Mary and the Cross." The passage reads:

        ¶ Whan p*ar*dou*n* is schewed w*ith* a scryne,
        W*ith* boke on bord w*ith* nayles smyte,
        W*ith* rede l*ett*res wryten blyne,
        Blewe and blak among me pyte:
        My lorde I likne to þ*at* signe,
        Þe body was bored *and* on borde bete,

anonymous twelfth-century author, for example, demonstrates that period's burgeoning

interest in the physicality of the book which Christ becomes and in how that metaphorical

book and the book being consulted by the reader might share tangible characteristics with

Christ's body.  He writes that "Liber vitae est Iesus, expansus coram filiis supernae

vocationis.  Beatus cui datur legere in libro illo . . . Studeat . . . librum Iesu semper prae

oculis et prae manibus habere, id est in corde et in opere" [Jesus is the book of life, he has

been openly spread out for the descendents of the heavenly call.  Blessed is he who has

been given to read in that book . . . let him study it . . . to have the book of Jesus always

before his eyes and in front of his hands, it is in his heart and in his service].[15]  The

relationship between Christ's body and the book (of life, in this case) begins in a manner

that does not suggest that the book functions as more than just a symbol.  But as the

passage continues, this book of life / Christ appears to transform into a more solid and

approachable object; it can be studied, held, and placed before one's eyes even while it is

also expected to be, in a more spiritual sense, placed within one's heart and enacted

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In bri3t blode our*e* boke gan schyne;
How woo he was no wi3t may wyte,
¶ Ne rede in hys rode;
3oure p*ardou*n boke fro top to too,
Wryten it was ful wonder woo,
Rede woundes and strokes bloo,
3oure boke was bounde in blode. (187-99)

See "Dispute Between Mary and the Cross," *Legends of the Holy Rood; Symbols of the Passion and Cross-Poems*, ed. Richard Morris EETS OS 46, reprinted in OS 103 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1871), 197-209, and 131-49.  For a detailed study of the textual sources of this poem, see David Lawton, "The Diversity of Middle English Alliterative Poetry," *Leeds Studies in English* 20 (1989): 153-62, esp. 155-8.

[15] H. M. Rochais, ed., "Inédits bernardins dans le ms. Harvard 185," in *Analecta monastica: Textes et Études Sur la Vie des Moines au Moyen Age* 50, 6th ser. (Rome: Pontificium Institutum S. Anselmi, 1962), 53-175, at 117.

through one's works.[16]  Out of such metaphorical play between the shared physical

characteristics of books and Christ's body emerged a variety of vernacular works that

provide a more sustained exploration of the tension between bodies and books,

particularly at the moment of Christ's crucifixion.

By the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, the image of Christ's crucified body as a

book had acquired its height of cultural saturation.  Margaret Aston comments that the

genre of texts relating Christ's body to a book demonstrate the "growing consciousness

of letters as valuable tools, that the apparatus of literacy was itself turned into a religious

metaphor."  She continues that "things do not become metaphors until they have well and

truly arrived."[17]  Vincent Gillespie suggests that the metaphor of Christ's body as a book

also demonstrates the increasing functional vernacular literacy during the late medieval

period, commenting that "this affective, image-based approach in England suggests that it

probably fulfilled a need for non-verbal discipline of this sort."[18]  The ability to imagine

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[16] For examples of biblical references to the book of life, see Revelations 3:5 ("If you conquer, you will be clothed like them in white robes, and I will not blot your name out of the book of life") and Revelations 20:12 ("And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened.  Also another book was opened, the book of life.  And the dead were judged according to their works, as recorded in the books").

[17] Margaret Aston, *Lollards and Reformers: Images and Literacy in Late Medieval Religion* (London: The Hambledon Press, 1984).

[18] Vincent Gillespie, "Strange Images of Death: The Passion in Later Medieval English Devotional and Mystical Writing" *Zeit, Tod und Ewigkeit in der Renaissance Literatur* 3 (1987): 111-159, at 112.  See also Vincent Gillespie, "Lukynge in haly bukes: Lectio in some Late Medieval Spiritual Miscellanies," *Spätmittelalterliche Geistliche Literatur in Der Nationalsprache*, Band 2, ed. by Dr. James Hogg (Salzburg: Institut Für Anglistik und Amerikanistik, 1984): 1-27.  In "Lukynge," Gillespie suggests that the increased frequency with which this metaphor occurs in the later Middle Ages demonstrates "the particular suitability of the implied shift from reading texts to reading imagery for the needs of the fourteenth- and fifteenth-century audiences led to its lively presence in a number of vernacular works" (11).

Christ as inhabiting the book that one holds in one's hands enables this metaphor, he suggests, to function both visually and verbally and thus allows it to affect readers of varying degrees of literacy. Gillespie offers a remarkably astute analysis, and I would add that holding a book that purports to be Christ whilst reading also allows for more than just a visual or a verbal experience of the metaphor. The tangibility of the book provides the metaphor with an additional sense of solidity, of linking the reader to Christ's body via an object that can be held and felt.[19] And, as an object made with the skin of dead animals, it could perhaps bring home the horror of Christ's Passion in a way that an image, for example, could not. The cultural signification of books (and metaphors about books) could be strikingly diverse, I suggest, because books could be *used* in a variety of manners. They could be touched, held, read, looked at, stored for future consultation, displayed, recopied, and commented upon, and their methods of signification could vary based upon who was reading the book in question, where, and for what purpose.

Scholarship on metaphor is peppered with assertions of the importance of tropes to how mankind makes sense of and understands his surrounding world. Raymond W. Gibbs, Jr., for example, comments that "metaphor is not simply an ornamental aspect of language, but a fundamental scheme by which people conceptualize the world and their

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[19] Bruce Holsinger similarly argues for the importance of recognizing the potential physicality of metaphorical language, writing that "metaphorical language is rooted in the body and tempered and constrained by lived, corporeal experience; and metaphors in turn *actively shape bodily experience and thought*, enlisting sensorimotor inference and allowing us to construct abstract concepts . . . out of experiences in the flesh." In Bruce Holsinger, *Music, Body, and Desire in Medieval Culture*, 12.

own activities," and George Lakoff and Mark Johnson likewise state that "metaphors partially structure our everyday concepts and that this structure is reflected in our literal language."[20]  Metaphors, they suggest, do more than just describe – they also influence perceptions of how two objects are understood to relate to one another.  Paul Ricoeur comments in a similar vein that "metaphor is the rhetorical process by which discourse unleashes the power that certain fictions have to redescribe reality."[21]  By relating Christ's body to a book, then, medieval writers seem not only to have implied that Christ's body resembled a book in some important and suggestive manner – they also created a rhetorical space in which Christ's body and books were necessarily linked together for generations of medieval audiences.  The object of the book did more than just resemble Christ's body; it also fundamentally shaped how his body was perceived, approached, and interacted with by devout readers.[22]

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[20] Raymond W. Gibbs, Jr., "Metaphor and Thought: The State of the Art," in *The Cambridge Handbook of Metaphor and Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 3-13, at 3; George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 46.

[21] Paul Ricoeur, *The Rule of Metaphor: Multi-disciplinary Studies of the Creation of Meaning in Language*, trans. by Robert Czerny (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1977), 7.

[22] Although I discuss how texts containing the metaphor relating Christ's body to a written text might have been consumed, I have chosen not to take up an extended analysis of how this metaphor might have related to medieval perceptions of the Eucharist.  This is not to say that late-medieval audiences might not have perceived links between the Eucharist, Christ's body, and the religious texts that they read or had read to them.  Indeed, a late-fourteenth century Lollard sermon for Quinquagesima Sunday show how the Eucharist could even be seen as an integral part of the document that Christ is described as creating from his body; the Eucharist is that which validates the document that Christ becomes.  The sermon states that "Þei schullen stidefastli bileue þat alle we beþ breþeren of oo Fadir in heuene, and breþeren to oure Lord Jesus Crist, and into his broþerhede we beþ receyued bi þe worschipeful chartre of þe hooli Trinyte: Fadir, and Sone, and Hooli Goost.  Þe chartre of þis breþerhede is þe blessid bodi þat hynge on a cros; writen wiþ þe worþi blood þat ran doun fro his herte, seelid wiþ þe precyous sacramente of þe auter in perpetuel mynde þerof" (275-82).  See "Quinquagesima Sunday," in *Lollard Sermons*, ed. by Gloria Cigman, EETS 294 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 105-20.

Recent trends in book history and literary scholarship have increasingly worked to resituate medieval texts, often read today in modern editions concerned with the production of an authoritative text, within their manuscript contexts.[23] Much exciting work has resulted from attempts to engage with textual variants and to consider manuscript miscellanies as whole books, and one important result of these recent studies is a renewed interest in how the book as an object might affect the reading process.[24] It

In both the Eucharist and in metaphors relating Christ's body to a book, Christ's body transforms. Just as the Eucharist was to be physically eaten, so too was it a common trope in medieval rhetoric that texts were meant to be devoured, chewed and digested by the reader. Both the Eucharist and, as I argue in the following chapters, written texts were thought to be spiritually beneficial to viewers; you did not have to eat the Eucharist to receive the protection it offered, nor did all audience members have to actually read texts in order to find their appearance (layout, images, written script) on the page meditatively or spiritually valuable. But while, as Jennifer Ash points out, the "constituent elements of the Eucharist were metaphorical no longer" after the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215, since they strongly asserted that "Christ's body and blood was a real and actual presence in the bread and wine," the metaphor relating Christ's body to a book still possessed, in the majority of instances, enough of a figurative thrust to dispel entirely literal interpretations (81). There are some witnesses to the *Short Charter of Christ* that appear to have been used as protective talismans, but for the most part, readers do not appear to have worshiped these texts or have treated them in any way – as in attempted stabbings to see if the book bled – that might have tested the truth behind the claim that Christ's body actually was a book. See Jennifer Ash, "The Discursive Construction of Christ's Body in the Later Middle Ages: Resistance and Autonomy," in *Feminine/Masculine and Representation*, ed. Terry Threadgold and Anne Cranny-Francis (Sydney: Allen and Unwin: 1990), 75-105. For a discussion of the Eucharist as a "sacramental sign" that assumed the presence of Christ's body, see David Aers, *Santifying Signs: Making Christian Tradition in Late Medieval England* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2004), esp. 1-28.

[23] For a few notable examples, see Andrew Taylor, *Textual Situations: Three Medieval Manuscripts and Their Readers* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002); John Dagenais, *The Ethics of Reading in Manuscript Culture: Glossing the* Libro de Buen Amor (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994); A. S. G. Edwards, Vincent Gillespie, and Ralph Hanna, eds., *The English Medieval Book: Studies in Memory of Jeremy Griffiths* (London: The British Library, 2000); George Shuffelton, *Codex Ashmole 61: A Compilation of Popular Middle English Verse* (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 2008); Jessica Brantley, *Reading in the Wilderness*.

[24] See Stephen G. Nichols, "Introduction: Philology in a Manuscript Culture" *Speculum* 65.1 (Jan. 1990): 1-10; Peter McDonald, "Ideas of the Book and Histories of Literature: After Theory?" *PMLA* 121.1 (Jan. 2006): 214-28; Stephen G. Nichols and Siegfried Wenzel, eds., *The Whole Book* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996); Margaret Connolly and Linne R. Mooney, eds., *Design and Distribution of Late Medieval Manuscripts in England* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: York Medieval Press, 2008).

For a critique of recent attempts to study manuscript miscellanies as "whole books," see Derek Pearsall, "The Whole Book: Late Medieval English Manuscript Miscellanies and their Modern

has become increasingly accepted that the material state in which a text exists necessarily influences the thoughts that one has about that text.[25] This observation is true in our own day, as what we read is often shaped by the form in which a text is presented to us. But in late medieval England, at a time when there existed a relative scarcity of books due to their cost and the complex process by which they were made, readers would have been attuned to the presence of their books much more strongly as they read than we are today.[26] Katherine Zieman suggests that the likelihood that individuals only had access to a handful of books could have influenced the goals that a reader might have had in acquiring literacy; she states that "layfolk were probably far more motivated to learn to read the single book or prayer roll they had acquired than to possess a generalized skill."[27] If the devout layperson might have desired to achieve the level of literacy required to read a specific book rather than a variety of texts, then the study of the manuscript context in which a work exists becomes even more crucial, as the layout and

Interpreters," in *Imagining the Book*, ed. by Stephen Kelly and John J. Thompson (Turnhout: Brepols, 2005), 17-29. Pearsall argues that it is "possible, and all too possible, to overestimate the activity of the controlling or guiding intelligence of the scribe-compiler in the making of late medieval English secular miscellanies" (29).

[25] See D. F. McKenzie, *Bibliography and the Sociology of Texts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), esp. 9-29. My thanks also are extended to Alexandra Gillespie for her extensive conversations with me on this point.

[26] The influence of the book as an object on the medieval reader, one imagines, depended upon the subject matter and text being read. A recipe book, for example, perhaps served a more utilitarian purpose, to be referred to quickly and then put aside, than did the religious or literary text demanding more sustained and continuous attention.

[27] Katherine Zieman, *Singing the New Song: Literacy and Liturgy in Late Medieval England* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 131.

form of a manuscript might have influenced both how a reader interpreted a single text and how that reader conceived more generally of literate practices.

The Passion poetry I consider in the following chapters occurs in a variety of manuscript contexts, ranging from a poem jotted onto the back of a legal charter to an illuminated roll, and from a roughly scrawled quire of devotional verse to a well-written songbook intended for use within Henry VII's court.[28]  Despite the potential range in the production quality of these manuscripts containing devotional verse on the Passion, however, the majority of such texts occur within codices of moderate quality – typically unilluminated, sparsely-decorated, serviceable books that appear to have been intended for personal use or communal circulation amongst a specific group of people or family. Many manuscripts containing vernacular devotional works seem to have been created for the increasingly literate upper middle class and lower aristocracy that began purchasing books with greater frequency during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, although some were also produced for and circulated within specific religious houses.[29]  Literacy rates started to rise in England beginning in the twelfth century, as suggested by the "increasing numbers of lay people, particularly among the aristocracy, [who] became

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[28] Bodleian, Kent Charter MS 233 (1400-25); BL Additional MS 22029; Gonville and Caius, Cambridge, MS 174/95 and BL Additional MS 5465, respectively.

[29] The manuscript containing *The Book of Margery Kempe* (BL, Additional MS 61823), for example, appears to have been created at the Carthusian house, Mount Grace Priory, in Yorkshire for the use of its members.  See Barry Windeatt, "Introduction," in *The Book of Margery Kempe*, ed. by Barry Windeatt (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2004), 1-35, esp. 1.

owners of books and patrons of writers."[30]  And by the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries,

it became increasingly common for individuals of lower status also to have gained some

degree of literacy, ranging from a basic understanding of the appearance and uses of the

various documents circulating in England to the ability to read vernacular verse in

private. [31]  Laurel Amtower states that "it is clear that by the fourteenth century an ability

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[30] M. T. Clanchy, "Parchment and Paper: Manuscript Culture 1100-1500," in *A Companion to the History of the Book*, ed. Simon Eliot and Jonathan Rose (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 195.  The fourteenth and fifteenth centuries witnessed a rise in the laity's literacy rates alongside a decrease in the price of manuscript books, a fact that appears to have encouraged the increased circulation of vernacular texts around the British Isles.  For an overview of the interrelation between literacy rates and the circulation of texts (particularly charters and documents), see M. T. Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record: England 1066-1307* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993).  While class was a crucial factor influencing one's potential literacy, by the late fourteenth century, London especially had become a competitive marketplace in which books were sold at a range of prices.  The general decrease in the cost of manuscript production helped to create the active literary environment of the late fourteenth century in which, as Clanchy notes, "the volume of writing in the vernaculars was beginning to rival the Latin learning of the clergy" ("Parchment and Paper," 195).  This augmenting corpus of vernacular works, he continues, directly contributed to a "growing number of literates and the increasing volume and variety of book production by 1400 [that] motivated inventors to experiment with ways of reproducing texts through printing" (195).

   See also Joanne Filippone Overty, "The Cost of Doing Scribal Business: Prices of Manuscript Books in England, 1300-1483," *Book History* 11 (2008): 1-32.  Overty tracks the effect of the Black Death on book prices in the fourteenth century, noting that a spike in the prices of books occurred during and directly after the Plague but that this elevated level of prices did not last for long.  She notes that the "the plague sharply depleted the pool of educated men most likely to engage in scribal activities" and that this "contraction in the labor market for educated men resulted in higher wages and greater benefits, and those increased costs were passed along to book consumers" (13).  Despite this uptick in the price of books during the second half of the fourteenth century, in general, prices trended downward, with Overty noting that there "was a sharp decrease in the price of manuscript books, by perhaps as much as 50 percent, from the early fourteenth century until the beginning of printing activity in the late fifteenth century" (30).

[31] It is tempting, at times, to envision that those who read and engaged with these texts were devout individuals who desired to craft their lives around religious prayer and meditation.  Anchoresses and hermits can quickly be imagined thumbing confidently through well-used prayer books and compilations of religious verse.  We know that passion narratives populated monastic libraries across England.  But dispelling any facile assumptions about audience are the numerous manuscript compilations inserting devotional works into otherwise secular contexts and the cultural predominance of religious imagery and thought that pervaded all levels of society.  Eamon Duffy asserts that by the late Middle Ages, "hard-nosed city shopkeepers just as much as aristocratic ladies with time on their hands took an active and enthusiastic interest in things of spirit" (233).  Yet Duffy's focus on the devotional life of the late Middle Ages raises the spectre of the evolving nature of religious practices over time.  In his study of the development of Latin passion narratives, Thomas Bestul makes just this point, emphasizing that "the audiences that read devotional texts, or listened to them being read, were historically variable, not constituted in exactly the

to read was a necessity for the operation of society, and special persons dedicated to the reading, writing, and analysis of texts – whether for religious or secular purposes – were in great demand."[32]  Although most literate individuals in the fourteenth century still tended to be from the upper classes or were members of the clergy, by the fifteenth century the division in literacy rates between the upper and middle classes began to diminish as "the ability to read came to be seen as a given" amongst a broader segment of lay society – a development that was complemented by the creation of a "working 'middle class' [that was able] to afford books – and they did so, in increasing numbers."[33]

As literate audiences grew and book production escalated to meet this new demand, the fourteenth and early-fifteenth centuries saw an expansion not of an organized book trade but, instead, of "essentially a cottage industry."[34]  To access books, readers might have commissioned scribes to write out specific texts, purchased ready-made quires or books from a stationer's shop, consulted books at the library of a religious house or university, or have written out the texts themselves from a friend's or neighbor's *exemplum*.[35]  While the following chapters do not delve deeply into the specifics of

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same way in the eleventh as in the fifteenth century" (8).  See Eamon Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars*; Thomas Bestul, *Texts of the Passion*.

[32] Laurel Amtower, *Engaging Words: The Culture of Reading in the Later Middle Ages* (New York: Palgrave, 2000), 34.

[33] Amtower, *Engaging Words*, 34, 29.

[34] Derek Pearsall, "Introduction," in *Book Production and Publishing in Britain 1375-1475*, ed. Jeremy Griffiths and Derek Pearsall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 7.

[35] G. S. Ivy comments that "in the Middle Ages, anyone who had extensive dealings with books would have been familiar with the several processes involved in their manufacture" (33).  See G. S. Ivy, "The

readership or provenance of particular manuscripts or groups of texts, it is important to

recognize that texts invoking the trope of Christ's body as a book and many other

vernacular works treating the Passion circulated in increasing numbers at a time when

book ownership was becoming more common, book production had not yet become

standardized, and readers still had a good chance of being involved in the creation of their

books – either by commissioning them, purchasing or making materials for them, writing

them, or binding them.[36]  A book was often not a ready-made object, but instead an

object that demanded that a reader engage with its materiality before the reading process

even began.

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Bibliography of the Manuscript-Book," in *The English Library before 1700*, ed. Francis Wormald and C. E. Wright (New Jersey: Athlone Press and Essential Books, 1958), 32-65.

[36] Many scholars have attempted to piece together the records regarding late-medieval book ownership; their work suggests that, despite the increasing circulation of vernacular books in England by the end of the fourteenth century, most readers probably still possessed only a handful of books during their lifetimes. While much of our knowledge of book ownership is based upon bequests recorded in wills, these bequeathed books likely indicate only the most valuable or well-made books that an individual might have possessed at the time of his or her death, "rather than the total number of possessions" (Amtower, 30). Amtower provides a succinct overview of recent studies on book ownership in the late-medieval period. He writes that "despite Margaret Deansely's remark in 1920 that a survey of the wills points to 'the extreme booklessness of the population as a whole,' more recent studies reflect a situation less dire," and he cites studies by Susan Hagen Cavanaugh and Sylvia Thrupp that "suggest that overall approximately 20 percent of wills produced in Britain during this time contained bequests of books" (28).
      See Margaret Deanesly, "Vernacular Books in England in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries," *Modern Language Review* 15 (1920): 349-58; John B. Friedman, *Northern English Books, Owners, and Makers in the Late Middle Ages* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1995); Susan Hagen Cavanaugh, "A Study of Books Privately Owned in England 1300-1450" (Dissertation: University of Pennsylvania, 1981); Sylvia Thrupp, *The Merchant Class of Medieval London, 1300-1500*, 2nd edition (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1989); Alexandra Barratt, "Spiritual Writings and Religious Instruction," in *The Cambridge History of the Book in Britain, Volume II: 1100-1400*, ed. Nigel Morgan and Rodney M. Thomson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 340-66; Tony Hunt, Julia Boffey, A. S. G. Edwards, and Daniel Huws, "Vernacular Literature and its Readership," in *The Cambridge History of the Book in Britain, Volume II: 1100-1400*, ed. Nigel Morgan and Rodney M. Thomson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 367-96.

Stephen Kelly and John J. Thompson have highlighted the rich signifying

potential that the object of the book could have had for late-medieval audiences,

suggesting that:

> Imagining the book as an object always under conditions of process in the
> Middle Ages – always, in other words, being remade and reconfigured by
> the cultural demands of its makers, readers, and owners – demotes the idea
> of the book as material object in favour of the idea of the book as a site of
> diverse activities and concerns.  From this perspective, the book is at the
> same time a material object and cultural phenomenon.  Its physical
> existence is already inscribed with a range of specifically cultural
> preoccupations that will condition the material uses to which it is put but
> which themselves depend upon an *a priori* apprehension of the
> possibilities of use conveyed by a book's physical composition.[37]

Kelly and Thompson make the crucial point that books – and indeed all technologies of

reading and writing – should be thought of as cultural phenomena whose use is often

shaped by specific "cultural preoccupations."[38]  A manuscript's materiality establishes it

as a cultural object, but the *use* of that materiality dictates how the object is shaped by

and in turn shapes the culture in which it circulates.  And it is this point that brings me to

my interest in Passion poetry more broadly, an interest that extends beyond my primary

focus on those texts that treat the metaphor of Christ's body as a book.  Since the vast

majority of the texts that describe Christ's body in bookish terms do so when recounting

scenes from Christ's Passion, it seems clear that in order to understand the complete

rhetorical implications of this trope one must also understand the larger cultural

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[37] Stephen Kelly and John J. Thompson, eds., *Imagining the Book* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2005): 5.

[38] Andrew Taylor likewise notes that "as objects, and objects of considerable value, and as books in a society for which 'the Book' was a fundamental metaphysical category, ... manuscripts assert an ordering power" (*Textual Situations*, 204).

preoccupations surrounding Christ's suffering body in general – how it functioned in

devotional settings, how it could also be "read" as either an image or a text, and what

audiences were expected to derive from meditation upon it.[39]

The overlap that I investigate between late-medieval practices that revolved

around devotion to the crucified Christ and the concurrent views concerning manuscripts

and their potential manners of use can be seen through a brief exploration of the concept

of *imitatio Christi*. Through *imitatio Christi*, devout individuals aspired to imitate

Christ's human actions and suffering, emulating Christ's example in their own works and

actions.[40] The religious emphasis on *imitatio Christi* grew concurrently with the spread

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[39] In *Singing the New Song*, Katherine Zieman suggests that "acknowledging forms of linguistic awareness beyond the phonemic as well as textual strategies beyond those taught in formal grammatical instruction opens up new areas of inquiry concerning the kinds of sense-making that might have been achieved in the practical world of lay devotion" (133). With this statement, Zieman deftly draws attention to the fact that readers approached devotional texts from a variety of educational backgrounds and thus made sense of them in ways that cannot be accounted for by turning exclusively to clerically-produced treatises on how one was to read. Zieman suggests that less learned readers developed alternate methods of "sense-making," which she labels as "extragrammatical strategies," that "tend to assign meaning by association, apposition, accretion, and other nonanalytic gestures," thereby attaching "to the words an illocutionary force that has no relation to their grammatical meaning" (133, 134). Zieman's study does not address how the object of the manuscript might have also contributed to the "sense-making" engaged in by devout readers, but the metaphor relating Christ's body to a book suggests that the object of the book could play an important role in how audiences approached and understood the texts contained within it.

[40] Caroline Walker Bynum extensively considers the gendered implications of *imitatio Christi*. She writes that "when women spoke of abstinence, of eucharistic ecstasy, of curing and healing through food, they called it *imitatio Christi*. 'Imitation' meant union – fusion – with that ultimate body which is the body of Christ. The goal of religious women was thus to realize the opportunity of physicality. They strove not to eradicate body but to merge their own humiliating and painful flesh with that flesh whose agony, espoused by choice, was salvation. Luxuriating in Christ's physicality, they found there the lifting up – the redemption – of their own" (246). Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987).
    David Aers and Lynn Staley suggest that Bynum's assertion of the "female empowerment" of such a type of *imitatio Christi* should be tempered since it should be acknowledged "that the dominant figurations of Christ's body, *including its alleged 'feminization,'* were *made* dominate, *constituted* as dominant, *maintained* as dominant" by the largely male religious establishment (34, italics in original). In David Aers and Lynn Staley, *The Powers of the Holy: Religion, Politics, and Gender in Late Medieval English Culture* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996).

of the Franciscan order during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries due to that order's promotion of Christ's humanity as a central component of affective devotional practice.[41] Sarah McNamer has commented that "*imitatio Christi* is not the same thing as 'compassion,' at least not in the sorrow-filled sense that distinguishes late-medieval responses to Christ's suffering from emotions described in early Christian literature of martyrdom."[42] And she goes on to specify that "suffering 'with' (beside, in the company of) Christ is not the same as suffering 'as' Christ. The former posits an intimate relationship between two people; the latter collapses [the] relationship into a solitary unit of identification."[43] While the distinction between suffering "with" and suffering "as" might not be as absolute as McNamer makes it out to have been, it is important to recognize that both types of relationships are promoted by authors of religious texts as affective methods for meditating upon and inserting oneself within the events of Christ's Passion. Some texts encourage readers to feel sorrow for – or with – Christ while he suffered during his Passion, while others make the more extreme demand that audiences

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[41] See David J. Jeffrey, *The Early English Lyric & Franciscan Spirituality* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1975), esp. 43-82.

[42] McNamer, *Affective Meditation*, 242, n. 54

[43] McNamer, 242, n. 54. Sarah Beckwith offers a similar interpretation of the goal of *imitatio Christi*, asserting that "in crucifixion piety then, the human body (Christ's body, and the body of the addressee) is both an image and a physical, experiential, felt presence. This is perhaps one reason why we return obsessively to the metaphor of theatre to describe this form of spirituality, for it is in the nature of the theatrical medium to foreground the human body through the mechanism of the actor as at once image and physical presence, at once representation and experience." Sarah Beckwith, *Christ's Body*, 61.

attempt to experience the events of the Passion "as" Christ, acquiring in some manner a measure of his pain while he was scorned, scourged, and hung on the cross.[44]

The metaphoric imagery relating Christ's body to a book might have compelled devout audiences to consider the physical and spiritual similarities between his suffering body and the book that they might have held or otherwise seen during their meditations. On the surface, this metaphor does not appear to facilitate the practice of *imitatio Christi* which encouraged individuals to imagine experiencing Christ's suffering as he was beaten and crucified since it seems instead to emphasize the spiritual efficacy of Christ's body / book in a form external to the reader's body. But this metaphor, I suggest, could in fact have acted as a tool that would have provided a reader with a specific way to imagine merging their body with that of Christ. Highlighting how the practice of *imitatio Christi* could be thought of in bookish terms, Jean Leclercq writes that:

> selon une expression qui vient d'Ézéchiel (2, 9) et que les Pères avaient expliquée, ce livre était écrit *intus et foris* : les Juifs n'en ont lu que l'extérieur. Mais pour en pénétrer l'écriture intérieure, il faut porter la croix, moyennant quoi les consciences formées à l'imitation de Jésus deviennent autant de livres où les vertus du Christ sont, en quelque sorte, recopiées. Ces livres, il faut les conserver en bon état, les maintenir sans cesse conformes à leur modèle.
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> [According to an expression that comes from Ezekiel and that the Church fathers had explained, this book was written both inside and outside: the Jews had only read the exterior. But to penetrate the interior writing, one must carry the cross, in return for which those consciousnesses formed in imitation of Jesus would become so many books where the virtues of

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[44] Sarah Beckwith argues that Margery Kempe is an excellent example of how literally men and women could attempt to participate in practices relating to *imitatio Christi*; Kempe not only attempts to mimic the sufferings of the crucified Christ on her pilgrimage to Calgary, but her *imitatio Christi* also "consists in her willing assumption of suffering, and the way she functions as an object of scorn to those around her" (*Christ's Body*, 82).

Christ are, in a way, recopied.  These books, it is necessary to keep them in good condition, to ensure continuously that they are true to their model.][45]

Leclercq suggests that the practice of *imitatio Christi* was an essential part of correctly reading biblical texts.  The text was to be read, but it was also to be internalized within the reader's actions and good works.  Readers thereby transform themselves into living versions of the biblical text they read, conforming to Christ's example just as copies of texts were supposed to conform to their *exemplum* by being free from scribal errors.  Christ's body as a book serves as an approachable, easily visualizable, and tangible metaphor that could aid devout audiences in their attempts to become copies of Christ, reproducing the text of his life both through and within their own bodies.

A fundamental assumption of this dissertation is that codex and non-codex manuscripts had the potential to be understood in diverse ways by a variety of readers.  Michel de Certeau has strongly argued for the status of the reader as a "poacher" of literary texts, suggesting that a "text has a meaning only through its readers; it changes along with them."[46]  John Dagenais similarly states that "the reader interacts with the text based on his or her own predispositions and goals, whether or not those coincide with any goals the author may have for his text," and he continues by writing that "the rhetorical content of the exchange is an occasional (that is, of a particular occasion) playing off of

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[45] Jean Leclercq, "Aspects Spirituels de la Symbolique du Livre au XIIe Siècle," in *L'Homme Devant Dieu: Mélanges offerts au Père Henri de Lubac*, Vol. 2 (Paris: Aubier, 1964), 63-72, at 66.  The translation is my own.

[46] Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 170.

the *res* of the text and the particular *circumstantiae* of the reader."[47]  So too must readers

have interacted with the materiality of the books they encountered in a variety of ways.

While de Certeau briefly nods to the truism that "one cannot maintain the division

separating the readable text (a book, image, etc.) from the act of reading," i.e. that the

physical object of the text plays a crucial role in how readers might consume it, his work

often conflates the text with its physical embodiment in a way that seems, at times, to

oversimplify the tensions that could result from this relationship.[48]  But he nonetheless

highlights the extent to which the materiality of a work, just as its constitutive words,

could operate as a text to be interpreted, mis-interpreted, and otherwise impertinently

interpreted in its own right – attempting to influence how a work might be understood by

"silent, transgressive, ironic [and] poetic" readers "who maintain their reserve in private

and without the knowledge of the 'masters.'"[49]

In the past twenty-five years, scholars have begun to explore in earnest how

meaning can be created through a reader's interaction with a text, the object of that text,

and through his or her experience of the interaction between the two.  D. F. McKenzie

has compellingly argued that a "book is never simply a remarkable *object*" since "like

every other technology it is invariably the product of human agency in complex and

highly volatile contexts which a responsible scholarship must seek to recover if we are to

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[47] Dagenais, *The Ethics of Reading in Manuscript Culture*, 4.

[48] De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 170.

[49] Ibid., 172.  De Certeau states that one of his aims is to justify "the reader's impertinence" as they interpret a text (176).

understand better the creation and communication of meaning as the defining

characteristic of human societies."[50]  The book, as McKenzie so eloquently points out, is

a tool whose cultural value and effectiveness as a medium of communication depends

upon how it is employed within the culture that produced or made use of it.  Jessica

Brantley reiterates the benefits of attending to how a book's materiality might have

influenced the reception of the texts contained within it, commenting that, "as so many

scholars have shown, the accidents of books' physical existence both reveal and create

intellectual substance."[51]  Of course, one of the difficulties in identifying how readers of

any type, let alone medieval readers from centuries past, might have read a text or

interpreted a manuscript's materiality is that each reader is an individual, guided in his or

her reading strategies by autonomous impulses and desires.  If everyone reads differently,

then how can one make any argument for how works in general might have been read and

understood by their contemporary audiences?  Roger Chartier notes this undertone of de

Certeau's work, stating that it provides a "necessary foundation and a disquieting

challenge for any history that intends to inventory and account for a practice – reading –

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[50] D. F. McKenzie, *Bibliography and the Sociology of Texts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 4.

[51] Jessica Brantley, "The Prehistory of the Book," *PMLA* 124.2 (March 2009): 632-39, at 633.  While much of the initial energy among book historians was centered on the study of early printed books and print culture, the medieval manuscript book has also benefited from the renewed interest in its "artifactual existance"; Brantley remarks that the study of the early book has also served to open "our eyes to other aspects of medieval texts in manuscript: traces of scribal collaboration, the importance of paratexts such as rubrics and running titles, the meaningful integration of illumination into the layout of the page, readers' marginalia, editorial anthologizing, and translation practice" (636, 634).

that rarely leaves traces, is scattered into an infinity of singular acts, and purposely frees itself from all the constraints seeking to subdue it."[52]

I agree that it is methodologically impossible to recover, beyond a shadow of a doubt, the particular reading experience of a medieval man or woman. But this impossibility for attaining certainty does not preclude us from learning something about how medieval works might have been read and understood through the study of textual organization and layout, *incipits* and *explicits* that direct readers to approach a text in a certain way, and the inclusion of scenes of reading within religious and literary narratives. While not all readers, either medieval or modern, read in the same manner, it does not seem logical to assume that we are truly so idiosyncratic that no two readers might have similar approaches to and interpretations of the texts that they consume. Although everyone comes to the texts they read wearing their own interpretive lenses that are fashioned from their personal life experiences and expectations, how they approach a text and what they expect to derive from it are also learned acts; these acts might be adapted or reworked by specific individuals, but they are often guided by culturally-determined and learned practices and assumptions.[53]

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[52] Roger Chartier, "Labourers and Voyagers: From the Text to the Reader," *Diacritics* 22:2 (1992): 49-61, at 49.

[53] Robert Darnton has argued that "reading is not simply as skill but a way of making meaning, which must vary from culture to culture," and he outlines five methods by which we can gain information regarding how different cultures approach the reading process (171). We can, he suggests, "study contemporary depictions of reading" in textual and visual sources, ask how reading was taught, explore autobiographical accounts of reading, and apply the principles of literary theory and analytical biography to help uncover the status and role of reading in a variety of cultural settings (171). And Darnton does not merely see such study as able to locate chronological differences amongst varied cultures or time periods; instead he claims that the importance of such work is to be found in its ability to, by understanding how man reads, "come

I have loosely conceptualized the following chapters as investigations into how

the relationship between Christ's body and a book might have influenced how specific

devotional texts were written, seen, read, and heard, i.e. how the book might have

appealed to a variety a reader's senses and have encouraged various manners of

interacting with the text and its material form.  I do not focus exclusively on just those

texts containing this metaphor, at times broadening my scope to include a more general

discussion of how devotional approaches to and imaginings of Christ's body might have

influenced the ways in which devout texts were read and understood.  I wholeheartedly

agree with Vincent Gillespie's assertion that "the image of Christ the book never allows

the horror of the event to be blunted, but it invites us to read the text in new and more

challenging ways," and I seek, in the following chapters, to add to our understanding of

medieval culture and reading practices through my exploration of this metaphor.[54]  The

following chapters attempt to tease out more fully how medieval works were crafted to

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closer to understanding how he made sense of life" (187).  See Robert Darnton, *The Kiss of Lamourette: Reflections in Cultural History* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., Inc., 1990).

David S. Miall points to the work of Pierre Bourdieu, Jonathan Culler, and Peter Rabinowitz as offering a counterpoint to Chartier's and de Certeau's emphasis on readerly idiosyncrasy.  Miall notes, for example, that Rabinowitz "claims that literary reading is not just 'a logical consequence of knowledge of the linguistic system and its written signs.  It is, rather, a separately learned, *conventional* activity' dependent on the acquisition of literary competence."  See David S. Miall, "Empirical Approaches to Studying Literary Readers: The State of the Discipline," *Book History* 9 (2006): 291-311, at 294-5.  In this passage, Miall cites Peter Rabinowitz, *Before Reading: Narrative Conventions and the Politics of Interpretation* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1998), 17.

[54] Vincent Gillespie, "Strange Images of Death," 126.  Eric Jager focuses on another prominent metaphor in late medieval England, that of the book of the heart.  He writes that "medieval culture constructed key aspects of inward experience from knowledge and memory to pious devotion and sensual passion in terms of the manuscript codex and the related tropes of reading, writing, erasure, and interpretation" (xiv).  Although this statement is made concerning the book of the heart metaphor, it is also applicable to the metaphor relating Christ's body to a book, particularly in regards to how the metaphor brought to mind aspects of a manuscript's creation and use.  Eric Jager, *The Book of the Heart*, xiv.

exploit their materiality as a central aspect of their "texts" and how medieval readers might have approached both the physical and the textual aspects of the words, parchment, books and documents purporting to resemble, if not be a part of, Christ's suffering body.[55]

The first chapter examines three fourteenth-century devotional poems that include detailed descriptions of Christ's Passion and the torturous process by which Christ's body was transformed into a textual object. In these works, the act of writing on Christ's body is figured as an *exemplum* of how readers should approach, remember, and incorporate the events of Christ's Passion into their own bodies. The *Meditations on the Life and Passion of Christ* and the *Orison of the Passion* instruct readers to "write" what they read about Christ's Passion in their hearts, suggesting that, by inscribing these texts into their bodies, they would be better able to experience Christ's painful suffering. I then turn from this metaphorical act of composition to a literal one, as I examine the various ways in which scribes wrote out the *Charters of Christ*. The variety of scribal presentations of this text suggests that the document created out of Christ's suffering body was not viewed as a reified, stable text to be copied out – or read – passively but instead as a text that welcomed interpretation and reinvention.

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[55] Michael Camille comments on the potentially intense importance of a book's material form for the medieval reader, commenting that "reading for the medieval literate was charged with . . . associations that made every turn of the page an act of intense interpenetration and one resonant with sensations, from the feel of the flesh and hair side of the parchment on one's fingertips to the lubricious labial mouthing of the words with one's throat and tongue." See Michael Camille, "The Book as Flesh and Fetish in Richard de Bury's Philobiblon," 41.

My second chapter considers the visual implications of the Christ-as-book metaphor. Through an examination of the *ABC of Christ's Passion* and John Lydgate's religious poetry, I explore how a text's material form could function as a powerful focal point for devotional practice. The *ABC* demonstrates how even the undecorated manuscript page could have been perceived as an affectively powerful image. By relating the letterforms of its text to the wounds that were written onto Christ's body during his Passion, novice readers could have learned how to recognize the symbolic and affective potential of a written text even before they could understand its literal meaning. I turn then to John Lydgate's poems on the Passion to consider how the object of the text could be seen as interacting with and at times even supplanting the visual impact of standard Passion iconography. While a reader could be moved to devout contemplation by regarding an image of the crucified Christ, Lydgate's verse suggests that the object of a text could also provide a focal point for prayers and meditative practices as it was viewed and touched. His poems become objects that can be engraved, rolled up, and hung up in the mind of readers to inspire their affective devotions to Christ's Passion.

The layout of books and rolls provides valuable evidence of how these textual objects were read by medieval audiences. My third chapter investigates how reading habits might have mirrored the late-medieval devotional preoccupation with Christ's suffering body. I assert that the roll format of the *Symbols of the Passion* encourages readers to consult that text in a piece-meal, discontinuous fashion, as if the reader's consumption of the text were intended to mirror similar divisions of Christ's body that

were highlighted within popular *arma Christi* images.  Rather than emphasizing the importance of reading its text continuously and in its entirety, the *Symbols* promotes an intense, affective focus on one or two stanzas at a time as the poem is unrolled.  This discontinuous manner of textual consumption illustrates the parity between how Christ's body and texts could be approached, and the tendency for late-medieval audiences to read discontinuously appears to have been encouraged by a wide-range of late-fourteenth and early-fifteenth works of devotion.  Margery Kempe's work, in particular, is well-suited to being read discontinuously, and I suggest that interpretations of her work as a "whole" text, as a result, should be reexamined.

But many medieval works were heard, rather than read, by audiences.  In my fourth chapter, I argue that Christ's transformation into a book illustrates how the material forms of texts could have been perceived as being infused with sound.  By tracing medieval conceptions of the corporeality of spoken language, of speech's ability to wound bodies and materially influence the exterior world, I suggest that the connection between the book and the body becomes more, rather than less, strong in these aurally consumed genres.  Richard Trachsler comments that "medieval literature is desperately oral, and the manuscripts we have only reflect a minor aspect of the literary activity of the period."[56]  By studying a unique musical version of the *Short Charter of Christ* and a non-musical (but nonetheless melodic) O-and-I lyric, "Throw hys hond," I examine how these works seem to play with the tension between the spoken and the written word and

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[56] Richard Trachsler, "How to Do Things with Manuscripts: From Humanist Practice to Recent Textual Criticism," *Textual Cultures: Texts, Contexts, Interpretation* 1.1 (2006): 5-28, at 19.

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suggest that they provide a glimpse of the oral and aural potential latent within the

metaphor of Christ's body as a book.  While manuscripts might be seen today as offering

a silent material witness to the past, medieval audiences conceived of these forms as

being imbued with sound, the otherwise dead skin and ink infused with a vocal life.

In these chapters, I illustrate that the manuscript book was an object demanding

active interpretation and interaction from late-medieval audiences.  The metaphor relating

Christ's body to a book often occurs in works that represent the creation and consumption

of books in similar terms – terms that emphasize books not as already completed objects

but as objects that are continuously in the process of being made, reproduced, edited, and

circulated.  Through an examination of the descriptions of the uses and interactive

potential of books found in these religious texts, I attempt to understand how the devout

lay reader perceived books as textual objects and objects of devotion.  I believe that the

reading practices I discuss, however, could also have guided how a wider variety of

readers interacted with books in general.  While this metaphor might demonstrate the

extreme of how the materiality of a book or a document could shape a text's reception

and consumption, its popularity suggests that many readers in late medieval England

would have been familiar with it.  Depictions of the crucifixion of Christ and descriptions

of his Passion were ubiquitous at that time, and many readers of both religious and non-

religious works would have learned from an early age of the connection between literacy

and devotional practice and of the belief that Christ was the Word made flesh.  By

attending, then, to the manner in which Christ's body was represented as a textual object,

we can gain a better understanding of how reading might have allowed audiences to engage more actively with the events of Christ's Passion – and of how the affective engagement with Christ's suffering body that pervaded late medieval devotional practice might have informed, in turn, the potential signifying power of a text's materiality.

Chapter 1

Writing and Inscribing Christ's Body

in Late Medieval Passion Poetry

Around 1372, John Grimestone, a Franciscan friar from Norfolk, compiled a

preaching book that has been described as "exceptional in the number of English verses it

includes."[1]  While many of the poems contained within this book, now known as

National Library of Scotland, MS Advocates 18.7.21, are unique textual witnesses, as a

group they vividly portray many of the wide-spread religious themes that preoccupied

late-medieval devotional authors.  Meditations on Christ's Passion rest alongside orisons

to Mary; translations of bible verses mingle with descriptions of the seven deadly sins.

And amidst the lyrics that treat Christ's crucifixion and death is one particularly striking

poem that reads:

> Gold and al this werdis wyn
>     Is nouht but Cristis rode;
> I wolde ben clad in Cristis skyn,
>     That ran so longe on blode,
> And gon t'is herte and taken myn in—
>     Ther is a fulsum fode.
> Than yef I litel of kith or kyn,

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[1] Rosemary Woolf, *English Religious Lyric in the Middle Ages* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968), 20.  Woolf describes these short "meditative poems" as "among the commonest and most attractive forms in medieval English literature" (1).  Woolf goes on, though, to clarify that the large number of Middle English lyrics contained within Grimestone's book has led "the manuscript [to be] traditionally, but inaccurately, referred to as a commonplace book: it is, however, an alphabetical preaching-book, distinguished only from many comparable works by the high proportion of vernacular verse that it contains" (20, n. 1).  For a discussion of this manuscript and its provenance, date, and language, see Edward Wilson, *A Descriptive Index of the English Lyrics in John of Grimestone's Preaching Book* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1973), esp. iv-xvi.  Lyrics from Grimestone's preaching manual are also included within Douglas Gray, ed., *A Selection of Religious Lyrics* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975).

For ther is alle gode.[2]

This poem positions itself within mainstream devotional thought with its rejection of the wealth of the world in exchange for the protection of the crucified Christ. But what is most striking about this poem is the unexpectedly physical imagery it employs to describe this protection. The narrator wishes to "ben clad in Cristis skyn," asking to enter into the interior of Christ's body by penetrating its blood-covered surface so that he might merge his own heart with Christ's nourishing one. Christ's body becomes a shelter, albeit one that can only be entered into at the moment of Christ's suffering and death, as the wounds Christ experiences subvert the boundaries between his body and that of the narrator / reader.

The lines "I wolde ben clad in Cristis skyn, / That ran so longe on blode / And gon t'is herte and taken myn in" focus attention, too, on the relationship between Christ's exterior body and his inner heart – between what the reader can perceive with his or her external eyes and what must be spiritually, and thus internally, acquired. The materiality of Christ's skin must be passed through in order to achieve union with Christ's heart where all that is good resides, a progression that follows the widely accepted late-medieval view that spiritual truth could be attained via one's sensory perception. While considered the most basic method for attempting to develop knowledge of spiritual matters, scholars such as Thomas Aquinas acknowledged the usefulness of meditating on exterior things. Aquinas states that "it must be said that it is appropriate for sacred

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[2]Gray, *Religious Lyrics*, 51.

writing to teach that which is divine and spiritual under the guise of comparison with corporeal objects. . . . It is natural for man to reach intellectual things by means of sensible things, because all our knowledge originates in sensation."[3] The skin of Christ, then, must be understood and comprehended as the reader attempts to enter into his body. It divides the reader from Christ's heart, but, once the reader gains entrance into its shelter through the openings of Christ's wounds, it becomes a protective shield that encloses the "fulsum fode" which "is alle gode."

Skin is a crucial object in this poem and one which highlights a common concern between medieval and modern readers – the question of how to reconcile an object's or a text's exterior characteristics with its subject matter or textual content. This chapter seeks to investigate one particular aspect of this question by considering how a certain type of skin, that of the parchment manuscript page, might have allowed access to and shaped interpretations of the words written on them. Was the parchment page something that could be quickly and invisibly permeated by medieval readers as they read, or did the page's materiality possess the ability to add to a text's signification? This inquiry raises an essential methodological issue for modern scholars who seek to balance their codicological investigations of manuscripts with literary analysis of the texts contained within them and demands that careful attention be paid to how the material form of a text might have influenced that text's reception amongst medieval audiences.

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[3] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, i (1a 1, article 9), trans. A. J. Minnis and A. B. Scott, in *Medieval Literary Theory and Criticism c. 1100-c. 1375* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 239.

The skin of Christ, in particular, seems to have been construed as a site of overlapping material and spiritual signification in a variety of devotional works from the thirteenth through fifteenth centuries that metaphorically relate Christ's body to a book or document.  Peter Bersuire, writing in the mid-fourteenth century, demonstrates how closely any attempts to gain spiritual access to Christ's body might have been directed by the process by which manuscript books were produced when he states:

> Christ is a sort of book written into the skin of the virgin . . . That book was spoken in the disposition of the Father, written in the conception of the mother, exposited in the clarification of the nativity, corrected in the passion, erased in the flagellation, punctuated in the imprint of the wounds, adorned in the crucifixion above the pulpit, illuminated in the outpouring of blood, bound in the resurrection, and examined in the ascension.[4]

Every event of Christ's life contributes to the book that is also his body, emphasizing that the book's creation does not result in the manufacture of a static physical object – but instead of a textual object that was made, used, and altered over time.  Although the book / Christ originated as the word of God, his direct speech had to be clarified and corrected before it could be examined by readers upon Christ's ascension.

In an article that considers the relationship between saints' lives that describe flayings and the parchment on which those texts are written, Sarah Kay suggests that the skin of manuscripts could have reminded readers of the transitory nature of life while at the same time foregrounding the durability of the written word.  She argues that "when turning the pages of a pious text especially, medieval readers would be faced, in the

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[4] Peter Bersuire, *Repertorium morale* (c. 1290-1362), qtd. by Jesse M. Gellrich, *The Idea of the Book in the Middle Ages: Language Theory, Mythology and Fiction* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), 17.

substance of the parchment on which it was copied with one or both of the aspects of the

dichotomy with which the work was centrally concerned: the torments of mortal life and

the blissful eternity to which it would lead."[5]  She goes on to ask if "these inarticulate

material witnesses affected readers as much as, or more than, the elaborate ideological

edifices recorded on them?"[6]  Kay's analysis is keen, and her article demonstrates how

delving into medieval perceptions of books might complement modern debates about

conceptions of the self and interiority.

　　　Much of Kay's argument builds upon the search for "the occasional blemish," the

"scrapes, cuts, and scratches . . . [and] tears and holes" that visibly mar the parchment of

the manuscript page.[7]  The visible wounds, she argues, can act as powerful

representations of the scenes of flaying narrated in many saints' lives.  While I agree that

these blemishes could occasionally influence a reader's impression of a text, the

materiality of books could signify in other, more intentional – although perhaps more

mundane – ways as well.  While some of the blemished parchment within manuscripts

containing texts about flaying might have been intentionally chosen to complement the

textual content of those works, some imperfect sheets probably were used by chance or as

an attempt to reduce production costs.  Interpretive hierarchies of script, layout, and

decorative elements, on the other hand, seem to have been more consistently crafted by

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[5] Sarah Kay, "Original Skin: Flaying, Reading and Thinking in the Legend of Saint Bartholomew and Other Works," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 36.1 (Winter 2006): 36.

[6] Kay, "Original Skin," 38.

[7] Ibid., 55.

scribes to influence how texts were read.  While the forms of letters and a text's *mise-en-page* would have been less visually dramatic than tears in the parchment, they nonetheless could just as powerfully affect a reader's reaction to a text.  But I would also nuance this claim by adding that the manuscript book appears to have been understood by medieval readers as a work in progress rather than as a finalized, static object.[8]  Texts were written out and decorated on the manuscript page, but they did not become finished works until they were read, seen, or heard and, ideally, internalized by readers.  The popular late-medieval metaphor that relates Christ's body to a book illustrates particularly well how books and documents were frequently thought of as objects in flux. It often occurs in works that represent the creation and the consumption of books in similar terms – terms that emphasize books not as already completed objects but as objects that are continuously in the process of being made, reproduced, edited, and circulated.

This chapter examines the relationship between Christ's body, the materiality of the manuscript book, and the overlap between acts of reading and writing.  The first section looks at two late-medieval devotional works, the *Meditations on the Life and Passion of Christ* and the *Orison of the Passion*, that implore readers to write Christ's pain within their hearts as they read.  Although this entreaty does not encourage readers

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[8] Mary Carruthers comments that "a medieval text was not presumed to be *perfectus*, 'finished,' even though it had been *scriptus*, 'written.'  The first task which both ancient and medieval elementary students performed in school when they had written copies of texts before them was *collatio*, in which the *grammaticus* read aloud from his text while the pupils emended theirs; thus the introduction a child had in school to a written text was as something that needed to be checked and corrected" (196).  The written text was not always considered to be the final or authoritative form of a text.  As it was read and studied, it could change and evolve as a reader corrected, edited, and amended it.  Mary Carruthers, *The Book of Memory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

to create a material reproduction of either text on parchment, I argue that it nonetheless

highlights how the act of composition was seen to continue beyond the moment when the

pen touched the parchment.  Reading a text was seen as an internal method of textual

inscription that enabled Christ's suffering to be circulated and transmitted amongst

devout audiences.  The second section then examines how scribes treated the various

witnesses of the *Charters of Christ*, a text which takes as its central subject matter the

metaphorical transformation of Christ's body into a legal document.  In writing out this

text that purported to be Christ's body, scribes seem to have become its readers and

adapters as they chose how to present that body, choices which I suggest contribute to the

wide variety in how this text is represented amongst the extant witnesses.  By pairing

these two sections together, I hope to articulate how metaphors that define Christ's

suffering body in textual terms are not intended to portray Christ as a static figure to be

written – and read – passively.  Instead depictions of the vividly suffering Christ-as-text

expose the lively interplay that could exist between bodies and texts, pain and

composition, and scribal habits and affective reading practices.

Internalizing Books, Externalizing Pain

British Library Additional MS 11307 contains the only extant copy of the

*Meditations on the Life and Passion of Christ*, a free-ranging translation of John of

Hoveden's Latin poem, *Philomena*.[9]  The *Meditations* is thematically, although not

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[9] Within this severely deconstructed manuscript (which was apparently disassembled and then reassembled at the hand of its early-nineteenth-century owner) are two other texts that also treat the event of Christ's

narratively, cohesive, leading Charlotte D'Evelyn to suggest that the text operates not as "a single poem, but [as] a collection of lyric themes loosely bound together."[10]  Over the course of its 2254 lines, the poem touches upon Mary's role in Christ's childhood, her emotional suffering during his crucifixion, and the love that compelled Christ to sacrifice himself for mankind – but most strikingly the poem repeatedly returns to the scene of Christ's crucifixion, diversely portraying Christ's wounds and pain as the poem progresses.[11]  D'Evelyn explains this recurring fixation on Christ's suffering as delimitating the divisions between the separate meditations that she sees as having been strung together to compose this poem.  Because "the events which form the subject of the meditations are often introduced out of their chronological order; or, again, some topics, such as the crucifixion, are treated several times in different parts of the poem," it is difficult, she writes, to provide an "orderly account of the poem."[12]  What might be seen as this poem's lack of organizational clarity to D'Evelyn, however, could instead be understood as an attempt by the poem's anonymous author to work within late-medieval

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Passion, a version of the *Charters of Christ* and the *Dialogue between St. Bernard and Mary*.  All three texts are written in the same Anglicana Formata hand and share similar formatting, suggesting that, although the quires of this manuscript have been taken apart, these works did originally belong to the same manuscript.  Charlotte D'Evelyn dates the text as having been written roughly between 1350-1450 and identifies the dialect as being "clearly south Midland" (ix).  See Charlotte D'Evelyn, ed., *Meditations on the Life and Passion of Christ*, EETS o.s. 158 (Bungay, Suffolk: Richard Clay & Sons, Ltd., 1921).

[10] Charlotte D'Evelyn, ed., *Meditations*, x.

[11] F. J. E. Raby, "A Middle English Paraphrase of John of Hoveden's "Philomena" and the Text of His "Viola","  *MLR* 30.3 (Jul., 1935): 339-43.  For a more detailed comparison of the two poems, see Charlotte D'Evelyn, "'Meditations on the Life and Passion of Christ,': A Note on its Literary Relationships," in *Essays and Studies in Honor of Carleton Brown* (New York: New York University Press, 1940): 79-90.

[12] Charlotte D'Evelyn, ed., *Meditations*, xv, xvi.

religious traditions that emphasized the importance of using scenes from Christ's Passion as a meditational focus in devout practices.

Members of the laity from all levels of society in late medieval England, for example, were taught to concentrate their devout attentions on scenes from Christ's Passion since this event was found to be a visually rich, affectively potent avenue by which audiences from a variety of educational backgrounds could engage with spiritual matters. The medieval mass demonstrates the pervasiveness with which scenes from the Passion permeated devotional practice. "From the beginning to the end," O. B. Hardison notes, the mass operated as "a rememorative drama depicting the life, ministry, crucifixion, and resurrection of Christ."[13] Those attending mass were encouraged to repetitively focus on the Passion, as demonstrated by a late-fifteenth-century text, titled in its manuscript as "Meditatyons for goostely exercise In þe tyme of þe masse." This work explicitly states that "þe *pr*ocesse of þe masse rep*r*esentyd þe verey *pr*ocesse of þe Passyon off Cryst," and describes at length the correspondences between the rituals of the mass and the events of Christ's Passion.[14] The priest, for example, is figured as Christ,

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[13] O. B. Hardison, Jr., *Christian Rite and Christian Drama in the Middle Ages: Essays in the Origin and Early History of Modern Drama* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1965), 44; see also pages 35-79. For a general discussion of how late-medieval audiences were instructed to hear mass, see Katherine Zieman, *Singing the New Song: Literacy and Liturgy in Late Medieval England* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 80-92.

[14] Bodleian Wood Empt. 17, f. 1r. The beginning of this work states: "The p*ri*ste going to masse signifythe . *&* rep*r*esentyd þe Sauyou*r* off þe world our moost swett Rede-mer Cryst Iesu . whyche cam fro*m* hevoy*n* to þe vaile of mys*eri*e this wrechyd w[orl]d to suffer passyon fo mans Redemptyon ." (f. 1r). This text can also be found in: Thomas Frederick Simmons, ed., *The Lay Folks Mass-Book*, EETS o.s. 71 (London: N. Trübner & Co., 1879).

the altar signifies the cross, and the chalice is related to Christ's sepulcher.[15] Eamon

Duffy notes that such correspondences highlighted for fifteenth- and sixteenth-century

audiences how the Passion was "the event which made all of them possible and

meaningful, the consecration which renewed and gave access to the salvation of mankind

on Calvary."[16] The repeated return to the Passion in the *Meditations on the Life and*

*Passion of Christ* strikingly mirrors the standard progression of prayer during mass by

leading the reader back to Christ's death as a way to heighten the affective power of the

surrounding material.[17] Repetitions of Christ's suffering could function – in the

ceremony of the mass and in poetic contexts such as the *Meditations* – as a narrative

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[15] See Bodleian Wood Empt. 17, f. 1v-2r. The text reads:

> The [a]vter The crosse The vestyme*n*ts signifyth The garment*s* . Whyte & purpule w*ith*
> which herode & þe Iewys dyd clothe ou*r* sauyou*r* in grett scorne & derysyon . The ryght
> corner of þe Avter Repre-sentyd þ*e* lyff of Innocensy . which man loost by synne .
> restoryde agay*ne* In þ*e* lyff of ou*r* moost blys-syd Sauyou*r* . The lefte ende of þe avter
> signyfyth þ*is* myserable lyff . þ*e* whiche we now be in . þe Chales dothe signyfye þe se-
> pulchur of ou*r* Lorde . the Paten . signifythe þ*e* stone þ*at* coue*r*yd þ*e*t The Corparaice .
> The sudarye & Syndo . signyfyeth wher in hys blyssyd body was layd The oyst The body
> of Oryst The watter & wyne doith rep*r*esent þe exp*e*sse effusyon of Blood & watter .
> frome hys blyssyd syde . Lett þ*is* be yo*r* daily Medytatyon to styr yow . to þe diligent &
> co*m*pendy-ous Reme*m*brance of þ*e* Passyon off Cryst. (f. 1v-2r, my transcription)

[16] Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England c. 1400-c. 1580* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 119.

[17] As I discuss in Chapter 3, this repeated return to affectively potent scenes such as Christ's Passion could provide the reader with fertile material for discontinuous reading practices – in which the goal of reading was to locate specific, memorable passages as opposed to reading a text from start to finish with the expectation of following a cohesive narrative. Many texts encouraged their readers in prologues and epilogues not to read their contents in order but to instead alight upon whichever passages best incited them to devotional fervor. The reaction inspired by a passage of a text in a reader, therefore, took precedent over the consumption of the entirety of a text; if a portion of a text seemed dull or unimportant to a reader, it could be passed over without guilt.

center, allowing the accompanying interwoven material to become more affectively

potent based upon its relationship to these cyclical returns to Christ's Passion.[18]

When the conflation of Christ's body with the composition of a book becomes one

of the central metaphors employed by the *Meditations* – a metaphor borrowed from

another poem also in circulation at the end of the fourteenth century, the *Orison of the*

*Passion* – the reader, then, would have recognized that a crucial interpretive element had

been added to the repetition of scenes from Christ's Passion.  The conflation of Christ

with a book enters into the poem for the first time when the narrator, referring to Christ,

states that:

> He wrot his body wiþ harde nailes
> To writon vs in bok þat neuere failes.
> Boþe wiþ-ynne and ek wiþ-oute
> þat bok was writon wiþ nailes stoute;
> þo lettres to þi bon weron set,
> ffor þei sholdon laste þe bet.[19]

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[18] Jennifer Ash comments on the pervasiveness of verbal and visual texts that focus on the Passion in late medieval Europe, stating that the "Christianity of the later Middle Ages was a discourse constituted through a rhetoric . . .of violence and death, of pain and suffering: a discourse of the body and the bodily, revelling in the fleshliness of the Word" (76).  Jennifer Ash, "The Discursive Construction of Christ's Body in the Later Middle Ages: Resistance and Autonomy," in *Feminine/Masculine and Representation*, ed. Terry Threadgold and Anne Cranny-Francis (Sydney: Allen and Unwin: 1990), 75-105.  But this violence was not just employed for its shock value; it had a variety of mnemonic and affective benefits for late-medieval audiences.  Mary Carruthers, for example, has demonstrated that textual or visual depictions inspiring extreme emotions in the reader could play a crucial mnemonic role by better enabling a reader to record that which was being read within his or her memory.  Regarding the "*trope* of violence," Carruthers states that "one sees its mnemonic use not only in the cultivation of anxiety-provoking images but in the actual, pervasive brutality of ancient and medieval elementary pedagogy, precisely the time in a child's life at which the most important foundational memory-work was being done … [and] many medieval people clearly saw it as necessary to impress memories upon the brain, those all-important, rote-retained 'habits of their culture" (3).  In Mary Carruthers, "Reading With Attitude, Remembering the Book," in *The Book and the Body*, eds. Dolores Warwick Frese and Katherine O'Brien O'Keeffe (Notre Dame, IN: The University of Notre Dame Press, 1997), 1-33.

[19] *Meditations*, lines 883-888.

Christ's body which is written on and the book within which he writes share many of the same attributes in this passage; both have an interior and an exterior, both are written on with nails which act as pens, and both are inscribed with letters.  In the final two lines quoted here, however, Christ's body and the book he creates become indistinguishable when it is stated that the book's letters were inscribed on the bones so that they "sholdon laste þe bet."  Christ writes his body and his book at the same time, joining the two written "texts" firmly within the mind of the reader.  In the midst of one of the *Meditations'* recurring scenes depicting Christ's Passion, this extreme scene of textual composition and bodily inscription is inserted, challenging the reader to consider his or her relationship to this violent act of writing – as both an audience member and as one who was assumedly written about in the "bok þat neuere failes."  The act of writing becomes intimately associated with Christ's body and death as letters are inscribed into Christ's, and the book's, very bones.

The *Orison of the Passion*, extant in nine manuscripts dating from the second half of the fourteenth century to the first half of the fifteenth century, provides the model for much of the language pertaining to books and writing in the *Meditations* and illustrates the popularity of and diverse interest in this metaphor.[20]  A short poem of 154 lines, the *Orison* is an extended prayer to Christ that dwells primarily upon Christ's crucifixion before ending in a lengthy entreaty that asks Christ to intercede on mankind's behalf.

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[20] The *Orison of the Passion* occurs in: MS Bodley 850 (90r-91v, 2nd half of 14th c.); MS Bodley e. Mus. 232 (f. 62r-65v); MS Bodley Addit E. 4 (first half of 15th c., a roll); Pepys 2125 (76v, 15th c.); BL MS Sloane 963 (f. 17r, begins imperfectly, 15th c.), Gurney MS (182v, end of 14th c.); Longleat MS (1) (15th c.); Longleat MS (2) (15th c.); Lambeth 599 (14th c., 134r); BL Addit 39574 (early 15th c., 1r-4v).

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The manuscript witnesses in which the *Orison* survives testify to its circulation alongside

a range of devotional texts, many of which also treat the subject of Christ's Passion.[21]

One witness, for example, found in Bodleian Library MS e. Musaeo 232 (c. 1475-1500),

positions this poem alongside the work of Richard Rolle of Hampole, the fourteenth-

century hermit whose Latin and vernacular works mark him as one of the most important

English mystics of the late-medieval period.  This short volume is comprised of eight

quires and contains multiple works which focus on Christ's Passion and how the devout

reader should meditate upon it.[22]  Richard Rolle's *Meditations on the Passion of Christ*

begins the manuscript and includes an oft-quoted passage that also links Christ's body to

a book:

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[21] The *Orison* occurs in primarily devotional manuscript contexts, and the text appears to have circulated amongst a range of audiences.  In Bodley 850, for example, the *Orison* is incorporated into a traditional Latin Book of Hours, while in MS Bodley Addit E. 4 it is written on a roll alongside the *Symbols of the Passion* (see chapter 3 for a more detailed discussion of the *Symbols*). Both of these manuscripts are illuminated and written in formal *textualis*-based scripts, suggesting that they were intended for wealthier audiences.  Pepys 2125 in contrast includes the *Orison* within a more utilitarian and sparsely decorated manuscript which contains a collection of devotional literature and sermons.

[22] The contents of the manuscript are: f. 1r-18r: Rolle, *Meditations on the Passion of Christ*; f. 18r-23v: *Gregorius de humilitate*; f. 24r-62r: *Speculum Ecclesiae*; f. 62r-65v: *The Orison of the Passion*; f. 65v-66v: A Prose meditation on the Passion (Incipit: "O myghtful ihū grete was þe peyne þat 3e suffred").  The manuscript is small enough to have fit into a reader's pocket and was rubricated by "Jon Flemmyn" (MS e. Mus. 232, f. 62). For a brief description of the manuscript, see Kathryn Kerby-Fulton and Denise L. Despres, *Iconography and the Professional Reader: The Politics of Book Production in the Douce* Piers Plowman (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1999): 228, n. 24.
   The employment of a consistent decorative schema across the included works and of regular catchphrases emphasizes the level of formality and scribal professionalism which existed in the production of this manuscript.  Josephine Koster Tarvers also notes that this manuscript bears the ownership marks of two women.  She writes that "an 'Annes Helperby' signed her name several times as owner; and another woman, 'Elyzabethe Stoughton,' also recorded her name" (317).  See '"Thys ys my mystrys boke": English Women as Readers and Writers in Late Medieval England', in *The Uses of Manuscripts in Literary Studies: Essays in Memory of Judson Boyce Allen*, eds. Charlotte Cook Morse, Penelope Reed Doob & Marjorie Curry Woods (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 1992), 305-27.

> More yit swet ihū þy body is lyke a bok written al w*ith* rede ynke ; so is þy body al written w*ith* rede wou*n*des . Now swete ihū g*ra*unt me to rede vpon þy boke & somwhate to vndrestond þ*e* swetnes of þ*at* writynge & to haue likynge i*n* studio*us* abydynge of þ*at* redynge . & yeve me g*ra*ce to conceyue somwhate of þ*e* perles loue of ihū crist . & to lerne by þ*at* ensample to loue god agaynward as I shold and swete ihū g*ra*unt me þis study in euche tyde of þe day & let me vpon þis boke study at my matyns & hours & euynsonge & complyne & euyr*e* to be my meditacou*n* my speche & my dalyaunce.[23]

The relationship between the book and Christ's body is firmly established in this passage. Christ's body is at first described as being "lyke a bok" because of the prevalence of his red wounds, but as the passage continues, the boundary between Christ and the book he resembles – as in the *Meditations* – becomes less distinct. The body of Christ merges with the book to become an object of study, a text to be read and interpreted. Rolle requests grace so that he might best be able to understand such a body / book. He asks Jesus to allow him to study it "in euche tyde of þe day" and to have it ever in his "speche" and "dalyaunce," with the goal of understanding somewhat the "perles" love of Christ. The contemplation of the book, as a representation of Christ's body but also as a material object that was written out with red ink and held in one's hand, acts for Rolle as a way to focus his meditations in a productive fashion. Christ's (wounded) body – and the love that inspired him to sacrifice himself for mankind – is rendered more accessible as it is transformed into an object that is present for audiences to view, read, and study.

The trope that relates Christ's body to a book, as exemplified by the passage from Rolle, often focuses on Christ's *suffering* body, a body tormented during his crucifixion.

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[23] Bodleian Library MS e. museo 232, f. 7v-8r.

The process of writing out Christ's body / book is excruciatingly enacted through the inflication of wounds on his flesh or bones. Were books, then, perceived as representing not only Christ's body but also his pain in some fundamental fashion? In writing out such a text – or in reading it – was Christ's suffering thought to have been re-enacted as well? There does seem to have existed the sense that a book and a body both shared the capacity to suffer. Michael Camille highlights how Richard de Bury describes the suffering of books in *Philobiblon*, commenting that de Bury understands books to be "bodies also in their vulnerability to disease and death, enduring pains in their backs, their 'limbs unstrung by palsy' and their whiteness turned 'to dun and yellow.'"[24] "It is only," Camille notes, "when describing books as victims of violence and subjects of suffering that de Bury ever gets close to the flesh of volumes."[25] Just as human bodies could display exterior markings of wounds or illnesses, so too could books be perceived of as providing proof of their "suffering" or age as a reader consulted their torn, discolored, and worn pages.

The material form of books might display the visually moving signs of age and disfigurement, but books could also act as tools that could be used to dispel the physical and temporal boundaries that might divide a reader from a text's author or narrated

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[24] Michael Camille, "The Book as Flesh and Fetish in Richard de Bury's Philobiblon," in *The Book and the Body*, ed. by Dolores Warwick Frese and Katherine O'Brien O'Keefe (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997), 34-77, at 54.

[25] Camille, "The Book as Flesh," 54-55.

subject.[26]  Commenting on the memorial practices that existed during the late Middle

Ages, Mary Carruthers specifies that "a book is itself a mnemonic" since "in a memorial

culture, a 'book' is only one way among several to remember a 'text,' to provision and cue

one's memory."[27]  The text was not intended to remain static on the page but instead was

intended to be transformed from written words into lived memory.  And once a text was

transferred from page to memory, it entered into the reader's experience.  Medieval

readers did not understand the process of reading to "observe in the same way the basic

distinction we make between 'what I read in a book' and 'my experience.'"[28]  Instead

readers seem to have considered that "'what I read in a book' is 'my experience,' and I

make it mine by incorporating it … in my memory."[29]  In a 1359 letter to Boccaccio,

Petrarch demonstrates how intimately written texts could enter into the body of the

reader, writing:

> I ate in the morning what I would digest in the evening; I swallowed as a
> boy what I would ruminate upon as an older man.  I have thoroughly
> absorbed these writings [michi tam familiariter ingessere], implanting
> them not only in my memory but in my marrow . . . But sometimes I may
> forget the author, since through long usage and continual possession I may
> adopt them and for some time regard them as my own.[30]

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[26] Paul Saenger also notes how the spread of silent reading and "the new internal mode of prayer, cultivated
in the late Middle Ages, created a new intimacy between the praying individual and the book, and intimacy
that both stimulated more individualistic practices of devotion, and kindled the desire for control of text and
accompanying illustrations" (156-7).  See Paul Saenger, "Books of Hours and the Reading Habits of the
Later Middle Ages" in *The Culture of Print: Power and the Uses of Print in Early Modern Europe*, ed.
Roger Chartier (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989), 141-173.

[27] Carruthers, *Memory*, 8.

[28] Ibid., 169.

[29] Ibid., 169.

[30] Qtd. by Carruthers, *Memory*, 219.

As Petrarch illustrates, the texts that one read were thought to become a part of that person in a fundamental way, a part of his or her knowledge, memory, and even body. And this process of reading as internal inscription, as a process that left its mark indelibly in the reader's body, strikingly mirrors the method of writing employed by Christ as he etched the words of his book into his bones so that they could endure for as long as possible.

The *Orison of the Passion* and the *Meditations on the Life and Passion of Christ* both actively encourage the incorporation of the text into the body of the reader – linking the acts of reading and writing with an increased experiential understanding of Christ's suffering during his Passion.[31] These poems conflate the book of Christ's body and the book being written within the reader's heart - and thus his or her memory.[32] The *Orison* immediately begins its verse by focusing on the body-as-book imagery while the *Meditations* incorporates this imagery through a refrain (much of which is borrowed from

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[31] Walter Ong argues that "when a speaker is addressing an audience, the members of the audience normally become a unity, with themselves and with the speaker. If the speaker asks the audience to read a handout provided for them, as each reader enters into his or her own private reading world, the unity of the audience is shattered" (74). I would counter, however, that the metaphors of writing the experience of Christ's Passion into one's heart does not result in a "shattered" unity amongst readers but instead a strengthened sense of community. Reading about Christ's Passion, inscribing it into their own memories, became a unifying experience for devout audiences; the written text does not appear to aim to divide these readers but instead to bring them together. Although, it must be admitted that these texts were probably listened to by groups of readers just as often, if not more so, because they were read privately. See Walter Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (London: Routledge, 1982).

[32] The heart, in contrast to our understanding of it as an emotional center today, was considered by medieval audiences to be the storehouse of one's memory. Carruthers writes that "'memory' as 'heart' was encoded in the common Latin verb *recordari*, meaning 'to recollect.' … The Latin verb evolved into the Italian *ricordarsi*, and clearly influenced the early use in English of 'heart' for memory.' Chaucer often uses the phrase 'by heart' as we still use it" (*Memory*, 48-49).

the *Orisons*) that begins about two-thirds of the way into its text.  The first occurrence of

this refrain in the *Meditations* reads:

> The corone an þe scorges grete
> þ*at* þou were wiþ so sore y-bete;
> þy wepyng and þi woundes wyde
> þe blod [þat] ran doun by thi side.
> þi shame, scorn, and gret despyt,
> þe spotel þ*at* fouled þy face whyt,
> þe easel and þe bitt*er* galle
> And other of þy peynes alle;
> But I haue hem in my þou3t
> Al my lyf I sette at nou3t.
> Loue þ*at* art so mykel of my3t,
> Writ in myn herte þat reufel sy3t…[33]

This passage foregrounds the traditional torments that Christ underwent: the crown of

thorns, the scourges with which he was beaten, the wounds from the nails and the sword,

and the gall raised to his lips.  These weapons of torment, Christ's *arma Christi*, were

frequently incorporated into texts and images by the end of the fourteenth century as

prompts for individual mediations on the Passion.  What is unusual, however, about this

passage is its abrupt transition from listing the origins of Christ's pain to overt instruction

as to how this scene should be approached by the reader.  The scene of Christ's suffering

opens a dialogue between what it means to read and what it means to write; to read

successfully – and in this case to read and comprehend Christ's suffering successfully –

one must write what one reads within one's memory and experience.[34]

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[33] *Meditations*, lines 1339-1350.

[34] This is not to say that reading and thus experiencing Christ's pain is conceived of as easy to accomplish.
Near the beginning of the *Meditations*, the narrator forefronts the difficulty when he prays, "Ih*esu*, sende in
myn herte also / Grace to fele of þat wo; / ffor þ*at* man*er* of morning / Passeth all worldes lykyng" (361-4).

A repetition follows in which the narrator instructs the reader to "writ" multiple

aspects of the Passion into his or her "herte."[35]  With each repetition, it is as if readers are

encouraged to etch and engrave the events of Christ's Passion and Christ's suffering

more deeply into their memories.  Several of these passages ground this metaphor in the

literal act of writing, such as when the narrator states, "Al-þei myn herte be hard a[s] ston

/ Loue, 3it þou my3t wryte þer-on / Wiþ nailes and wiþ spere kene, / So shullon þe lettres

wel be sene."[36]  Just as Christ earlier uses his nails to etch out the letters of his book on

his own body, so too is the reader directed to employ similar writing tools, with the

reader's heart acting as the etching-surface onto which the details of Christ's crucifixion

are recorded.[37]  The narrator continues with this metaphor, instructing, for example:

"Writ þe strokes of hammeres stoute, / Writ þe blod rennyng a-boute"; "Writ after þis þat

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[35] Eric Jager examines in-depth the medieval metaphor of writing in the book of one's heart.  He states that "the book of the heart is a quintessentially medieval trope.  On a material level, figuring the heart as a book (i.e., a manuscript codex) reflected a scribe-based technology of writing and book production, while on a conceptual level it reflected the medieval notion of knowledge or truth as a totality.  Conversely, to figure a book as a heart was to equate textuality with subjectivity since the heart was central to medieval psychology" (2).  This reading is perceptive, but I would add that the imagery of writing Christ's *pain* and the events of his crucifixion in one's heart inserts an additional level of physicality into this metaphor.  In the *Meditations* and *Orison*, writing on one's heart involves an active experiencing and remembering of another's bodily suffering.  Textuality becomes associated here with subjectivity – but in the very physical sense of offering the reader an imaginary space in which he or she can experience the Christ's pain during his Passion.  Eric Jager, "The Book of the Heart: Reading and Writing the Medieval Subject," *Speculum* 71 (1996): 1-26.  See also Eric Jager, *Book of the Heart* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000).

[36] *Meditations*, 1355-8.

[37] In "Reading with Attitude," Carruthers examines the fact that writing within one's memory is often depicted as a violent process – similar to the actual, physical writing on an exterior page of parchment.  She comments that medieval texts describe how, as one reads, "materials are cut (incised) into the brain, as units of text and image like the bits of punctuated text on a book page"; written materials are, she continues, "incised in memory and brought forth through *com-punc-tion* or anxious care – that is, 'affliction'" (6-7).  St. Anselm of Bec, Carruthers points out, "scares himself [when reading], he grieves himself, he shames himself: this is *com-punc-tio cordis*, wounding oneself with the text and picture" (22).

body swete, / Wiþ sharpe scories þat body bete"; "Writ his body with blod y-spreynt / As

is þe welkene with sterres y-peynt"; and "Writ peynes, scornes, and despyt, / The rede

woundes on skyn so whyt."[38] The lines above represent just a small portion of such

directives included in the *Meditations* but amply display the sustained instruction for the

reader to read about Christ's wounded body and suffering and then to write those

descriptions into his or her own heart / experience.

While the *Meditations* derives this metaphor from the *Orison of the Passion*, the

author of the *Meditations* adapts the borrowed passages to suit his own narrative

interests; he does not, for example, maintain the order of the lines that he pulls from the

*Orison* nor does he copy the lifted lines word for word.[39] The main change the author of

the *Meditations* makes, however, is in who is being asked to undertake the writing of

Christ's pain within the reader's heart. In the passages pulled from the *Orison*, an

allegorization of "Love" is entreated to complete this act of composition – a love that

comes into being as readers set aside their love of all earthly things to focus on their love

of Christ.[40] The narrator asks "Loue þat art so mykel of my3t" to "writ in myn herte þat

rueful sy3t,"[41] as if Love could act as a third party who negotiates between the reader and

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[38] *Meditations*, 1363-4, 1391-2, 1467-8, 1399-1400.

[39] See D'Evelyn, ed., *Meditations*, 60-64. D'Evelyn provides a complete account of which lines in the *Orison* have been borrowed by the *Meditations* – and in what order they have been borrowed – in the Appendix to her edition.

[40] See *Meditations*, 1323-24. The text reads: "Nou, herte, let þuse loues gon / And set þy loue on Cryst alon."

[41] Ibid., 1349-50.

Christ's suffering body. Christ's suffering seems figured less as that which can be directly experienced by readers and more as that which should be affectively witnessed by them.

The *Orison*, however, allows no such distance since it is not Love but instead Christ himself whom the narrator asks to write the events of the Passion into his heart. The *Orison* begins with the request that "Ihū þat hast me dere I bo3t / Write þou gostly in my þo3t / þat I mow with deuocoun / þynk on þy der passioun."[42] These are among the few lines not incorporated into the *Meditations*, and they offer the impression that Christ takes an active role in relating the events of his Passion to the reader. Through reading the poem, it is implied, the reader could gain access to Christ's personal vantage point as he was crucified. The narrator requests, for example, that Christ "write hou downewarde þou gane lokene / Whane Iewus to þe þe crose betokene," "Ihesu, write in myne herte deepe / how þat þou be-ganne to wepe," and "Ihesu, 3ite write in myne herte / How bloode oute of þi wondis sterte; / And wiþ þat bloode write þow so ofte / Myne harde herte tile hit be softe."[43] The reader is encouraged to see the Jews from Christ's position on the cross, to share in his tears, and perhaps even to feel the sensation of the blood flowing from his wounds.

This style of narration encourages an immediacy of experience between the reader and Christ and perhaps explains why some witnesses of the *Orison* begin with a short

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[42] Bodleian Library, MS e. mueso 232, f. 62r-v.

[43] *"An Orison of the Passion,"* in *Meditations on the Life and Passion of Christ*, ed. Charlotte D'Evelyn (Bungay, Suffolk: Richard Clay & Sons, Ltd., 1921), lines 37-8, 41-2, 49-52.

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prologue which instructs: "In seiynge of þis orisoun stynteth & bydeth at euery cros &

thynketh whate 3e haue seide . ffor a more deuout prayere ffond I neuer of þe passioun

who so wold deuoutly say hit as hit folweth."[44]  This injunction highlights the active style

of reading advocated by this poem.  The text – and Christ's suffering during the Passion –

should be incorporated into the reader's devotional practice to such an extent that it could

be said to structure his or her reaction to certain images and objects.  And as readers

repeat this poem at every cross that they come across, the author of the *Orison* demands

that they simultaneously etch its words deeper into their memories.  With each repetition

of this prayer, readers would reiterate their request that Christ write the text within their

thoughts – encouraging the (ever deeper) inscription of the events of the Passion into

their memories.  The acts of composition and of reading, then, become intimately linked

with Christ's suffering and the material form of the book as the narrator exploits such

imagery to confront and explore Christ's pain.[45]

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[44] Bodleian Library, MS e. museo 232, f. 62r.

[45] In her book, *From Judgment to Passion*, Rachel Fulton explores John of Fécamp's *Libellus*, an eleventh-century Latin work written for a nun that guides the reader in prayers to Christ.  This text requests that the reader's heart be pierced, written upon, and wounded by Christ's love, and Fulton comments that "this writing into memory, this inscription on the heart, is itself expected to provoke tears: the *compunctio* of the heart is here conceptually identified with *compunctio*, the pricking or punctuation, of the written page. Pain, in other words, is a prerequisite not only of love but also of memory – including, above all, memory of Christ" (166).  She goes on to remark that memory was "associated through the image of writing with pain, painful or 'excessive' images being considered, by ancient rhetoricians as well as medieval *oratores*, to be more conducive to memory than milder, less passionate, more common ones.  The wounds of Christ are invoked to fix the memory of his love in the mind of the *orator*, . . . [with] the weapons themselves standing as metaphors for the wounds they inflict, material references for the pain that the soul experiences in its separation from Christ" (169-70).  Rachel Fulton, *From Judgment to Passion: Devotion to Christ and the Virgin Mary, 800-1200* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002).

Amidst these metaphorical and literal acts of writing and textual creation, it seems important to emphasize the obvious instruction included within these passages that the reader must write, and thereby remember the experience of, someone else's pain. It is implied that the better one is as a reader, the more of Christ's pain one would be able to experience and thus remember. Modern theorists, however, often describe pain as difficult, if not impossible, to convey accurately between individuals.[46] Elaine Scarry, for example, writes that pain brings about "an absolute split between one's sense of one's own reality and the reality of other persons," and that "whatever pain achieves, it achieves in part through its unsharability, [ensuring] this unsharability through its resistance to language."[47] While logically this statement seems inescapably true – that no matter how hard I try I will never be able to know my neighbor's or my husband's pain – in a surprising way, the *Meditations* and the *Orison* seem to challenge the certainty that an "absolute split" takes place between bodies. The narrative instruction in these texts appears to assume that the reader *can* meditate on Christ's pain to the point that they are

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[46] Elaine Scarry describes pain as "language-destroying"; David B. Morris writes that it is "an archetype of subjectivity" since it is impossible to share; and Mary S. Sheridan states that the concept of pain is "riddled with paradox" since it appears to defy expression even while occupying a central role in the human experience. See Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 19; David B. Morris, *The Culture of Pain* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 14; and Mary S. Sheridan, *Pain in America* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1992), ix.

[47] Scarry, *Pain*, 4.

able to "feel" it successfully.[48]  The entire purpose of these texts rests upon this assumption.

The metaphor of the body as book seems to reveal, in part, how medieval religious culture conceived of the boundaries between and possible overlapping experiences of individual bodies, especially between Christ's body and that of the reader. Assuming the impossibility of conveying the "truth" of pain with language, scholars who study pain frequently interest themselves in how suffering is described via figurative language as authors attempt to get ever closer to the threshold of precise communication.[49]  And perhaps the metaphor of the book functions as just such an attempt, couching Christ's pain in figurative language to enable readers to imagine his internal pain in an external form – one that could be held at arm's length and perused. But the emphasis on writing Christ's pain in one's heart suggests that this metaphor does not intend the pure reification of Christ's pain into an external object since medieval readers approached books as objects that were meant to be internalized as they were consumed.

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[48] See *Sacred Pain: Hurting the Body for the Sake of the Soul* in which Ariel Glucklich examines the complex relationship between rituals of suffering and virtue in religion from a psychological perspective. Glucklich writes that the knot at the center of the study was: "What is the effect of self-induced pain on the religious person?" (6).  Unlike many other recent writers, Glucklich argues for the innate human capacity to share pain, writing that "it is inconceivable that the suffering of Christ on the cross, or that the astounding martyrdom of the saints, … would mean anything to anyone unless pain was intrinsically shareable" (63).

[49] For example, see Lucy Bending, "Approximation, Suggestion, and Analogy: Translating Pain into Language," *Yearbook of English Studies* 36.1 (2006): 131-7.  In an analysis of the private notebooks of nineteenth-century French novelist, Alphonse Daudet, who suffered from syphilis, Bending suggest that while "pain may indeed lie beyond the reach of a direct, categorical language, . . . it may perhaps be approached indirectly through analogy or through particular kinds of narrative representation" (132).

When people are in pain, it has been suggested, those individuals become trapped within their bodies, as if the rest of the world recedes and only the pain that they experience is real, while they suffer from an internal sensation that cannot be accurately communicated via language.  This inability to communicate their experiences results in isolating those sufferers from society.[50]  The principle goal of the sufferer is said to be to stop his or her pain, to expel it by attaining its cessation.  But medieval culture presents an alternate view, one in which pain is considered not to be an inherently bad sensation that must be neutralized but instead one that could be a potentially useful tool for devotional and literary activity.  With the growing popularity of the body-as-book metaphor from the twelfth through the fifteenth centuries, religious authors exploited the book as an object in their attempts to render Christ's crucifixion more affectively potent and more easily accessible to readers.  Books seem to have been treated in these texts as tools that could mediate between bodies by seeming to allow the reader entrance into Christ's suffering.  Because readers were encouraged to internalize the books and texts they consumed, the reading process acted as a mirror image of the modern perception that sufferers must desire to externalize (and thus cease) their physical pain.  By both describing Christ's tortuous act of writing on his own body and instructing the reader to

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[50] Elaine Scarry writes that "for the person in pain, so incontestably and unnegotiably present is it that 'having pain' may come to be thought of as the most vibrant example of what it is to 'have certainty,' while for the other person it is so elusive that 'hearing about pain' may exist as the primary model of what it is 'to have doubt.'  Thus pain comes unsharably into our midst as at once that which cannot be denied and that which cannot be confirmed" (4).

write Christ's pain within his or her heart, two acts of composition in the *Meditations* and *Orison* converge on the *locus* of the manuscript book.

In both the *Meditations* and the *Orison*, reading is crucially linked to writing. The reader is called upon to continue the act of writing that was started by the scribe who initially wrote out the text's words. Each re-reading would seem to have constituted a re-writing as well, and each internal inscription of the text and of the events of Christ's Passion seems to make the reader into a new copy – a new witness, in both the textual and the spiritual sense. Christ writes of his painful Passion on his body / in his book, and readers reproduce that exemplum within their hearts while they read. The *Orison* and the *Meditations* imply that readers gain a connection to Christ's suffering through their texts precisely because they, themselves, become copies of Christ's book as they read.

Christ as document: the *Charters of Christ*

The *Charters of Christ* are a family of popular devotional texts that circulated widely in late medieval England.[51] As a group, these texts describe the transformation of Christ's body, during his Passion, into a legal charter that guarantees mankind's salvation. While the *Meditations on the Life and Passion of Christ* and *Orison of the Passion* explore the affective potential latent within the interplay between writing and reading a text, they fall short of the level of detailed description of textual creation that is

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[51] Andrew Breeze notes the primarily English provenance of the *Charters of Christ*, stating that the audience they were written for "was almost completely English and popular." See Andrew Breeze, "The Charter of Christ in Medieval English, Welsh, and Irish," *Celtica* 19 (1987): 111-20, at 111.

found in the *Charters of Christ*. The *Meditations* and *Orison* hint at the mechanics of writing with the portrayal of nails as pens and of bones as writing surfaces, but the *Charters* include a more sustained treatment of the materials and processes that went into the creation of a manuscript book or, in this case, a document. This section continues to explore the interrelation between acts of reading and writing by turning to the manuscript record of the *Charters* and suggesting that the witnesses to these texts demonstrate possible evidence of scribal interpretation and adaptation. Because the body of Christ becomes a document that this text purports to reproduce, scribes might be thought of as having a privileged role in that document's creation, decorating and inscribing the words onto the page that presents itself as being Christ's body – a writing process that is described as a part of Christ's torment and torture. If the *Meditations* and the *Orison* invite readers to inscribe the events of Christ's Passion within their bodies as they read, in a sense turning readers into writers, then the witnesses of the *Charters* seem to flip the relationship between writing and reading around as some of its scribes appear to have become active readers and interpreters of these poems as they wrote out and decorated them.[52]

Versions of Christ's charter exist in over forty manuscripts dating from the first half of the fourteenth century, and a prose re-interpretation of the text, titled the "Charter

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[52] Although speaking specifically about Chaucer's "House of Fame," Martin Irvine suggests that the act of writing in that work is shown to be "a form of reading which repeats itself in another text" (869). Through writing texts are read and circulated amongst readers; those texts that are not rewritten are thus doomed to fall into "oblivion" (869). See Martin Irvine, "Medieval Grammatical Theory and Chaucer's *House of Fame*," *Speculum* 60.4 (Oct., 1985): 850-76.

of Heaven," circulated as a part of the *Pore Caitif* in an additional forty-seven

manuscripts.[53]  The impressive number of extant witnesses to versions and adaptations of

the *Charters of Christ* indicates the important role this poem played in late-medieval

devotional practice, and it has been commented that, "if one poem alone could stand for

the traditional ideologies and pieties of late-medieval English literature, it would seem to

be . . . the *Long Charter of Christ*."[54] Three main versions of the *Charters of Christ* are

commonly distinguished: the *Carta Dei*, the *Short Charter* and the *Long Charter*.  The

*Long Charter* is further subdivided into three separate redactions, an A-text (234 lines), a

B-text (418 lines), and a C-text (618 lines).[55]

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[53] For a description of the "Charter of Heaven," see Emily Steiner, "Lollardy and the Legal Document," in
*Lollards and their Influence in Late Medieval England*, ed. Fiona Somerset, Jill C. Havens, and Derrick G.
Pitard (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2003), 155-74.  Mary Spalding edits the witness to the "Charter of
Heaven" found in CUL MS Ff.6.34 in *The Middle English Charters of Christ* (Bryn Mawr, Penn: Bryn
Mawr College, 1914), 100-2.

[54] Emily Steiner, "Lollardy," 155.  For a general discussion of the placement of the *Charters of Christ*
within the tradition Passion narratives, see Rosemary Woolf, *The English Religious Lyric*, 210-4.

[55] See 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), 2343.  While the *Carta Dei* is extant in only one
manuscript (Bodleian, MS Kent Charter 233, c. 1400-25), the *Short* and *Long* redactions have survived in
greater quantities, extant in 23 and 18 witnesses respectively.  The *Manual* lists 24 extant witnesses of the
*Short Charter* (2548-9), but Laura Ashe has recently pointed out that the Manual incorrectly lists the single
version found in CUL Addit. 6686 (1400-50) as two separate witnesses, a long version and a short version
(37).  See Laura Ashe, "The 'Short *Charter of Christ*': An Unpublished Longer Version, from Cambridge
University Library, MS Add. 6686," *Medium Aevum* 72 (2003): 32-48.  CUL Ee. 2. 15 (1475-1500) is
similarly double-counted in the *Manual* as containing both a short and a long version, but only the B-text of
the *Long Charter* exists in Ee. 2. 15; the confusion appears to have occurred as a result of multiple foliation
systems present in the volume.  After removing these two-double counted versions, 42 witnesses to all
versions of the *Charters of Christ* may be said to be extant.
    The *Manual* lists nine witnesses to the A-text; as Ashe noted, CUL Addit 6686 was counted twice,
reducing the actual number to eight.  The B-text can be found in nine manuscripts, while the C-text is only
known to exist in a single manuscript (BL Royal 17.C.xvii, c. 1400-25).  The relationship between these
redactions would benefit from being reexamined, as several new manuscripts have come to light since
Mary Spalding's 1914 multi-text edition of the *Charters of Christ*.  The *Manual*, for example, identifies
three B-texts of which Spalding was not aware.

The earliest extant witness to the *Charters* is an A-text found in Oxford, Bodleian

Library MS Rawlinson poetry 175 (c. 1350). As no witness to the *Short Charter* can be

dated to earlier than 1400, it has been suggested that the *Short Charter* is an "abridged

version" of the longer text, although this assertion is not unanimously accepted.[56] The

redactions of the *Long Charter* provide an account of Christ's Passion, including

narrative scenes from the life of Christ and a detailed description of the process by which

Christ's body transforms into the charter during his Passion.[57] The shorter versions, the

*Carta Dei* (43 lines) and *Short Charter* (34 lines), present themselves as if they are the

final charter that was created by Christ during his crucifixion; this charter is implied to

have been created out of his body when Christ asserts that "my awne seal þerto I hynge /

And for þe more sikirnes / þe wounde in my syde þe seal it is."[58] The document of

Christ's charter is validated by his seal which is the wound in his side.

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[56] Steiner, "Lollardy," 155. This view has recently been disputed by Laura Ashe who argues that the relationship between the Short and Long versions of the Charter is "one of material coincidence rather than compositional inheritance" (32). She goes on to suggest that "the shorter poem, rather than being a less successful version of the long, is evidently engaged in a different task" – that of creating the impression that the poem partakes in the "authoritative legality" of charters – and the text has been altered to better serve this task (32, 36). Ashe, "The Short *Charter of Christ*."

[57] This chapter will take into account all versions of the *Charters of Christ* when looking at its material characteristics but will principally focus on the B-text of the *Long Charter* found in CUL MS Ff. 2. 38 for textual analysis. See Spalding, *The Middle English Charters of Christ*, for transcriptions of ten witnesses of the *Short Charter*, seven witnesses of the A-text of the *Long Charter*, and five witnesses of the B-text of the *Long Charter*.

[58] *Short Charter* (BL Additional MS 37049), ed. by Spalding, in *The Middle English Charters of Christ*, 8. The *Carta Dei* similarly makes the link between Christ's body and the charter explicit through the seal validating the document. It reads: "To thys charte trewe and good / I have set my seal, myn herthe blod" (Spalding, 98).

Within the *Long Charter*, the creation of Christ's charter is a violent, bloody

affair.  In the B-text, Christ is described as being bound to a pillar and covered in his own

blood the night before his crucifixion, awaiting the morning when he would be "streyned

well harde vpone a tree / As perchement owyth for to be."[59]  After the comparison of

Christ's skin to a sheet of parchment, Christ (as the *Charter*'s narrator) recounts that:

> Ouer all the face felle the ynke
> Thornys in myn hedd begynne to synke
> The pennys þat þo letturs wretyn*e*
> Were scorges þat y was w*ith* smetyn*e*
> How many letturs that þer-on bee
> Rede & þou may wytt and see
> ffyve thousande .v.c fifty & .x. than
> woundes on my body rede & wan*e*
> ffor to schewe þe for my loue-dede
> My-selfe wolde here the chartyr rede."[60]

The physical effects of his torturous transformation into a legal document are vividly

portrayed.  A steady flow of blood, of ink, covers Christ's face due to the crown of thorns.

Whips – and the pens of scribes – lash the letters into the parchment of his skin.  The

reader is invited to examine the 5,560 red wounds that cover Christ's pale body.  Each

material component of the charter is carefully associated with a portion of Christ's body

and is created from it through violence.  And in the thousands of dripping wounds /

words covering his body / parchment, readers are told that they will find proof of Christ's

"loue-dede" for them.  This act of love is not said to be evident through affective

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[59] Cambridge University Library, Ff. 2. 38, lines 157-8.  Edited in Spalding, *The Middle English Charters of Christ*, 47-81.

[60] CUL, MS Ff. 2. 38, lines 161-70.

observation, or pity, or compassion; instead, it must be read, and by reading the text inscribed on his skin, "þou may wytt and see."

The document is said to have been completed with the addition of impressed seals which are created from Christ's five wounds; the text reads:

> The selys þat hyt ys selyd w*ith*
> They were made at a smyth
> Of golde ne syluyr be þey noght
> Of Stele and yren they were wroght
> ffor w*ith* a spere of stelle my hert was sto*ng*e*n*
> Thorow my syde & thorow my longen*e*
> Vpon my syde þey made a wounde
> That my herte blode ran to ground
> And w*ith* yren nayles they bored me
> Thorow fete & hondes in-to þe tre
> The sesynge was dere y-boght
> At my herte rote hyt was y-soght
> All tempurd w*ith* fyne vermylou*n*
> Of my redd blood þat rane a-downe.[61]

This passage stresses the physical properties of the seals' stamps, the spear and the nails, identifying the metals out of which they were composed and specifying that they were created in a smith's shop. The placement of the wound the spear inflicts on Christ's body is presented with a similar physical specificity when its trajectory is described as reaching his heart through his side and through his lung. The "fyne vermyloun" of Christ's blood creates the document's sealing wax and also seems to reference the type of red ink most commonly used in manuscripts for rubrication, headings, and running titles.[62] By

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[61] Ibid., lines 217-30.

[62] In *Scribes and Illuminators* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992), Christopher de Hamel describes the use of vermillion ink alongside that of standard black ink (33).

describing the metals, the parts of Christ's body marked by these weapons, and the transformation of his blood into wax, this scene draws additional attention to the material processes by which legal documents were made.[63]  The text revels in the myriad ways in which the materiality of a document (its parchment, inks, and seals) could be related to Christ's suffering body and asserts that the validity of Christ's charter was ensured by its association with his physical wounds and flowing blood.

The detail with which the *Charters* relate Christ's body to a document invites an exploration into the surviving manuscript witnesses to consider how scribes portrayed that suffering, bleeding body in its written form.  It has been suggested that medieval scribes "had more freedom [than fifteenth- and sixteenth-century printers] (and, perhaps, more contact with those who commissioned books), that enabled them to develop, and refine, the page for the convenience of readers."[64]  This is not to suggest that all scribes – or even the majority of scribes – were creative adapters of a text's content or original crafters of its *mise-en-page*.  But, as Margaret Connolly and Linne Mooney comment, "in some instances scribes were concerned to reproduce the author's original text as it stood, or to recover it if necessary . . . ; [while] in many other instances scribes sought to adapt

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[63] Sometimes, as is found in CUL, MS Additional 6686, a text's Latin phrases were written with vermillion. It might be too tenuous to claim that this switch to red ink is meant to represent more explicitly the blood of Christ that was used as ink for his charter, since red ink was commonly employed for rubrication and simple decorations.  But the seal appended to the end of the text in this witness [Figure 11], complete with ties of blood running above and below it, encourages the connection to be made and perhaps illustrates how the scribe made use of the materials available to him to increase the visual and rhetorical effectiveness of the text.

[64] M. B. Parkes, "Layout and Presentation of the Text," *The Cambridge History of the Book in Britain, Vol. II (1100-1400)*, eds. Nigel Morgan and Rodney M. Thomson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 55-74, at 74.

their copy-texts to suit new purposes, extending or modernizing material or customizing it for different audiences."[65]  The *Charters* provide an ideal testing ground, I suggest, for questions of scribal influence due to the fact that they "enjoyed a long production life and were continually modified to accommodate a diverse readership."[66]  This section, then, aims to consider how contemporary depictions of scribal work resonate with the *Charters*' description of the writing process and suggest that extant witnesses to the *Charters* demonstrate the generic complexity of this text which, despite its explicit connection with a medieval legal document, appears to have been variously interpreted by its scribes as a religious, legal, and even courtly text.  In general, scribes who wrote out versions of the *Short Charter* make a greater effort to conform to the format of legal charters through their layout, length, and inclusion of Latin rubrics than do the scribes of witnesses of the *Long Charter* who tend to promote the text's religious themes through choices of script and contextual placement.  But when all the versions are regarded together, a surprising number of scribes appear to have altered the standard manuscript layout, textual content, or decorative schema, leaving traces of their interpretive choices in how they copied out these texts, as they emphasized the text's legal metaphor, its religious elements, or some combination of the two.

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[65] Margaret Connolly and Linne R. Mooney, eds., *Design and Distribution of Late Medieval Manuscripts in England* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: York Medieval Press, 2008), 2.

[66] Steiner, *Documentary Culture*, 76.  In "Lollardy and the Legal Document," Steiner also asserts that "Lollard appropriations of Christ's charter motivated fifteenth-century scribes of the *Long Charter* to re-affiliate the poem with an unabiguously orthodox polemic, and, in the process, to redefine the textual community . . . that a legal document might seem to produce" (156).  This is a strong claim for scribal intervention in this text – not only in how it was presented but also in terms of its content.  Steiner, "Lollardy and the Legal Document," 155-74.

The work of a medieval scribe was tedious, strenuous, and often painful. The tenth-century Spanish scribe, Florentius of Valeránica, describes the "burden of writing" at the end of the *Moralia in Job* in Madrid, Biblioteca National, MS 80, stating that "it mists the eyes, it curves the back, it breaks the belly and the ribs, it fills the kidneys with pain, and the body with all kinds of suffering."[67] Because writing inflicted such suffering, Florentius entreats future readers to "turn the pages slowly . . . and keep your fingers well away from the pages, for just as a hailstorm ruins the fecundity of the soil, so the sloppy reader destroys both the book and the writing."[68] And just as the act of writing took its toll on the scribe's body, so too did it alter the surface upon which the scribe pressed his pen. Mary Carruthers remarks that writing in the Middle Ages was a "vigorous, if not actually violent, activity" that involved "making a mark upon such a physical surface as an animal's skin."[69] The scribe had to break that skin, "rough it up, 'wound' it in some way with a sharply pointed instrument," leading writing to be "always hard physical labor [for a scribe], very hard as well on the surface on which it was being done."[70] With the act of writing so closely associated with the scribe's bodily discomfort, it is, perhaps, not surprising that texts relating Christ's body to a book or document choose Christ's crucifixion for their setting.

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[67] Qtd. by Raymond Clemens and Timothy Graham, in *Introduction to Manuscript Studies* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2007), 23.

[68] Clemens and Graham, *Manuscript Studies*, 23.

[69] Carruthers, "Reading with Attitude," 4. For a brief introduction to the process of making and the costs of parchment, see also Christopher de Hamel, *Scribes and Illuminators*, 8-16.

[70] Carruthers, "Reading with Attitude," 4.

The act of writing out a text, though, was not seen as an activity that affected the body alone; scribal work also is lauded in medieval sermons and religious texts for its potential spiritual benefit.  G. S. Ivy states that by the twelfth century, book production "had become identified with the monastic ideal" and that "it was extolled as a comprehensive means of subjugating the body for the future benefit of the soul."[71]  A twelfth-century sermon in Durham Cathedral MS B. IV. 12, cited by Ivy, clearly relates the production of books and scribal work with spiritual growth; it reads:

> Let us consider then how we may become scribes of the Lord.  The parchment on which we write for him is a pure conscience, whereon all our good works are noted by the pen of memory, and make us acceptable to God.  The knife wherewith it is scraped is the fear of God, which removes from our conscience by repentance all the roughness and unevenness of sin and vice. . . . The pen [penna], divided in two that it may be fit for writing, is the love of God and neighbor . . . The ink with which we write is humility itself . . . The diverse colours wherewith the book is illuminated, not unworthily represent the grace of heavenly Wisdom.[72]

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[71] G. S. Ivy, "The Bibliography of the Manuscript-Book," in *The English Library before 1700*, ed. by Francis Wormald and C. E. Wright (New Jersey: Athlone Press and Essential Books, 1958), 32-65, at 33 and 37.  See also M. T. Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record: England 1066-1307*, 2nd ed. (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 1993), esp. 115-8.

[72] Qtd. by Ivy, "The Bibliography of the Manuscript Book," 33-34.  Original citation: R. A. B. Mynors, *Durham Cathedral Manuscripts* (Oxford, 1939), 9.  The entire quotation, translated from Latin by R. A. B. Mynors, reads:

> Let us consider then how we may become scribes of the Lord.  The parchment on which we write for him is a pure conscience, whereon all our good works are noted by the pen of memory, and make us acceptable to God.  The knife wherewith it is scraped is the fear of God, which removes from our conscience by repentance all the roughness and unevenness of sin and vice.  The pumice wherewith it is made smooth is the discipline of heavenly desires . . . The chalk with whose fine particles it is whitened indicates the unbroken meditation of holy thoughts.  The ruler [regula] by which the line is drawn that we may write straight, is the will of God . . . The tool [instrumentum] that is drawn along the ruler to make the line, is our devotion to our holy task . . .  The pen [penna], divided in two that it may be fit for writing, is the love of God and neighbor . . . The ink with which we write is humility itself . . . The diverse colours wherewith the book is illuminated, not unworthily represent the grace of heavenly Wisdom . . . The desk [scriptorium] whereon we write is tranquillity of heart . . . The copy [exemplar] by which

Each act in the book-making process described in this passage is related to a step in the scribe's spiritual growth, and this affiliation between writing and one's devotional efforts was relatively common throughout late-medieval Europe since, as M. T. Clanchy comments, "everything to do with writing in medieval Christendom had potential transcendent significance."[73]  Of course, the spiritual benefit of scribal work was in all likelihood only a minor consideration – if even one at all – for late-medieval, non-monastic scribes working in government or commercial settings.  But in a culture permeated by religious texts and thought, it seems reasonable that the metaphorical connection between scribal work and spiritual activity could have been common knowledge for the majority of scribes, both monastic and non-monastic, who wrote out the *Charters*.

The idea that writing was a painful process but a spiritually beneficial one is taken to the extreme in the *Charters of Christ*.  The writing out of this charter can only be completed upon Christ's death, but the document created from his body redeems mankind.  One wonders what scribes must have thought as they wrote out this text which implicitly associates scribal work with the scourging of Christ's body committed by his Jewish tormentors.  The text states that "The pennys þat þo letturs wretyn*e* / Were scorges þat y was w*ith* smetyn*e*," hinting that as the scribe recopied each letter of Christ's charter they were inflicting, in a sense, new wounds on his flesh and thereby were

we write is the life of our Redeemer . . . The place where we write is contempt of worldly things.

[73] Clanchy, *Memory*, 118.

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becoming active participants in his crucifixion.  Although scribes would have been

conscious that they were writing on sheep's skin and not the skin of Christ, the poem

gains much of its rhetorical force by implying otherwise, by suggesting that the

completed text was, at the very least, a reproduction of the charter created from Christ's

body.  It seems surprising then that there is such textual variety amongst the versions of

the *Charters* and that even amongst the same versions of the text scribes alter the *mise-*

*en-page* and decorate the text in idiosyncratic ways.  If scribes might have considered the

text to possess any real link to the body of Christ, one would imagine that they would

have aimed to provide a consistent reproduction of the text they copied.  Perhaps, then,

the diversity of textual presentation evident amongst the extant witnesses indicates

instead an active scribal interest in how best to fashion Christ's charter as they set about

"customizing it for different audiences."[74]

Some scribes chose to emphasize strongly the legal roots of the *Charters of*

*Christ*, adapting the text's manuscript setting or layout in response to the poem's

extended legal metaphor.  The sole witness to the *Carta Dei* (Bodleian, MS Kent Charter

233), for example, occurs on the back of a deed dated 1395 [Figures 1, 2], and an

abridged witness of the A-text of the *Long Charter* (Magdalene College, Oxford MS St.

Peter-in-the-East 18.e) graces the dorse of an early fifteenth-century charter which lodges

a complaint against the addition of a new window in Black Hall, Oxford [Figure 3].[75]

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[74] Connolly and Mooney, eds., *Design and Distribution*, 2.

[75] In *Charters*, Spalding quotes the Magdalen College librarian who describes the document as "a record of a presentment made in the King's Court in Oxford, on the part of the Master and brethren of the Hospital of

These witnesses are both laid out as single columns of text as actual charters tended to be

in the fourteenth century [Figure 4]. The scribe of the Kent Charter employs a cursive

Anglicana while that of the St. Peter-in-the-East manuscript uses an Anglicana /

Secretary hybrid; the cursivity of both of these scripts provides a good approximation of

the documentary and court hands used by scribes of legal documents. Neither witness

includes any decorative elements, seeming to rely on their exploitation of actual charters

to infuse the metaphor of Christ's body as a charter with a sense of authenticity. In both

cases, the scribes privilege the legal implications of Christ's transformation into a

document through their contextual placement of these texts and draw attention to

signifying potential of the material form of these texts. While the *Carta Dei* and this

witness of the A-text might gain documentary authenticity by being composed on the

dorse of legal charters, the charters themselves might alternately have been seen as

gaining an element of divine approval by being inscribed with a text that purports to have

been originally composed by Christ upon his own body.

Decorative elements, such as seals or penned boarders, could also link the

*Charters* to their legal models. Out of a sampling of thirty-three witnesses, seven include

a decorative element of this sort. While this might seem a relatively high proportion at

first, it is important to note that five of these decorated witnesses are from the sixteenth-

century or later. BL Sloane MS 3292 (16th century) [Figure 5] and BL Stowe MS 620

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St. John Baptist, on the Monday after the Exaltation of the Cross, in the 13th year of Henry IV. (i.e. on Sept. 19th, 1412), for the abatement of a nuisance caused to them by the Proctors of the University having made a new window in a hall called Blakehall (Black Hall), in the parish of St. Peter in the East, opening on the land of a tenement belonging to the Master and Brethren" (xxxii).

(1550-1600) depict a wounded heart in the center of a decorative seal, with Sloane 3292 additionally ringing the seal with the crown of thorns.[76] The scribe of BL Stowe MS 1055 (18th c.) draws a frame around the *Charter*, thereby emphasizing its metaphorical documentary form. The scribes of BL Additional Charter MS 5960 (16th c.) [Figure 6] and Harley MS 6848 (18th c.) both write out the *Short Charter* on a single loose sheet as if the text were an actual charter (although Harley 6848 is an apparent eighteenth-century copy of Additional Charter 5960).[77] Emily Steiner suggests that these later witnesses could have been made with the intent to "trivialize medieval practice in the service of Protestant antiquarianism," but these decorative additions could also have been simple recopyings of decorated medieval exemplars that no long survive or could have been reinterpretations of a medieval text by later readers who assumed that a text claiming to be a charter should, in fact, look like a charter.[78]

The post-fifteenth-century witnesses to the *Short Charter* illustrate the attraction that the legal metaphor of this family of texts has had for non-medieval audiences, and modern scholars have likewise been intrigued by these poems' legal elements since the *Charters of Christ* provide a rare example of the influence of legal documents on literary

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[76] Images of these seals can be found in Steiner, *Documentary Culture*, 78, 80, 81, 82, 86.

[77] Spalding makes this suggestion, and upon looking at the two witnesses, I concur with her assessment (xxiii). The wording and layout of the texts are remarkably similar, and the Harley witness includes a drawing of an oval shape whose purpose is unclear until one looks at Additional Charter 5960 – at which time it becomes evident that the eighteenth century scribe was drawing an incision in the parchment made so that the tag (which would hold the seal) could be attached.

[78] Steiner, *Documentary Culture*, 79.

production in late-medieval England.[79]  Since M. T. Clanchy published *From Memory to Written Record*, the *Charters* have received renewed attention in several studies that question how the increasing circulation of charters and written records during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries might have influenced the dissemination and reception of these – and other – popular medieval texts.[80]  The *Charters* seem to welcome this approach since many witnesses include standard Latin legal formulas which Richard Firth Green notes "echo the most obvious linguistic features of such deeds ... [and] follow the proper diplomatic form in considerable detail."[81]  Christ, for example, while

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[79] The two other Middle English texts that link themselves with legal charters are the *Charter of the Abbey of the Holy Ghost* and the "Charter of Favel to Falsehood" in *Piers Plowman*.  See *Charter of the Abbey of the Holy Ghost*, in *Yorkshire Writers: Richard Rolle of Hampole and his Follower*s, Vol. 1, ed. C. Horstmann (London: Swan Sonnenschein & Co., 1895), 337-62; and *The Vision of Piers Plowman*, ed. A. V. C. Schmidt (London: J. M. Dent, 1995), II, 74-114.

[80] See Emily Steiner, *Documentary Culture*; Richard Firth Green, *A Crisis of Truth: Literature and Law in Ricardian England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999); and Jill Averil Keen, *The Charters of Christ and* Piers Plowman*: Documenting Salvation* (New York: Peter Lang, 2002).  Laura Ashe explores the importance of the image of the charter in the *Short Charter* and some of the cultural implications that might have been incorporated into the text as a result of its central metaphor in "The 'Short Charter of Christ': An Unpublished Longer Version." And Miri Rubin references the sustained legal metaphor of the *Charters*, considering the devotional aspects the poem to demonstrate a "striking development in the articulation of the Passion through eucharistic symbolism" (306).  See Miri Rubin, *Corpus Christi: The Eucharist in Late Medieval Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), esp. 306-8.
       In *From Memory to Written Record*, M. T. Clanchy argues that by 1300 the usage of charters had disseminated throughout all the social classes; he comments that "in the thirteenth century laymen began to convey property to each other by charter; in the latter half of the century this practice extended below the gentry class to some peasants.  Laymen used documents among themselves as a matter of habit only when they became sufficiently familiar with literate modes to trust them.  By 1300 even serfs, the more prosperous ones at least, were familiar with documents" (53).  The *Charters of Christ* post-date this estimate and primarily circulated between 1350-1500.

[81] Richard Firth Green, *A Crisis of Truth*, 276.  While many versions of the *Charter* include Latin legal phrases that are incorporated into the text, not all of them do; out of the thirty-three versions that I have examined, eight witnesses and the *Carta Dei* omit these standard Latin legal formulas, although some do have Middle English translations of these phrases.  The choice to omit the Latin formulas, provided it was not just the result of copying an exemplar which lacked these formulas as well, could indicate an attempt to separate the *Charter* from its legal associations.  Of the remaining twenty-four witnesses that include the Latin phrases, the scribes treat these phrases in a variety of fashions, sometimes making no differentiation

"woundedd & all for-bledd" after the words of the charter have been inscribed into his

skin with scourges, reads from his newly created document:

> *Sciant presentes et futuri*
> Weten þo þ*at* ben here & þo þ*at* be to come
> That y ih*es*u of na3areþ godd*is* sone
> ... I made a sesynge whan y was borne
> To saue mankynde þ*at* was forlorne
> But w*ith* my chartur here-in p*re*sente
> I make to mannys soule a feffeme*nt* . . .[82]

The Latin phrase that introduces this section was a standard formulaic way of beginning a

charter, and it is translated in the following line for those readers only literate in the

vernacular. The translation highlights the Latin's symbolic function, as some readers

might have recognized it as deriving from formulaic legal discourse but might not have

understood what the phrase signified without a subsequent translation. The Latin line

remains separate from the text's couplet rhyme scheme, further emphasizing its accessory

position within the poem – adorning the Middle English text without being fully

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at all between them and the surrounding Middle English text and sometimes setting them apart by changing ink, by underlining the Latin with red, or by using a higher grade of script. While some of these choices of script could have derived from a scribe's professional background or from his attempt to reproduce the exemplar he was copying, some seem suggestive of an attempt to interpret the genre of the text being written out.

The following witnesses omit the standard Latin legal formulas: Harley 237, BL Additional 5465, Ashmole 189 and Ashmole 61 (Short Charter); Bodleian Additional C. 280, Magdalen, Oxford St. Peter in the East 18.e (A-Text); CUL Ii.3.26 (B-Text); BL Royal 17.C.xvii (C-Text); Bodleian Kent Charter 233 (Carta Dei). Of the *Short Charters*, Spalding identifies Harley 237, BL Additional 5465, Ashmole 189 and Ashmole 61 as having derived from a common exemplar, although two other witnesses suggested to have descended from the same exemplar do includes these legal formulas. Likewise the two versions of the A-Text which lack these formulas are shown to descend from a common exemplar. It is possible, therefore, that the lack of Latin formulas in these witnesses is the result of the scribes faithfully reproducing their exemplar; at some point, however, someone chose to remove the legal formulas from the text they were copying – before others could repeat its version of the text. As there is only one B-Text and one C-Text extant which lack the Latin phrases, it is less certain as to where along the chain of textual relations the Latin formulas dropped out.

[82] CUL, Ff. 2. 38, lines 176-78, 185-88.

incorporated into it and seeming to have been included to provide the text with an aura of legal authenticity.  Other Latin legal formulas, such as "*dedi and concessi*," "*hiis testibus*," "*in cuius rei testimonium*," and "*datum*," are also inserted into some witnesses in a similar fashion, further mirroring the basic organizational structure of fourteenth- and fifteenth-century charters.[83]

The conflation of Christ's body with a legal charter appears to mark the general moment in time by which legal charters had established themselves as a trustworthy documentary form – one that could promote both secular and religious interests and that could quickly and clearly present the "rente" required of mankind to achieve salvation.[84] At the same time, however, it seems to indicate not an increased comfort or familiarity with this legal genre but instead the continued mystique associated with this documentary

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[83] See, for example, BL Addit. 37049, lines 8, 23, 32, 39.

[84] The *Long Charter* takes advantage of its legal format to specify those actions that the reader must complete in order to receive the benefit of salvation.  The text compels the reader to action by asserting that in addition to holding the text firmly within one's memory, he or she must also "fulfyllyth hyt in dede" (11).  The request that the reader actively engage with the lessons of the text is couched in legal language as when the "rente" demanded of mankind is clearly laid out:

> ffor homage or ellys for fealte
> No more wyll y aske of the
> But a foure leued grasse ȝelde þou me
> That oon lefe ys very schryfte of hert
> That oþer ys for þy synne here smert
> The thrydd y wyll no more do soo
> The fourþe do þy penaunce mekely þerto (200-6)

Men must yield four "leued grasse(s)" to Christ in order to fulfill their contractual obligation to him. Apparently reminiscent of a four-leaved clover, Christ assigns each leaf to an action that must be completed before his sacrifice / the legal document of the Charter becomes valid; one must give honest confession, feel the vileness of sin, resolve to sin no longer, and meekly engage in penance for those sins that have already been committed.  Christ goes on to verify that if these four rents are paid by man, then "grete mercy wole y schewe þe" (212), returning to the suffering inflicted upon his body as proof of his sincerity when the final seal is added to the charter ("The selys þat hyt ys selyd w*ith* / ... Of stele and yren they were wroght / ffor w*ith* a spere of stele my hert was sto*nge*n" (217, 220-1).

form.  Charters perhaps lent themselves to literary applications precisely because they

were seen to function more symbolically than factually.  By offering a representation of a

document that is simultaneously pedestrian and literal and unique and symbolic – a

representation that blends secular and sacred imagery – the *Charters* offer the reader *both*

divine and worldly promises of salvation. Emily Steiner explores the literary implications

of the material form of the charter for medieval audiences, commenting that:

> Just as the vehicle (the charter) seems almost to take precedence over the
> tenor (the sacramental efficacy of the Word), so the materiality of
> documentary practice takes precedence over its textuality.  The charter
> becomes the classifying function or material determinant of the lyric (its
> genre, but also its historical precedent) rather than simply its governing
> metaphor.[85]

For Steiner, then, the *Charters* align themselves so strongly with the genre of legal

charters that the content of the poems loses importance in comparison to that content's

material form – specifically its association with the material and textual markers of legal

charters.  Steiner goes on to consider the import of transferring the guise of this legal

power to a literary depiction of the Passion, arguing that in another genre, "as a 'book,'

Christ's wounded body produces penitential empathy and iconographic information," but

that "as a legal document, that body may be understood as a redemptive textual object,

which simultaneously attests to and implements the conditions of the New Law."[86]

While Steiner offers an intriguing understanding of how the document's legal

components might have subsumed their devotional counterparts, her reading also

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[85] Emily Steiner, *Documentary Culture*, 85.

[86] Ibid., 71.

suggests that the transformation of Christ's body into a legal text provides it with a greater amount of symbolic redemptive power than it would have had if Christ had merely become a "book."  She argues that the legal language distinguishes the *Charters* from other texts within the genre of devotional literature, claiming that unlike devotional texts, in which the remembrance of "the liturgical-lyrical Christ is to be complicit in his suffering, to reproduce his plaintive voice and gawk at his tortured body," the remembrance of "the documentary Christ ... is to witness a continual proclamation, and thus to re-inscribe the lyric speaker and his audience into an altogether different set of social and historical relations."[87]  Steiner's analysis highlights how the *Charters*' association with legal charters enables them to share in the continual presentness of an event that is promoted by that genre; a charter's physical form offered enduring proof that an event occurred – that land or goods were transferred between parties, for example. But I would suggest that interest in the legal characteristics of the *Charters of Christ* should not obscure the fact that this is, at its heart, a devotional text.[88]  While the legal characteristics of the *Charters* (both textual and formal) are admittedly a captivating aspect of these texts, standard late-medieval devotional language and imagery is

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[87] Ibid., 68-9.

[88] Steiner comments on the interplay between the devotional and the legal characteristics of the *Charters*, stating that "we may guess that for the educated and litigious authors of these documents, the lyric had two, mutually illuminating literary 'personalities': it was at once a religious lyric and an efficacious text that strengthened the official document through its very resemblance to that document" (*Documentary Culture*, 90).  But while she motions to the variety of contexts in which the *Charter* occurs, she focuses much of her analysis on CUL Additional 6686 and BL Additional 37049 – two witnesses which promote the legal elements of the text – and her interest clearly lies in the relationship between the *Charters of Christ* with their official legal brethren.

pervasive, and many scribes treat the *Charters* not as legal texts but instead as purely

devotional ones, i.e., when writing out the *Charters* within manuscripts that otherwise

contain only devotional material, no effort is made to distinguish this text from those

surrounding it.

The devotional intent of the B-text of the *Long Charter* is immediately declared at

the beginning of that text. The opening reads:

> Who-so will ou*er*-rede this boke
> And wyth hys goostly eye þ*er*-on loke
> To odur scole dar he not wende
> To saue hys soule fro the fende
> Than for to do as þys boke tellyth
> ffor holy wryte for-sothe hyt spellyth
> Wherefore y pray yow for charyte
> He that thys boke wyll rede or see
> Wyth yowre herte & all yowre mynde
> Kepyth derworþely þ*at* ye here-in fynde
> And fulfyllyth hyt in dede
> That ye schull now in þys boke rede.[89]

The *Long Charter* explicitly links itself with holy writ, citing it as the basis for the

instruction it teaches. These opening lines further compel readers to approach the text

with both their earthly eyes and their "goostly" (or spiritual) eyes in order that they might

learn the spiritual truths contained within the work through their reading of it.[90] The

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[89] CUL, Ff. 2. 38, lines 1-12.

[90] While medieval audiences understood spiritual sight as "divorced from physical sense experience," they considered bodily vision to "[focus] on corporeal entities, typically the humanity of Christ." See Kathleen Kamerick, *Popular Piety and Art in the Late Middle Ages: Image Worship and Idolatry in England 1350-1500* (New York: Palgrave, 2002), 134. And the language of the *Charter*'s instruction that the reader employ their "goostly" sight during the reading process echoes that of many mystical writers of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, such as Julian of Norwich and Margery Kempe. Julian of Norwich, for example, comments that the teachings of God were showed to her in "thre parties: that is, be bodilye sight, and be worde formede in mine understandinge, and be gastelye sight." See Julian of Norwich, *A Vision*

*Charter* emphasizes the spiritual benefit of incorporating the text within the reader's

memory, bringing to mind the encouragement of the *Meditations* and the *Orison* to write

the events of Christ's passion within one's heart.  And the text further calls attention to

the distinction between reading the text and seeing it ("He that thys boke wyll rede or

see"), appearing to distinguish two methods by which the author envisioned this text

could be consumed.  While some individuals might read the text of the *Long Charter*,

either in private or in a group setting, other audience members might only "see" the

image of the text without reading its words.  These dual methods of approaching this text

seem to emphasize that both the content of the poem and its material form (its layout,

decoration, location within a manuscript) could work to incite the reader's devotion.

This opening passage from the *Long Charter* additionally identifies the text as a

"boke," specifically "þys boke," four times within the opening twelve lines and thus

raises the question of just what book is being discussed by this text that otherwise

associates itself with the form of a legal charter.[91]  "Boke," at times, could be a flexible

term that referred to a range of material forms, ranging from a loose quire to a bound

codex.[92]  But the pronoun "thys" arguably seems to narrow the term's signification to the

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*Showed to a Devout Woman*, in *The Writings of Julian of Norwich*, ed. Nicholas Watson and Jacqueline Jenkins (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006), 75.

[91] Definition 5 of "bok" in the MED does suggest that this term could apply to "a formal legal document, such as a charter, deed, will," but this passage does not clearly specify that the phrase "þys boke" refers to the legal document that is discussed later in the poem.

[92] See definitions 1 and 2a in the MED; a book as "any collection of sheets or leaves, bound or unbound, making up a volume of writings; a book as a material object" (1) or as "a written composition or compilation (in prose or verse, occupying one or more volumes); a book as an authoritative source" (2a). In regards to definition 1, it should be noted that only four witnesses survive unbound, i.e. not written

book at hand – the material support of a particular witness to the *Charters of Christ*. As

readers came across this passage, it seems reasonable that the repetition of "þys boke"

would focus their attention on the object that they were reading at that instant, thereby

beginning the poem's sustained interest in the interaction between the text and its

material form. The phrase "þys boke" further emphasizes how the physical form of a text

might act as a mediator between readers and their acquisition of "goostly" understanding;

the "goostly eye" must "*þer*-on loke" to "saue hys soule fro the fende." At this point,

however, no mention of a legal document is made, and if one read these opening lines

divorced from the subsequent portrayal of Christ's transformation into a charter, it would

be difficult to distinguish this opening passage from standard devotional discourse of the

fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Although legal language and formulas play significant

roles as the text progresses, the opening lines of the B-text illustrate that the author also

aims to position the *Long Charter* as a devotional work that is intended, at its most basic

level, to instruct readers in how to attain salvation.

Many scribes seem to embrace the *Charters* as primarily religious poems by

making no efforts to highlight the texts' legal elements. The scribes of British Library

Additional MS 11307 and Cambridge University Library MS Ff.2.38, for example,

appear to accentuate the *Long Charter*'s religious themes by integrating the poem's

layout and decorative schema with that of the surrounding religious texts and by writing

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within a codex compilation. In regards to definition 2a, the implication that a book is an authoritative
source might also be seen as present in this passage, especially as the narrator also associates the *Charter*
with holy writ as an apparent attempt to validate its contents. See the Middle English Dictionary, s.v.
"bok," http://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/med/.

out the poem's Latin legal formulas in *textualis*. Additional 11307, the manuscript

containing *The Meditations on the Life and Passion of Christ*, also includes an A-text of

the *Charter* and the *Dialogue between St. Bernard and Mary*. Each of these works

explores the narrative of Christ's Passion, with the *Charter* and the *Meditations* explicitly

displaying an interest in the relationship between Christ's body and a book or document.

Ff.2.38 is a larger compilation, comprised of both religious and secular works; the

religious works (amongst which the B-text of the *Charter* occurs) are grouped at the

manuscript's beginning while the secular works become more prevalent towards the

volume's end.[93] The *Charter* occurs after a string of hagiographical tales, some of which

were extracted from popular sermon literature, and precedes the "XV tokenys before the

day of dome."[94] In both of these manuscripts, the scribes do not treat the *Charter*

differently from the surrounding texts; no decorations or alterations in layout emphasize

the material or legal metaphors of these texts. In Additional 11307, the scribe maintains

a consistent layout (a single column of verse per page) and employs a steady Anglicana

Formata, a popular bookhand of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, throughout the

manuscript. The first letter of each line of verse is highlighted with red ink throughout.

The scribe of Ff.2.38 also matches the layout of the *Charter* to that of the surrounding

texts, in this case employing a two-columned verse format and a mixed script comprised

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[93] For a comprehensive description of the manuscript's contents, see the modern facsimile edition: *University Library MS Ff.2.38* (London: Scholar Press, 1979).

[94] The manuscript includes three hagiographies in extracted form from Mirk's *Festial* – those of Mary Magdalen, St. Margaret, and St. Thomas.

of Anglicana and Secretary features that is used throughout the manuscript.  On the whole, a reader would be given no clues that the *Charter* should be thought of as different from the surrounding devotional texts.  These scribes seem comfortable allowing the poem to be read as a primarily religious work.

The impression that these two scribes might have actively interpreted these witnesses of the *Long Charter* as being more devout than legal in nature is strengthened by the fact that both wrote out the Latin formulas of the *Charter* in a higher grade of script that demonstrates features common to *textualis*, a formal script more often associated with religious texts than with legal ones [Figure 7].[95]  By using a rough version of *textualis* for the legal formulas, these scribes appear to be privileging the devotional aspects of this text over its legal framework, writing out legal formulas with a formal script most often used for Latin texts of a biblical nature, such as Psalters, bibles, or biblical commentary [Figure 8].[96]  In vernacular contexts, *textualis* tends to be used primarily for headings or Latin quotations, as is the case here, but the majority of the

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[95] In Additional 11307 the Latin lines are also underlined with red ink.  For a discussion of the uses of display script in late-medieval manuscripts, see M. B. Parkes, "Layout and Presentation of the Text," 62-8. For a succinct overview of the development and evolution of scripts in late medieval England, see M. B. Parkes, "Handwriting in English Books," *The Cambridge History of the Book in Britain, Vol. II (1100-1400)*, eds. Nigel Morgan and Rodney M. Thomson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 110-35.

[96] Michelle Brown, in *A Guide to Western Historical Scripts from Antiquity to 1600* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990), has labeled the *textualis*-based scripts used in headings and other moments where emphasis is required as *fere-textualis*, defining these scripts as "*fere-textualis* (more commonly *fere-textura*) and *fere-hybrida*, which represent attempts to imitate, or almost 'fake', *textualis* and *hybrida*, often for display purposes, titles, colophons, etcetera" (81).  While I agree that the styles of *textualis* inserted as headings or used for Latin quotations in some manuscripts of the *Charter* are not of the highest quality and most often qualify for the label of "*fere-textualis*," the relative poverty of the script does not alter the atmosphere that the scribe seems to be attempting to invoke by using it.

time, these headings and quotations would have been taken from biblical texts – not from standardized legal formulas.[97]  Ranked above Secretary and Anglicana in the hierarchy of scripts, *textualis*'s perceived formality derived from the time that it took to write, since it required frequent pen lifts to form the graphs.  True legal charters typically employed cursive scripts that could be written more quickly – a valuable quality for the scribes employed to write out an ever increasing number of documents each year, and M. T. Clanchy suggests that the cursive scripts used by professional scribes were "not so much the distinctive mark of an official, as a practical way of getting through the business."[98] The turn to a rough version of *texualis* for the Latin legal formulas in these manuscripts, then, appears to recall the conventions of biblical texts more strongly than it does those of charters – even though the words being highlighted are relatively faithful renditions of legal language.

CUL MS Ii. 3. 26 is another witness in which the scribe seems to have emphasized the religious content of the text over its legal elements.  This manuscript contains a B-text of the *Long Charter* which directly follows the *Canterbury Tales*, the only other text within the manuscript.  The *Charter* seems to have been included as a filler text by a later scribe on the extra folios of the final quire of the *Canterbury Tales*. The text is written out entirely in a set Anglicana Formata so formal that it seems to aspire to *textualis* at times, an unusually high grade of script for a vernacular text [Figure

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[97] For a general discussion of the use of *textualis* in vernacular English manuscripts see Jane Roberts, *Guide to Scripts used in English Writings up to 1500* (London: British Library, 2005), 140-3.

[98] Clanchy, *Memory*, 129.

9]. While the script in Ii. 3. 26 is not *textualis*, similar care can be seen to have been taken with its letterforms which would have clearly required frequent pen lifts, demonstrate a decided lack of cursivity, and include some graphs reminiscent of *textualis* (such as the long "s" that sits on the base line in the text's opening line). While the formality of the script alone appears to privilege visually the religious elements of this text over the legal ones, this witness also omits the Latin legal language typically present in versions of the *Charter*, further emphasizing the *Charter*'s devotional content. Although it is impossible to know why a later scribe added the *Charter* to the end of the *Canterbury Tales*, it could be that he was reacting to the serious tone with which Chaucer's work ends, inserting a popular devotional poem in the final folios of the quire as proof, perhaps, that men (and potentially Chaucer himself) would be saved if they repented – or wrote a retraction.

Finally, I would like to end with a brief discussion of three additional witnesses in which the scribes do not seem exclusively to promote either the devotional content or the legal metaphor but instead decorate their texts to illustrate the generic blending that takes place within this work. In BL Additional MS 37049 (1400-1450) and CUL MS Additional 6686 (1400-1450), two medieval scribes chose to decorate versions of the *Short Charter*, and the scarcity of fourteenth- and fifteenth-century witnesses that display added decorative elements suggests the originality of these scribes' decisions to do so. In both manuscripts, the scribes highlight the text's legal characteristics within manuscripts otherwise filled with devotional works and thus make explicit the generic mixture at

work within the *Charters*.  BL Additional 37049 demonstrates how religious and legal

elements might be closely intertwined in the attempt to produce an affective response in

the reader [Figure 10].[99]  In some ways, this witness visually highlights the documentary

aspects and legal characteristics of the text.  The wounded Christ holds the charter in

front of his body, pictorially associating its physical composition with that of his own

body / skin.  The text is not presented as being comprised of verse lines; instead the

scribe almost fills all of the document's available writing space – reminiscent of actual

legal charters in which the text is often written out in a single, undivided block with

narrow margins [Figure 4].  And a seal depicting Christ's pierced heart is drawn as if it

had been attached by a parchment tag at the charter's end.  Yet these legal characteristics

are surrounded by images of a more devotional nature: the *arma Christi* populate the

image's background, bones are rudely drawn along the scene's bottom to call themes of

*memento mori* to mind, and Christ's wounded and bleeding body seems primarily

intended to incite pity and compassion in the viewer.  The congruence of legal and

devotional imagery necessitates that the reader experience the *Charter* as a generically

mixed text.  Christ's suffering body becomes both a document (proof of mankind's

salvation) and an object of meditation which enables readers to empathize with – and

vicariously experience – the pain Christ endured during his Passion.

The scribe of CUL Additional 6686 does not decorate the *Charter* so extensively,

adding only a single illustration of a seal that visually accentuates the text's legal features

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[99] Jessica Brantley has worked extensively with BL MS Additional 37049.  See her recent study, *Reading in the Wilderness: Private Devotion and Public Performance in Late Medieval England* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2007.

[Figure 10].  This witness occurs after a series of religious texts, including *The Mirror of the Blessed Life of Christ*, *The Pistyl of Love*, and the *Five Sorrows of Our Lady*; it is the only text written by this scribe within the manuscript, and he appears to have taken advantage of the free space left after the conclusion of the *Five Sorrows of Our Lady* which ends on the previous page, five pages before the end of the quire.  The *Charter* is followed by Lydgate's short text on the Kings of England which likewise is written out by a scribe who contributes only one short text to the manuscript.  The seal drawn beneath the *Charter* portrays a disembodied wound dripping blood; a green crown of thorns surrounds the brownish wound, and the tags attaching the seal to the text are inked in red, as though formed from Christ's dripping blood.  The scribe could have drawn the seal in reaction to the passage where Christ declares that "In testimone" of the salvation of mankind "Myn owene sele þer to I hynge: / And for þe more sikkerness / The wound in my side þe sele it is" and to the final lines of the text which state that "My grette sele is sette þer till / To werre man froo his dedely foose." [100]  While red ink was commonly employed for rubrication and simple decorations within a variety of manuscripts, the ties of red used above the seal seem explicitly suggestive of blood, as if the scribe made use of the materials available to him to increase the visual and rhetorical effectiveness of the text. [101]  The seal acknowledges the centrality of wounding to the document's creation and

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[100] CUL, MS Additional 6686, lines 29-32.  Edited in Laura Ashe, "The 'Short Charter of Christ,'" 32-48.

[101] See Christopher de Hamel, *Scribes and Illuminators*, 33-34.  De Hamel notes that "red was used greatly in medieval manuscripts, for headings, running titles and initials, for rubrics (hence the word) in liturgical manuscripts, and for red-letter days (hence that term too) in Calendars.  Corrections to the text were sometimes made in red, drawing attention to the care with which a text had been checked.  Blue and green inks exist, but are rarer; red was always the second colour" (33).

thereby might have encouraged readers to consider the written text in terms of its material

components and the pain caused to Christ during its creation.  Despite the choice to

highlight this documentary element of the *Charter*, however, the scribe interestingly does

not include the typical Latin phrases that clearly position the text within the realm of

legal language.[102]  Three Latin phrases are emphasized by being written in red ink, but

these function as section titles and have no relationship to legal documentary formulas.

Even so, as one of the two medieval examples of a scribe who incorporates a decorative

element pertaining to the documentary standards of legal charters, this witness seems

fashioned to highlight the text's generic blending of legal and devotional content – with

the omission of the legal formulas perhaps resulting from the scribe's attempt to adapt its

text so that it might better blend with the otherwise devotional content of the

manuscript.[103]

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[102] It is unclear whether the omission of the Latin legal formulas could be explained stemmatically or if the scribe made the decision to alter the text provided by his exemplar.  Other *Short Charters* exist which lack legal formulas, but, as Laura Ashe has commented, "the status of this text in relation to those shorter versions witnessed in other manuscripts is unclear (42).  The witness to the *Short Charter* found in Additional 6686, however, has been altered considerably from all other known, extant witnesses to that text by the addition of over 40 additional lines of verse; as one who engaged in such extensive revision, it seems clear that maintaining textual consistency with his exemplar was not the overriding goal of this scribe.

[103] There is yet another witness to the *Short Charter of Christ* that strongly demonstrates the generic complexity of this text, and I discuss it in detail in Chapter 4.  In BL Additional MS 5465, the *Charter*, a poem about the physical and bodily demands of textual creation, has been transformed into a song and put to music.  This witness fascinatingly takes a text which is deeply concerned about embodiment and skin and blood and adapts it into a completely aural form.  Briefly, the document described as being created within the *Charter* no longer becomes a page or a leaf of parchment that can be seen and felt and verified. Instead it is something heard – it has been completely disembodied, de-textualized.  This witness exemplifies how different scribes and different readers seem to have derived a variety of meanings from and to have seen a variety of potential forms for this text.  Those desiring to feature its documentary or devotional elements were free to do so; similarly, those desiring to transform this lyric into a song felt comfortable making such a leap.

One more witness exists, however, that includes an illustration at the text's end, but the scribe of Bodleian, MS Ashmole 61 (1475-1500) idiosyncratically chooses to highlight neither the legal nor the devotional characteristics of the text, instead adding a drawing of an emblematic shield at the poem's end.[104] Christ becomes not a penitential figure or a legal body but instead a knight.[105] The image of his shield symbolically reproduces his wounds as proof of his identity and sacrifice for mankind [Figure 12]. The shield is divided into four quadrants, each of which contains a small faded red circle that represents one of the four wounds located in Christ's hands and feet; at the shield's center is placed a fifth wound with a heart drawn around it which references the spear wound that pierced Christ's heart. The scribe's deviation from both legal and devotional representations of the *Short Charter* illustrates the leeway some scribes seem to have taken in how they chose to represent this text. In the case of Ashmole 61, the poem occurs amongst both religious works and romances (tales of King Arthur mingle with narratives of Christ's life), and the scribe appears to have been reacting to the content of

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[104] For an edition of MS Ashmole 61, see George Shuffelton, *Codex Ashmole 61: A Compilation of Popular Middle English Verse* (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 2008). Shuffelton describes the scribe of Ashmole 61 as idiosyncratic, commenting that "Rate's peculiar habits, as well as his relaxed attitude towards error and his tendency to carelessness, suggest that he was not a professional scribe but rather a reasonably proficient amateur copying for his own use" (5).

[105] For a description of the representation of Christ as a lover-knight, see Woolf, *English Religious Lyric*, 45-55.

the manuscript as a whole when figuring Christ's wounds within the chivalric symbol of a shield.[106]

As versions and adaptations of the *Charters of Christ* describe the transformation of Christ's body into a legal document, they do not attempt to present that body in a stable, consistent form. It is instead a body and an object that seems to have been actively interacted with as it was written out by scribes and approached by readers – scribes and readers who were both involved in acts of inscription as they reinterpreted and re-experienced Christ's Passion. The act of writing as depicted in the *Charters* – and in the *Meditations* and *Orison* – appears to be, then, not a process of simple textual reproduction or copying but instead an act that is central to textual interpretation and comprehension.

The *Meditations on the Life and Passion of Christ* and the *Orison of the Passion* demonstrate how reading and writing could be figured as simultaneous acts of composition – acts that center on the object of the book that links the body of Christ with that of the reader. Christ writes his body (his book) while suffering during his Passion, and readers write Christ's experience into their own bodies through repeatedly reading

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[106] In the Vernon text of the *Ancrene Wisse*, there is a fascinating passage that compares Christ's body to a shield. Perhaps the scribe of Ashmole 61 had such an image in mind when he decorated his version of the *Short Charter*. The passage from the *Ancrene Wisse* reads:

> In a shield there are three things, the wood, the leather and the painting. So it was in this shield: the wood of the cross, the leather of God's body, the painting of the red blood that colored it so beautifully. . . . After a brave knight's death, his shield is hung high in church in his memory. So is this shield, that is, the crucifix, set high in church in such a place where it is soonest seen, to bring to mind Jesus Christ's chivalry, which he performed on the cross (192).

*Ancrene Wisse*, ed. and trans. by Anne Savage and Nicholas Watson, in *Anchoritic Spirituality: "Ancrene Wisse" and Associated Works* (New York: Paulist Press, 1991).

about it and thus inscribing it within their memory. The physical book enables this connection between Christ and the reader to take place while also allowing for a community of readers to share in the Christ's experience as the manuscript is shared and circulated. The *Charters of Christ* figure Christ's body as a legal document which functions simultaneously as proof of Christ's sacrifice and as a guarantee that that sacrifice will result in mankind's salvation. The detail with which the *Charters* describe Christ's transformation into a document powerfully draws the reader's attention to the material form of the text he or she is reading, seeing, and touching while also influencing how scribes treated the text's layout, script, and decoration. If the form of a text might be said to influence the thoughts we have about that text, then the form in which Christ's body is reproduced and re-imagined in these witnesses must have shaped the thoughts medieval readers had about it as well. Through its figuration as both a book and a charter, Christ's body functioned as an object that could be actively inscribed, internalized, and adapted by readers and scribes as it circulated amongst fourteenth- and fifteenth-century devout audiences.
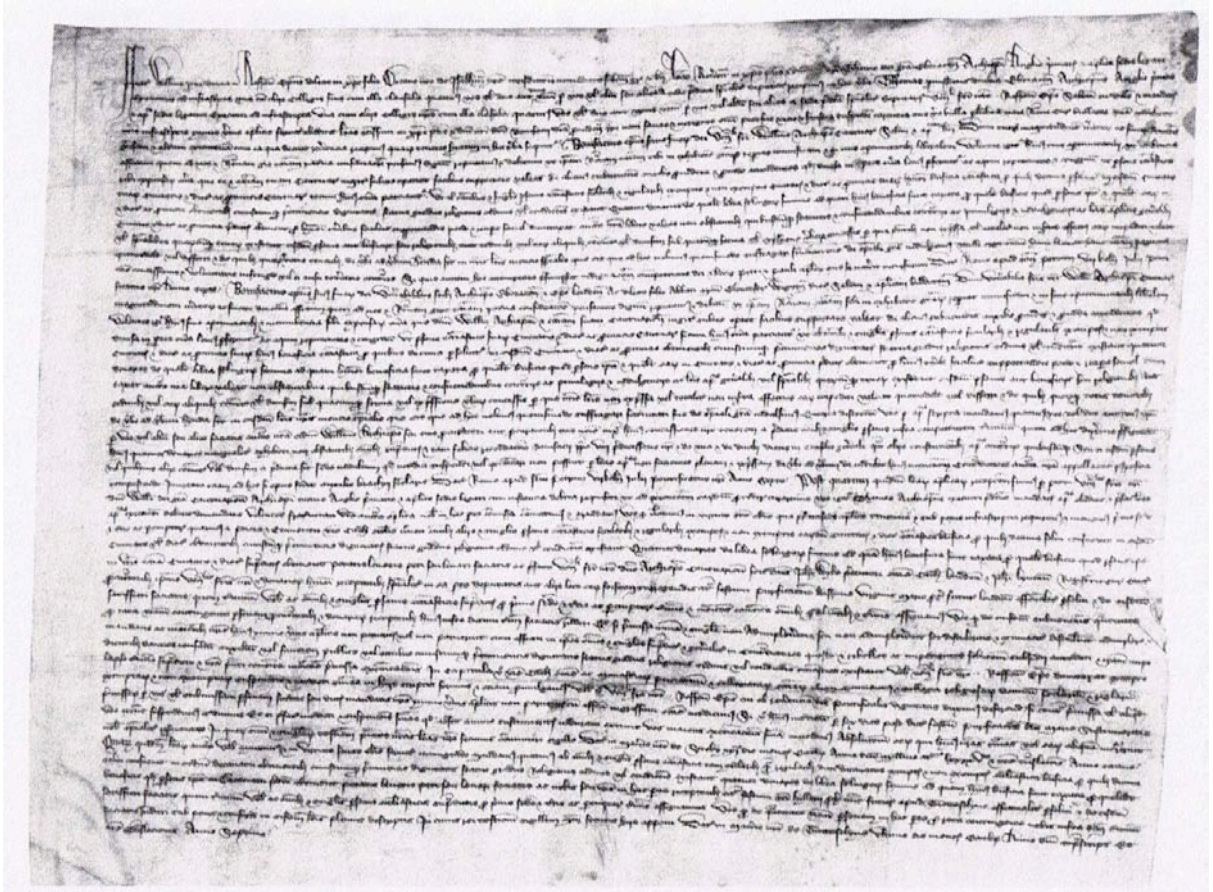
Figures:



Figure 1: Bodleian, Kent Charter MS 233 (c. 1400-25)

Figure 2: Text of the *Carta Dei*, as found on the dorse of Bodleian, Kent Charter MS 233
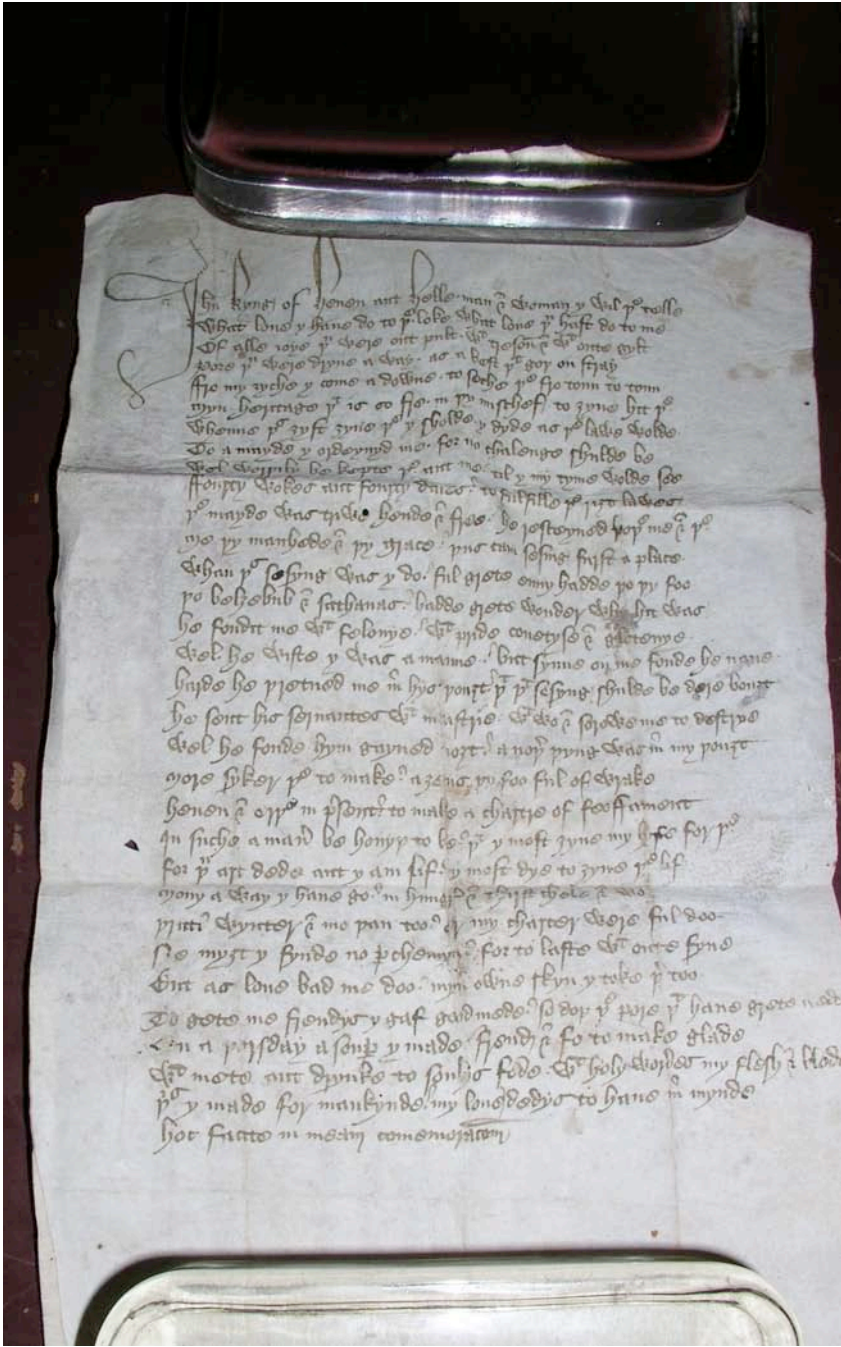
Figure 3: Magdalene College Oxford MS St. Peter-in-the-East 18.e (15<sup>th</sup> century)

Figure 4: Example of a 14<sup>th</sup> c. charter, collection of David and Sharon MacDonald, MS 1

Figure 4: Example of a 14th c. charter, collection of David and Sharon MacDonald, MS 1
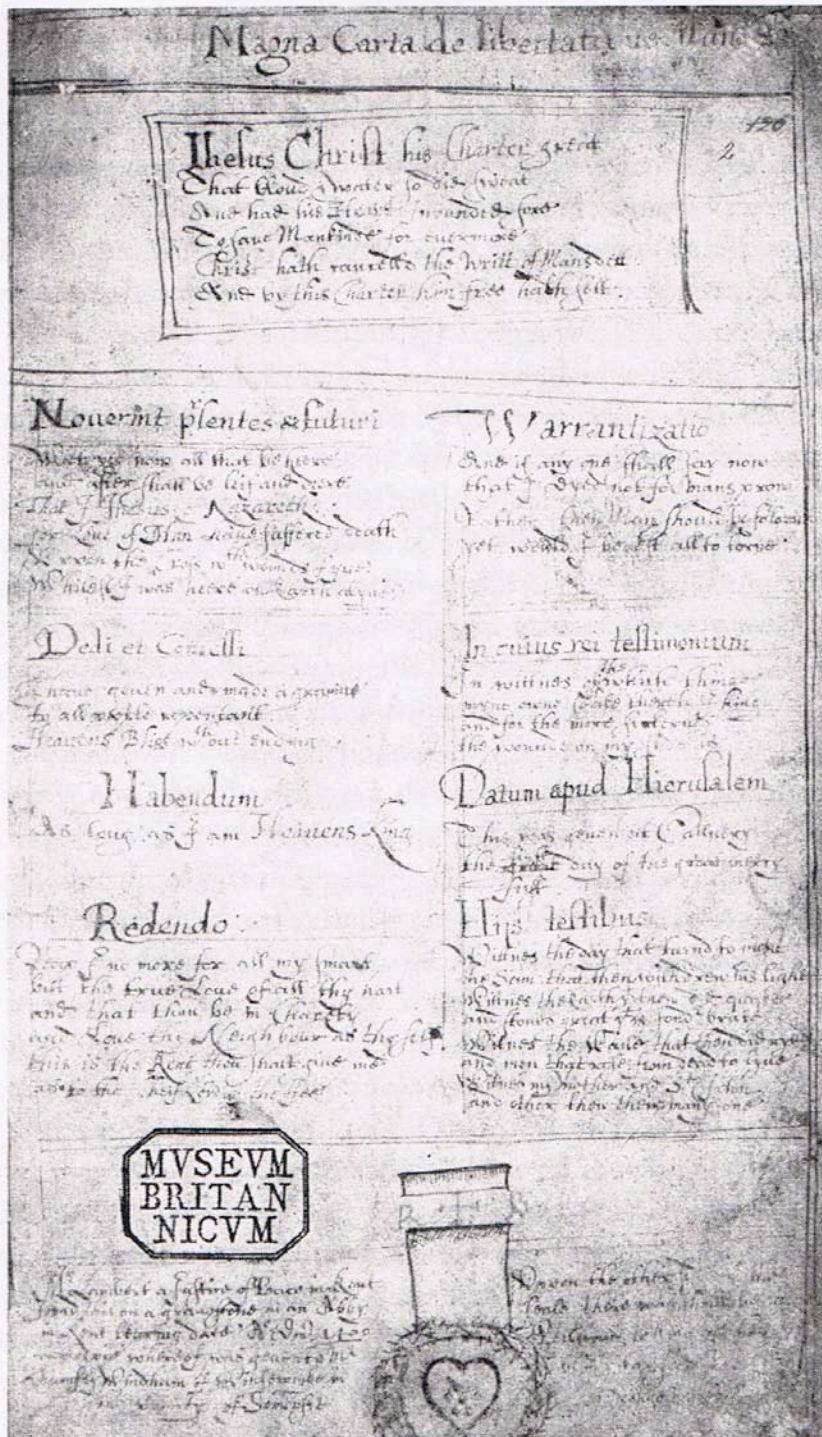
Figure 5: BL, Sloane MS 3292 (16<sup>th</sup> century)
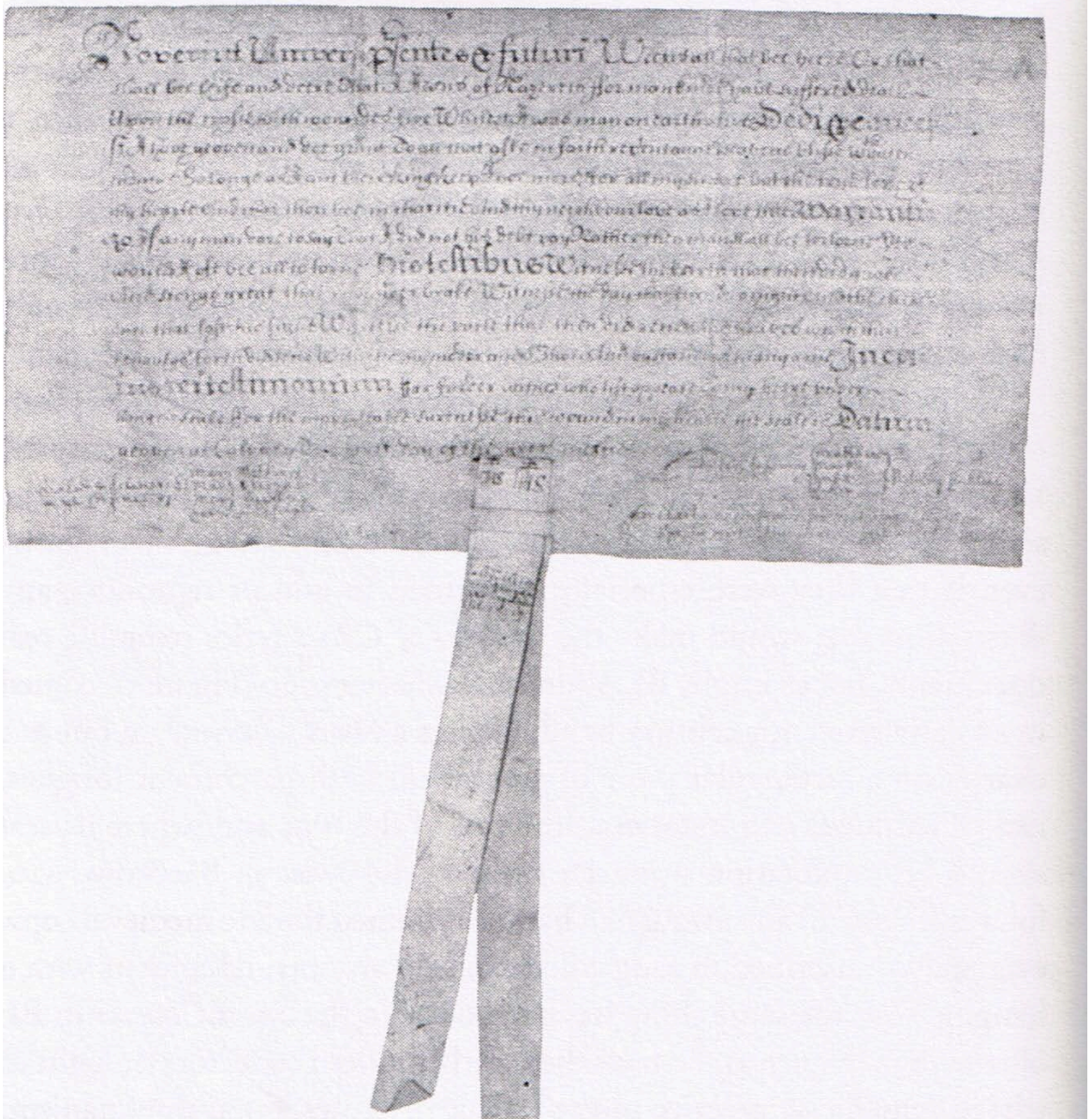
Figure 6: BL, Additional Charter MS 5960 (early 16th century)
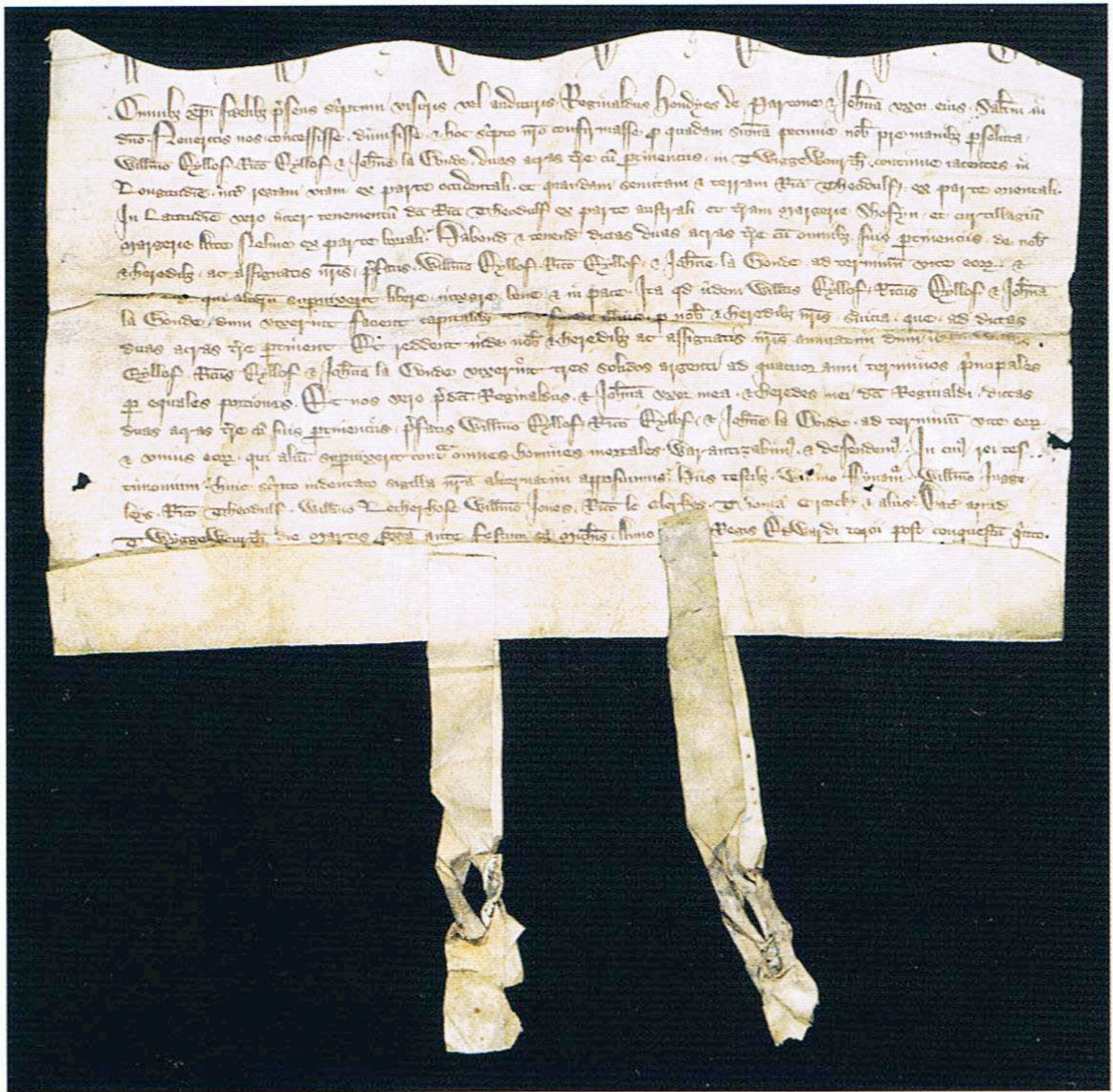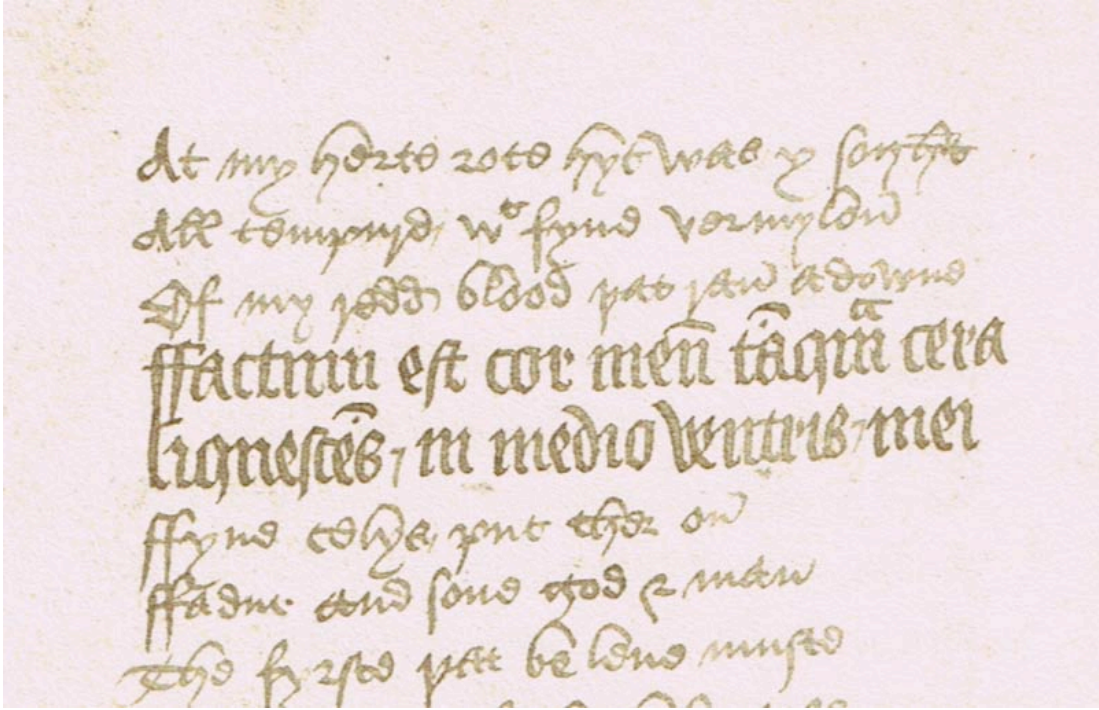
Figure 7: Example of the rough *textualis* found in CUL, MS Ff.2.38, f. 49v (c. 1450)
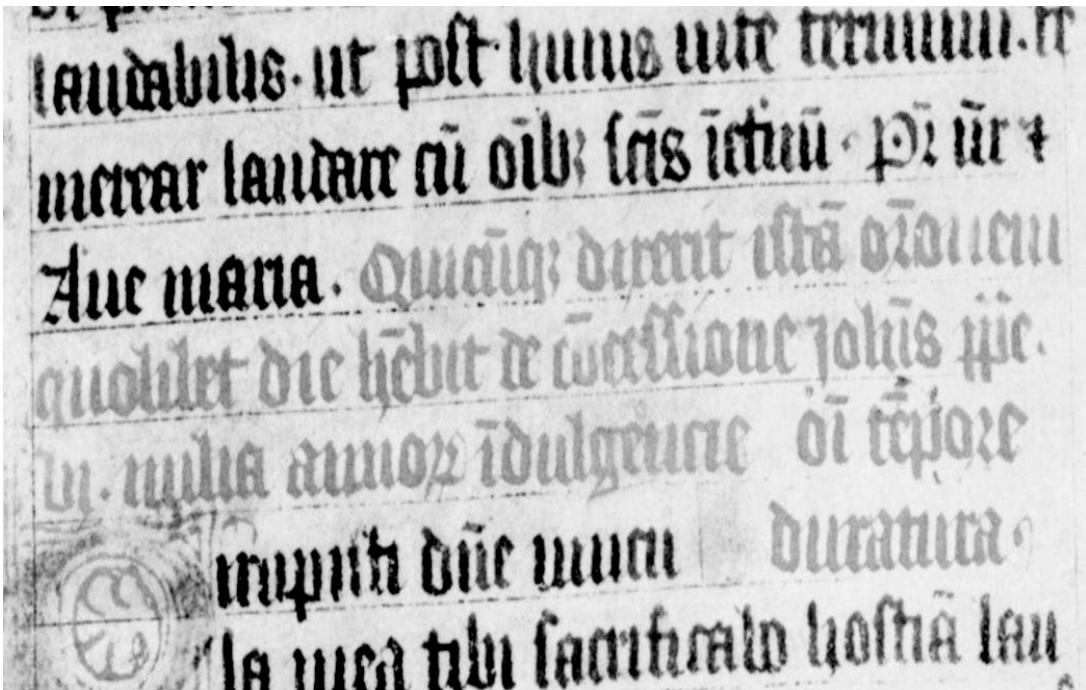
Figure 8: Example of *textualis* from BL Royal MS 17.A.xxvii, f. 95r (15[th] c.)

Bona carta gloriose passionis d[omi]-
n[or]um nostri Ih[esu]m xpi.

Ho so euyr will rede this boke
And lyt gostly ey ther yn loke
To other thyng[es] shall he not wende
To sane his sowle fro the fende.
Than for to do as this boke telleth

Figure 9: Example from CUL MS Ii.3.26, f. 238r (c. 1430-50)
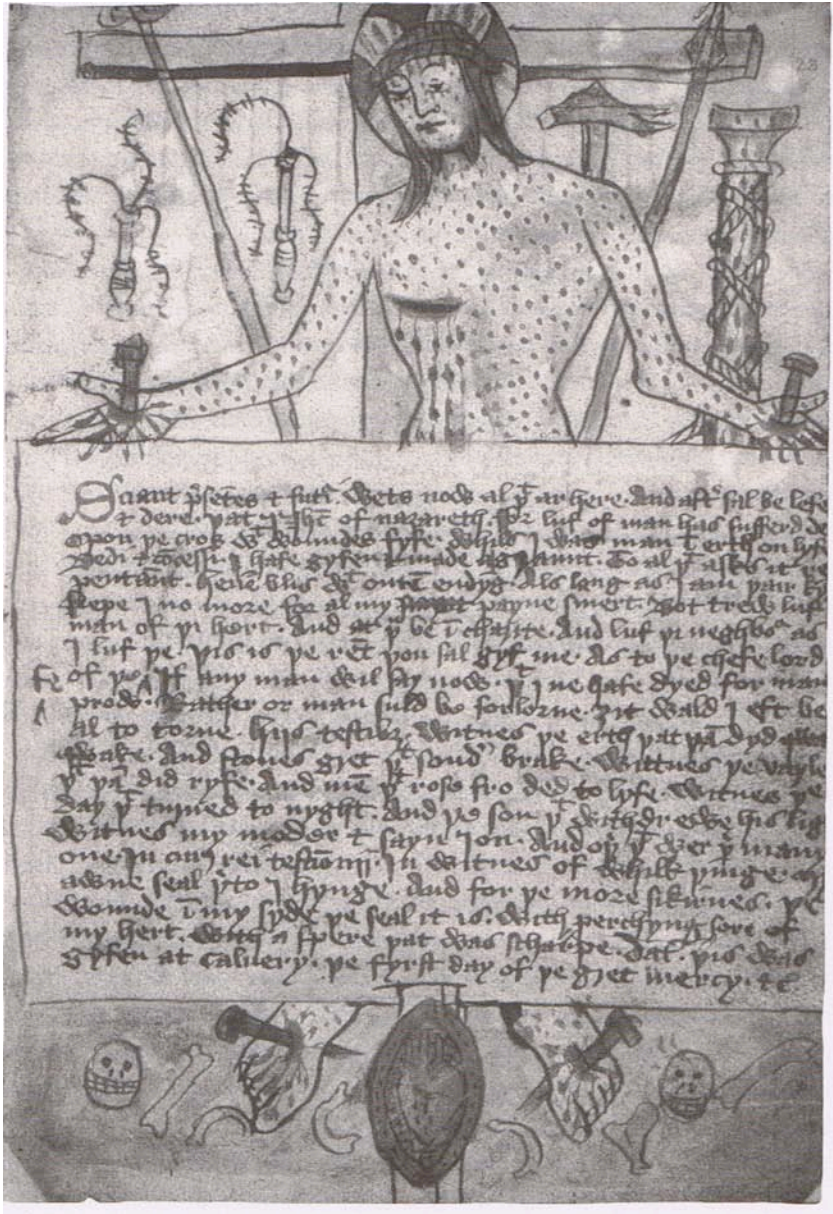
Figure 10: British Library Additional MS 37049, f. 23r (c. 1400-50)

all ye sayntes yat er in Rome
Of aungels a million & moo
Hymen at sepulge undre ye hille
The thyrd daye whan yat I vp roose
ay gretteste sole is sette yer till
To berre man froo his deddly foose

Figure 11: Cambridge University Library, Additional MS 6686, p. 271 (c. 1400-50)

In deptnes off þᵉ ꝑche thynge

Ayen ds̄dns̄ soto ȳ to �‧ thynge

(29)

Ramblaṽ bo nī

Figure 12: Detail of Bodleian, Ashmole MS 61, f. 106r (c. 1500)

Chapter 2

## The Object of the Text: the *ABC of Christ's Passion*

## and John Lydgate's Passion Poetry

In a statement that has attracted sustained attention for nearly fifteen hundred

years, Pope Gregory the Great (590-604) describes images as books for the illiterate since

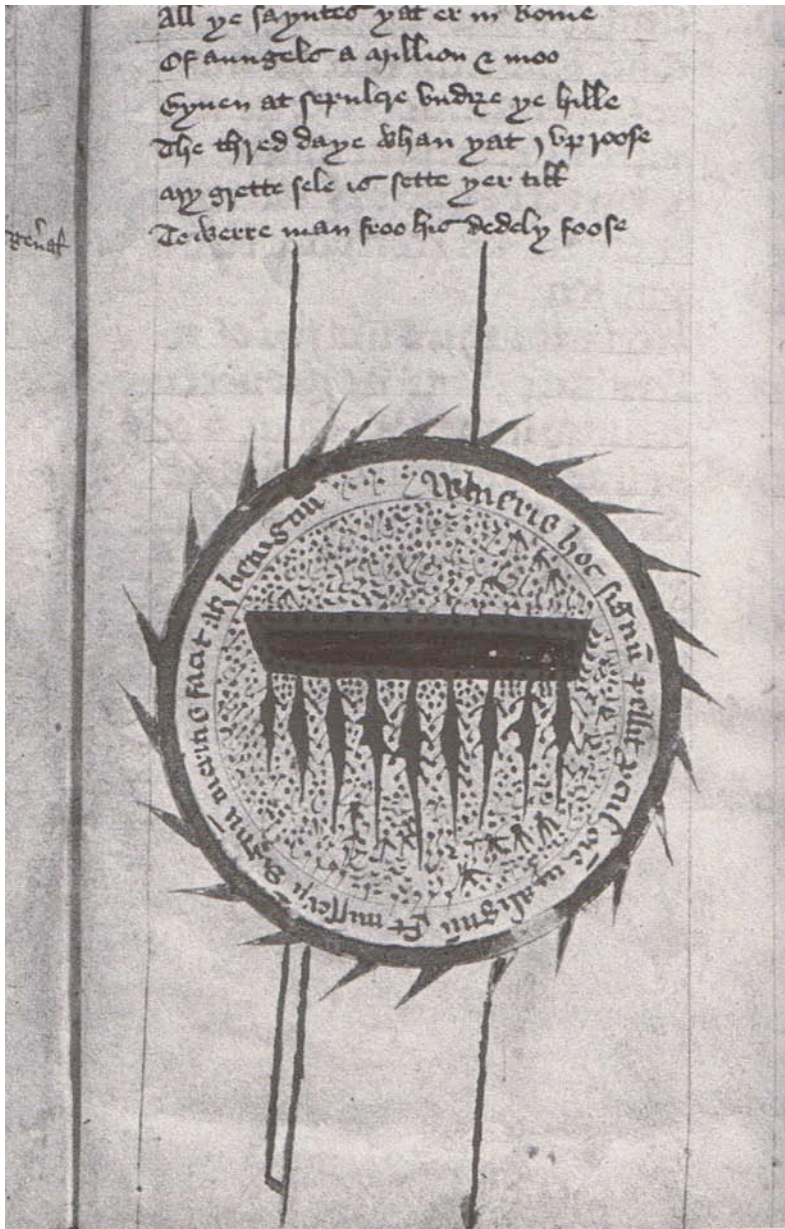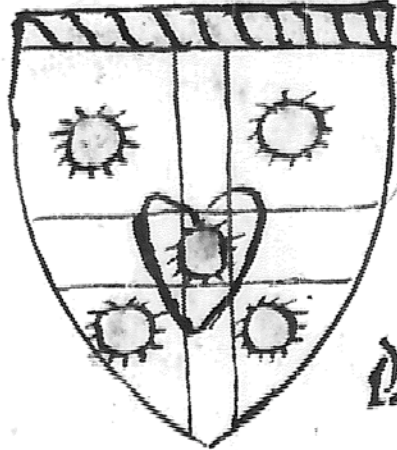"what writing (*scriptura*) does for the literate, a picture does for the illiterate looking at it,

because the ignorant see in it what they ought to do."[1]  This statement is, admittedly,

semantically slippery.  What, for example, does writing *do* for the literate and from

whence arises the confidence that the illiterate will correctly interpret the pictures that

they view?  But medieval and modern scholars nonetheless have been consistently drawn

to Pope Gregory's memorable description of images as a kind of text that can be "read"

by illiterate audiences.[2]  There existed, though, an alternate interpretive tradition that

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[1] Qtd. in Lawrence G. Duggan, "Was Art Really the 'Book of the Illiterate'?" in *Reading Images and Texts: Medieval Images and Texts as Forms of Communication*, ed. by Mariëlle Hageman and Marco Mostert (Brepols, 2005), 63.  Pope Gregory states, in full, that "pictures are used in churches so that those who are ignorant of letters may at least read by seeing on the walls what they cannot read in books (*codicibus*)," and that "what writing (*scriptura*) does for the literate, a picture does for the illiterate looking at it, because the ignorant see in it what they ought to do; those who do not know letters read in it.  Thus, especially for the nations (*gentibus*), a picture takes the place of reading" (63).

[2] The continued discussion of Pope Gregory's statement, by men such as Wycliffe, Reginal Pecock, and the author of *Dives and Pauper*, to name a few, demonstrates the sustained attention that the relationship between images and texts received in the late Middle Ages.  See Duggan, 78-9.  For an overview of modern approaches to Pope Gregory's statement, see Celia M. Chazelle, "Pictures, Books, and the Illiterate: Pope Gregory I's Letters to Serenus of Marseilles," *Word & Image* 6.2 (1990): 138-53; and Athene Reiss, "Beyond 'Books for the Illiterate': Understanding English Medieval Wall Paintings," *The British Art Journal* 9.1 (2008): 4-14.  Reiss examines the medieval and modern attraction to Pope Gregory's statement, arguing that Pope Gregory's comment has been given too much weight in modern interpretations of medieval wall paintings.  She writes that "the idea was cited by virtually every author and encylopaedist who considered the roll of images throughout the Middle Ages, up to and including the Council of Trent" (5).  And this popularity continued amongst modern scholars as, due to the "paucity of medieval textual commentary" regarding the purposes and functions of medieval wall paintings, "Gregory the Great's memorable axiom 'books for the illiterate' has assumed exaggerated importance" amongst modern scholars

focused not on the textual qualities of images but instead on the imagistic qualities of written texts.  This view was articulated by the early-sixth-century grammarian Priscian and propagated through William of Conches's *Glosule super Priscianum* which states that "a letter can be called an image because it is a representation of an element by which a letter is discerned."[3]  Written letters – because they transform sound and thought into visually perceivable signs – could be thought, according to Priscian, to resemble images in that they could depict "an element (sound value) and an image (*imago*) of *vox literata*."[4]  Priscian's statement continued to be discussed into the fifteenth century, as shown when the English Carmelite Thomas Netter (c. 1377-1430) asks, "for what is writing but a certain picture and an image of a word of the mind or voice?"[5]  Pictures might have functioned as a type of written text for the illiterate, but it is equally important to note that for medieval audiences written texts might not have been perceived as being that distant, themselves, from images.

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(4).  For an overview of the how Pope Gregory's statement seems to have been interpreted in early medieval England, see William J. Diebold, *Word and Image: An Introduction to Early Medieval Art* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2000), 9-44.

[3] Martin Irvine, "Medieval Grammatical Theory and Chaucer's *House of Fame*," *Speculum* 60.4 (Oct., 1985): 850-76, at 869.  William of Conches is thought to have composed the *Glosule super Priscianum* in the second quarter of the twelfth century.  Irvine quotes the Latin of the *Glosule super Priscianum*, fol. 6v, as follows: "imago dicitur quia representatio est elementi qua littera cognoscitur" (869, n. 53).

[4] Irvine, 869.  Irvine offers this paraphrase of Priscian's views in the *Grammatici Latini*, 2:6.  The original Latin reads: "Litera igitur est nota elementi et velut imago quaedam vocis literatae, quae cognoscitur ex qualitate et quantitate figurae linearum" (Qtd. by Irvine, 869).

[5] Qtd. in Duggan, "Art," 79; see also 63-82.  For an outline of the debate about the value and role of images in religious devotion, see Kathleen Kamerick, *Popular Piety and Art in the Late Middle Ages: Image Worship and Idolatry in England 1350-1500* (New York: Palgrave, 2002), esp. 13-42.

Recent studies by both literary scholars and art historians have demonstrated the potentially productive work that results from delving into the apparent similarities, differences, and gaps in medieval conceptions of texts and images.[6] Some focus on the dissimilarities between how texts and images were understood by late-medieval audiences; Stephen Nichols, for example, states that "the dynamic of the medieval manuscript matrix – I am talking here particularly of illuminated manuscripts – involves cognitive perception as two kinds of literacy: reading text and interpreting visual signs."[7] Such an emphasis on the difference between how texts and images functioned for medieval readers provides Nichols and other scholars the opportunity to explore the tension created by the inclusion of images alongside texts within manuscript contexts.[8] Others offer an alternate view, as does Marco Mostert who suggests that more investigation should be directed not into how texts and images differ but instead into how

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[6] See Michael Camille, "Seeing and Reading: Some Visual Implications of Medieval Literacy and Illiteracy," *Art History* 8.1 (March, 1985): 26-49; Laura Kendrick, *Animating the Letter: The Figurative Embodiment of Writing from Late Antiquity to the Renaissance* (Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press, 1999); Jeremy Dimmick, James Simpson, Nicolette Zeeman, eds., *Images, Idolatry, and Iconoclasms in Late Medieval England: Textuality and the Visual Image* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); Kathleen Kamerick, *Popular Piety*; Maidie Hilmo, *Medieval Images, Icons, and Illustrated English Literary Texts: From the Ruthwell Cross to the Ellesmere Chaucer* (Hampshire, UK: Ashgate, 2004).

[7] Stephen G. Nichols, "Introduction: Philology in a Manuscript Culture," *Speculum* 65.1 (Jan. 1990): 8.

[8] Duggan also argues for the fundamental difference between reading a text and observing an image, but he positions his opinion from a rather extreme position. He confronts the statement by Pope Gregory by arguing that he was wrong since he "intended to say that images can do more than remind and deepen what one already knows" (101). It seems counterproductive, however, to invest energy in attempting to prove that Pope Gregory was wrong; the fact that his pronouncement on the usage of images continued to be discussed for nearly a millennium instead proves the tenacity of the debate surrounding the relationship between texts and images throughout the Middle Ages.

they might resemble one another.[9]  In a statement markedly similar to that made by

Priscian, he claims that "writing is a visual system representing speech, and because of its

visuality, all writing is also image" and goes on to propose that "historians of the image

might try having a look at the questions posed by the historians of reading."[10]

In light of recent work that has so productively considered the interplay between

text and image, this chapter aims to consider how written words were presented as

resembling images in some late-medieval Passion poetry and how the material object of

the text functioned as a mediating element in the text / image divide.[11]  Michael Camille

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[9] Jessica Brantley's conception of the "imagetext" runs roughly along these same lines.  Paraphrasing W. J.
T. Mitchell's idea that "every seemingly discrete artwork should really be considered an 'imagetext,"
Brantley considers "imagetexts" to include "narrative images that proliferate in wall painting and
manuscript illumination," "the many emblematic images that summon up familiar histories, and depend for
their interpretation upon the viewers' knowledge of associated texts," and "the many medieval literary
works that organize themselves around visionary experience" (316).  Brantley's readings of the interplay
between texts and images are astutely aware of the overlap between reading and viewing these media; she
does not, however, account for the undecorated text in her analysis.  See Jessica Brantley, "Vision, Image,
Text," in *Middle English*, ed. Paul Strohm (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 315-34.  For a more
extended consideration of the "imagetext" that also attends to the materiality of the illustrated book, see
Jessica Brantley, *Reading in the Wilderness: Private Devotion and Public Performance in Late Medieval
England* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2007).

[10] Marco Mostert, "Reading Images and Texts: Some Preliminary Observations Instead of an Introduction,"
in *Reading Images and Texts: Medieval Images and Texts as Forms of Communication*, ed. by Mariëlle
Hageman and Marco Mostert (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2005), 6.

[11] The Feast of the Holy Name, officially recognized in the 1480s (although devotions to the Holy Name
arose in the mid-fourteenth century), provides one striking example of the possible resonances between
texts and images in late medieval England.  These devotions to Christ's name involved "repetitions of
pronouncements of the name of Jesus as a word of power, of healing and salvation" and led the written
letters, IHS, to be venerated as a quasi image and text (Rosewell, 175).  One chapel, that of St. John the
Baptist at Ewelme (Oxon.), exhibits the visual interest Christ's name possessed for medieval audiences
through the diapered pattern of his name painted on its walls [Figure 1].  The letters of Christ's name seem
to function in this space as both text and image, both that which is read and that which is viewed.
    See Roger Rosewell, *Medieval Wall Paintings in English and Welsh Churches* (Woodbridge, UK:
Boydell Press, 2008), 175.  See also Rossell Hope Robbins, "The Gurney Series of Religious Lyrics,"
*PMLA* 54.2 (June, 1939): 369-90.  Robbins includes a poem on the "Int*r*epretaciu*n* of þe hey name of IHC"
that provides a good example of some of the poetic devotions to the Holy Name produced around the end
of the fourteenth / beginning of the fifteenth century.  Note the emphasis on being able to correctly read the

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suggests that "the medieval artist was not creating 'art' in our sense of the word, but visual propaganda aimed at an increasingly volatile mass of semi-illiterates yearning for access to the Word through the flesh of the image."[12]  I would add that the flesh of the book must be also considered.  Books were of course read, but they were also *seen* and functioned as potentially meaningful objects in their own right.  And it seems suggestive that the metaphor relating Christ's body to a book or a document arose within a culture that strongly associated images with devotional practice.[13]  The interiors of churches were covered in wall paintings; painted rood screens depicted images of the Passion; altars could be elaborately carved and painted to depict biblical scenes; wooden statues of saints populated the corners of chapels; and, of course, *de luxe* illuminated manuscripts containing religious texts such as metrical Apocalypses and Books of Hours circulated in

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three letters of Christ's name, a symbol which signifies through its complete form as "þe titil" hung on Christ's cross and through the individual letters which comprise it.  The poem begins:

> These lettris þre wiþ þe titil
> Arn mochil of myht and semin but litil;
> ffor thus arn þey at onis to neuene
> Our Lord Iesu, Goddis Sone of Heuene,
> That is to say, qwoso ryht redis,
> The Corown of Grace, þe ȝiuere of medis,
> And ilk a lettre haþ gret myht
> To he*m* þat kunne haue Good in syht;
> For ilk a lettre is wurþ ful mochil
> ȝif þey ben cou*er*id vndir þe titil;
> ffor þus arn þey to vndirstande
> Owr Lord Iesu al-weldande.  (lines 1-12)

[12] Michael Camille, "The Image and the Self: Unwriting Late Medieval Bodies," in *Framing Medieval Bodies*, ed. by Sarah Kay and Miri Rubin (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994), 74-5.

[13] The Bible, in particular, demonstrates how powerful simply seeing a book was perceived to have been. See Margaret Aston, *Lollards and Reformers: Images and Literacy in Late Medieval Religion* (London: The Hambledon Press, 1984).  Aston comments that "letters or texts could become talismans, relics, or images, and possibly this letter-magic reflects the regard for literacy extending down the social scale [since] among the elevated, the Bible was a treasure comparable to a holy relic, something with a value that greatly surpassed its content as reading matter" (113).

the upper echelons of society.  In a culture that was saturated with devotional images, books seem to have been valued not only for the images they contained but also for how they could, themselves, function as visually significant objects.

Although a closed book might have been visually striking if it possessed an ornate binding (such as those that were made from dyed leather, colored velvets or embroidered fabrics and were decorated with silver or gold clasps and mounts), the majority of manuscript books were unadorned – and often unbound for years after they were produced.[14]  From my survey of over one hundred and thirty manuscripts containing vernacular Passion poetry and prose from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, only a handful have illustrations or illuminations within them.  But it is nonetheless important, I would argue, to consider the visual implications of Christ's body as a book – especially at a time when manuscript books, even those that were unadorned with illuminations or illustrations, were a relative luxury.

This chapter aims to explore, considering the ubiquity of the metaphor of Christ's body as a book or a document during the late Middle Ages, the tendency of some Passion lyrics to elide the boundaries between images and texts, creating poems that meditate

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[14] See Christopher de Hamel, *Medieval Craftsmen: Scribes and Illuminators* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992), 65-9.  See also Raymond Clemens and Timothy Graham, *Introduction to Manuscript Studies* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007).  Clemens and Graham note that "late medieval inventories of books suggest that textile chemise bindings were especially prized by noblewomen" (57).  When Froissart presents a collection of his poems to King Richard II, the king immediately considers the quality of the book's material form – the quality of its miniatures, script, and binding.  Froissart notes that "it pleased hym well, for it was fayre enluymned and written, and couered with crymson veluet, with ten botons of syluer and gylte, and Roses of gold, in the myddes with two great clapses gylte, rychely wrought" (qtd. by Taylor, 41).  See Andrew Taylor, "Into his Secret Chamber: Reading and Privacy in Late Medieval England," in *The Practice and Representation of Reading*, ed. by James Raven, Helen Small, and Naomi Tadmor (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1996), 41-61.

upon common medieval iconography while also promoting the material form of the poem as an object of devotion. The *ABC of Christ's Passion* is one such a text, as it ostensibly aims to train readers not only in how to read its words but also in how to view the letterforms on the page as representative of Christ's wounds. By learning to understand the symbolic potential of a text's letters, paraphs and rubrication, audiences would have gained an unexpectedly visual way to witness Christ's wounds and comprehend the pain of his Passion as they read. The Passion lyrics of John Lydgate engage with the divide between images and texts from a different perspective, focusing not on how the letters of a text might be visually significant but instead on how the material object of a work could guide a reader's affective engagement with Christ's Passion. While a reader could be moved to devout contemplation by regarding an image of the crucified Christ, Lydgate's verse suggests that the object of a text could provide a focal point for prayers and meditative practices as it was viewed and perhaps touched. Both the *ABC of Christ's Passion* and Lydgate's Passion poetry therefore provide potential insight into how late-medieval lay audiences might have perceived the overlap between images and texts, suggesting that a text's material embodiment – the manuscript page and its inscribed letters – could serve to inspire audiences to engage in devout meditations by contemplating its visual characteristics.

*Learning to Read (Christ's Body)*

There has long been a recognition of the increased emphasis on the humanity and physicality of Christ in Passion narratives of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Christ's body becomes a point of meditative fixation in devotional literature, and readers are encouraged to explore his wounds and sufferings in great detail; "gruesomely realistic portrayals" recount his various torments, such as the scourging of his flesh and the straining of his ligaments and joints as he is nailed to the cross.[15] Kathleen Kamerick writes that the focus on the corporeal reality of the Passion "was an obsession demanding the saturation of the senses so that the realization of Christ's every pain could be brought home to the body and mind."[16] One way that she suggests this "saturation of the senses" took place was through the inclusion of images in many prayer books during the late Middle Ages. She suggests that "for the many thousands of women and men who used primers made from the late fourteenth to early sixteenth centuries, the accessory prayers and images gave entrée to this knowledge by demanding that the user both read about and look at Christ's suffering."[17] "Late medieval prayer books," she continues, "effected a fusion of the two acts that had for so long been considered separate and antithetical: reading and – in the medieval usage – beholding."[18] Kamerick's use of the word

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[15] Rebecca Krug, "The Fifteen Oes," in *Cultures of Piety: Medieval English Devotional Literature in Translation*, ed. Anne Clark Bartlett and Thomas H. Bestul (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999), 108.

[16] Kamerick, *Popular Piety*, 160.

[17] Ibid., 160.

[18] Ibid., 160.

"beholding" consciously echoes the wording included in many devotional works that, in order to encourage a more affective engagement with the scene of Christ's Passion, instructs the reader to become an active participant in the narrative and imaginatively "behold" or "take heed" of the unfolding events.[19] In her reading of *The Hours of the Cross*, Marlene Villalobos Hennessy remarks that the relationship between text and image unfolds with the standard instruction to the reader to "'Behald, man, and se,' [referring] to an image of Christ's wounds that is both on the page and in the reader's mind."[20] She goes on to assert that "physical vision and *aspectus* (concentrated inner seeing) are thus depicted as ways of entering into the text and engaging with it – both initiate dialogue with Christ."[21]

Overlooked, however, in these astute readings is the potential for even the undecorated manuscript page to act as a visually affective object that could influence a reader's engagement with a text. Certainly the relationship between an image painted in a manuscript or in a church and a text's explicit emphasis on visualizing the scene of Christ's Passion offers fecund material to consider the overlap between external sight and

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[19] See, for example, the repetition of these phrases in Nicholas Love's, *Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ*, ed. by Michael G. Sargent (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2004). One representative passage from that work directs the reader to "take hede now diligently with alle þi herte, all þo þinges þat be now to come, & make þe þere present in þi minde, beholdyng alle þat shale be done a3eynus þi lorde Jesu & þat bene spoken or done of him. And so wiþ þe innere eye of þi soule beholde | sume, settyng & ficching þe crosse fast in to þe erþe" (174). The reader is invited to construct this scene within his mind's eye, setting himself amongst the action of the narrative as though he were actually there on the day Christ's was crucified.

[20] Marlene Villalobos Hennessy, "Passion Devotion, Penitential Reading, and the Manuscript Page: 'The Hours of the Cross' in London, British Library Additional 37049," *Mediaeval Studies* 66 (2004): 240.

[21] Hennessy, "Passion Devotion," 240.

internal meditative visions. But it is important also to remember precisely what is being

viewed by readers; every instruction to "behold and see" would direct readers' attention

to an internal meditative landscape while at the same time centering their attention on the

book that they held (or from which they saw another reading). As they read the text, the

book would consume their field of vision, becoming a focal point for their devotions –

and in the majority of instances, this book would not have contained any images.

Hennessy comments that the command to "behold and see" works to draw attention to an

image of the crucified Christ that might have been included alongside the text as well as

to a mentally constructed image. But in those cases where no image accompanied a text,

it seems crucial to recognize that the undecorated manuscript page could still function as

a point of meditative departure for the reader.

The *ABC of Christ's Passion* offers a vivid example of how the written letters of a

text could either be read or viewed as if they were devotionally inspiring images. The

author of the *ABC* ostensibly aspires to teach readers the alphabet while also recounting

the events of Christ's Passion, and this text thus provides insight into how medieval

audiences might have been taught to garner meaning simultaneously from a text's words

and its material form. The *ABC of Christ's Passion* appears to have been an early-

fifteenth-century text, and it is extant, in two distinct versions, in at least three

manuscripts.[22] ABCs were, in general, common tools used to help students learn how to

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[22] Harley MS 3954 (c. 1420) and MS Bodley 789 (mid-15th c.) are two witnesses of the same version of the ABC of Christ's Passion. Gonville and Caius, Cambridge, MS 174/95 (late 15th c., p. 482-3) contains another *alphabetum* that relates the words on the page to the wounds Christ suffered during his crucifixion, but its text differs substantially from the other two witnesses. The relationship between these versions

read, and they were used throughout the majority of the Middle Ages. Nicholas Orme

has documented scribbled alphabets occurring in the margins of books from the tenth and

eleventh centuries, and he notes that "alphabets become more common at the end of the

fourteenth century, when they start to appear on the first pages of some lay prayer books

of the kind known as 'primers.'"[23] From the late-fourteenth century until the mid-

sixteenth century, the majority of alphabets have been described as being "broadly

similar," indicating that the basic letters being taught and the format in which these ABCs

occurred had attained a level of stabilization.[24] ABCs appear to have gained, therefore, a

degree of cultural ubiquity amongst those who were literate in Latin and the vernacular,

becoming a familiar sight on the road to literacy.

    Alphabets in general tended to tie themselves to devotional themes. Some make

this connection explicit with the inclusion of the symbol of a cross before the first letter

"A." Orme classifies the function of this initial cross as "a rubric: an instruction to

readers to say a short prayer before they pronounced the letters that followed" which

caused the recitation of the letters to become "a prayer, and the word 'amen' was said at

the end of the process."[25] Others, such as Chaucer's "An ABC," stick loosely to the

ABC's standardized format while also using the progression through the letters of the

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seems more thematic than textual. The witness in Harley MS 3954 has been edited. See "An ABC Poem on the Passion of Christ," in *Political, Religious, and Love Poems*, ed. Frederick J. Furnivall, EETS o.s. 15 (London: N. Trübner & Co., 1866): 244-50.

[23] Nicholas Orme, *Medieval Children* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 248.

[24] Orme, *Medieval Children*, 248.

[25] Ibid., 251.

alphabet as a stanzaic frame for lyrics on religious themes.[26]  The *ABC of Christ's*

*Passion* falls into the second category and appears to play with this overlapping

signification between the literal and the religious benefits of learning the alphabet.[27]

While there is no symbol of the cross at the poem's beginning, the cross and Christ's

body figure prominently in how the poem calls upon the reader to understand the

significance of its text.  The *ABC* ends, also, on a decidedly prayerful note, with the

statement: "man siker loue þe passiou*n* in al þi mynde ; and wy*n*ne þe heuene wiþ oute

ende . ¶ Est amen . man at domes dai schal arise . and bringe forþ boþe foolis and wise .

to ebron sikerli ; and þer*e* schal be þe gre-te assise . god of heuene oure iustise . w*ith*

wou*n*des al blodi . Ih*esu* m*er*ci."[28]  The author of the *ABC of Christ's Passion* presents

this text as offering more than just an avenue towards the acquisition of literacy; it can

also provide the reader with an alternate method by which he or she can affectively

meditate on Christ's Passion, thereby helping to secure his or her salvation.

The *ABC* conflates learning to read letters with learning to read Christ's body and

the pain he undergoes during his crucifixion.[29]  From the poem's beginning, the author

vividly links the reading process with a book's physical characteristics, asserting that:

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[26] Geoffrey Chaucer, "An ABC," in *The Riverside Chaucer, 3rd edition*, ed. Larry D. Benson (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1987), 637-40.

[27] Orme comments that "not only was the alphabet a religious text, but the tablet itself an icon which you could venerate just as you did an image of the crucified Christ in a church. 'The word made flesh' becomes 'the flesh made word'" (255).

[28] MS Bodley 789, f. 155v.

[29] See also "Meditation addressed to Christ Crucified," in *Christ Crucified and Other Meditations of a Durham Hermit*, ed. David Hugh Farmer, trans. Dame Frideswide Sandeman (Herefordshire, UK:

In eueri place men mai see . whanne children to scole sette schulen be . a
book to hem is brou3t . nailed to a bord of tree . þat is clepid an a. b. c.
parfiitliche wrou3t ¶ wrou3t is on þis book aboute . v. p*ar*affis greete and
stoute . rede as rose schape ; þat is write wiþ ynne sau*n*ce doute . ful of let-
tris al aboute . boþe reede and blake . ¶ þe blake lettris in p*ar*chemyn .
maken þe childrin soon afien . lettris to knowe and see ; bi þis book men
mai diuine . cristis bodi ful of pyne . þat diede on roode tre . ¶ Greete
p*ar*affis ben his wou*n*-dis fyue . 3e may undirstonde.[30]

Here readers are described as developing a progressive familiarity with the text, one that

leads them from learning about the physical aspects of the book to grasping their

symbolic connotations.  The material qualities of this ABC are identified first; it is

comprised of parchment, nails, wood, and ink.  This setup is rather surprisingly referred

to as a "book," hinting at a flexibility of this term during the period.[31]  Perhaps the "book

... nailed to a bord of tree" references an object similar to that described by Odo of

Cheriton early in the thirteenth century, who writes that "just as the sheet (*carta*) on

which the ABC taught to children is fixed with four nails to a board, so the flesh or skin

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Gracewing, 1994), 33-117.  The Monk of Farne, thought to have been John Whiterig, d. 1371, lived in the
fourteenth century; he includes a scene that similarly conflates learning to read a book with learning to read
the wounds of Christ within his meditations.  He writes:

> Study then, O man, to know Christ: get to know your Saviour.  His body, hanging on the
> cross, is a book, open for your perusal.  The words of this book are Christ's actions, as well as his
> sufferings and passion, for everything that he did serves for our instruction.  His wounds are the
> letters or characters, the five chief wounds being the five vowels and the others the consonants of
> your book.  Learn how to read the lamentations and alas! too the reproaches, outrages, insults and
> humiliations which are written therein (76).

[30] MS Bodley 789, ff. 152r-v.  A witness to this poem found in BL Harley MS 3954 has been edited by
Frederick J. Furnivall, "An ABC Poem on the Passion of Christ," 244-50.

[31] Orme also expresses surprise of the use of this term, writing that "people called it both an 'abece' and a
'book', although it was not a book in the usual sense" (255).

of Christ was stretched out on the cross."[32]  But the specification that the five red paraphs

are written "wiþ ynne sau*n*ce doute" raises the question: within what?  Perhaps this

passage was describing an object similar to the early modern hornbook which was made

by attaching a sheet of parchment covered by a thin layer of horn to a wooden board; or

there could have been two wooden boards, one with parchment nailed to it and one used

to cover that parchment and provide it protection, forming what might look like a rough

codex manuscript with only one page.  The passage is ambiguous as to the exact shape

and format of the ABC being described, perhaps assuming that the reader could have

envisioned such a common item with ease.

After reviewing the *ABC*'s physical makeup, the reader is invited to turn to the

script on the page but not to begin reading it *per se*.  Instead the number of paraphs and

the colors of the script are described: "v. p*ar*affis greete and stoute . rede as rose schape ;

þat is write wiþ ynne sau*n*ce doute . ful of let-tris al aboute . boþe reede and blake."

These basic decorative markers allow the reader to gain a general overview of the text's

organization.  The five paraphs indicate five primary sections of the prologue before the

ABC begins, after which point each letter of the alphabet is highlighted by an additional

paraph mark [Figure 2, 3].  And the alternation between red and black ink allows the

capital letters and section headings, written with red ink, to be distinguished quickly from

the surrounding body of black text.  The text then transitions to exploring the symbolic

registers implied by the physical composition and layout of the *ABC*, explicitly joining

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[32] Qtd. by Orme, *Medieval Children*, 254; cited also in H. Leith Spencer, *English Preaching in the Late Middle Ages* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 140, 417.

the act of learning to read letters with learning how to read Christ's suffering on the cross.  The narrator declares that "bi þis book men mai diuine . cristis bodi ful of pyne . þat diede on roode tre . ¶ Greete p*ar*affis ben his wou*n*-dis fyue . 3e may undirstonde." The text calls upon the reader to "diuine" Christ's pain from the physical components of the book and the visual appearance of the script on parchment, suggesting the importance of learning to read both the semantic *and* symbolic meaning of written words.  The book "nailed to a bord of tree" gains an explicit association with the "roode tre" and its symbolism, while the paraphs function to illustrate both divisions of ideas within the text and the physical openings made in Christ's body by the nails and the spear during his crucifixion.

Mary Carruthers has pointed out the mnemonic importance of decoration and layout in medieval books, commenting that "the symbiotic relationship between memorial effectiveness and the layout of books throughout the Middle Ages is apparent at the level of principle and general rules."[33]  Much of Carruthers' analysis focuses on marginal decoration, diagrams, and other images, exploring how their inclusion within manuscripts could provide readers with mnemonic guideposts as they read a text. Although not considering how works might have been written to facilitate the ease of their remembrance, Malcolm Parkes similarly explores the link between the design of a manuscript page and how that page was read, suggesting that changes in rubrication and page layout from the twelfth through the fifteenth centuries reflect changes in scholastic

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[33] Mary Carruthers, *The Book of Memory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 243.

reading practices occurring during that time.[34] Both Carruthers and Parkes, however,

approach this symbiotic relationship between the layout of a manuscript page and its

potential uses through the evaluation of scholarly, latinate sources; they base many of

their findings on Latin manuscripts destined for the most experienced of readers, often

those circulating within monastic and academic contexts. It is not clear, however, how

extensively less-learned readers might have made use of these new styles of page-layout

and decoration to help them memorize the texts they consulted.

In her study of literate practices amongst fourteenth-century vernacular readers,

Margaret Aston attempts to tease out how such less-learned readers might have

approached the books and documents with which they might have come into contact.

She suggests that the relationship between a book's form and its content was symbolic, as

opposed to symbiotic, outside of monastic and scholarly centers of learning. Aston

points out that for "all the everydayness of some kinds of reading and writing and texts,

there was still a sacred aspect to letters" and that "this existed on many levels and

included beliefs that were more magical than devout."[35] The format of a text, its letters,

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[34] Malcolm Beckwith Parkes, "The Influence of the Concepts of Ordinatio and Compilatio on the Development of the Book," in *Medieval Learning and Literature*, ed. J. J. G. Alexander and M. T. Gibson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), 115-41. Parkes writes that "the late medieval book differs more from its early medieval predecessors than it does from the printed books of our own day. The scholarly apparatus which we take for granted – analytical table of contents, text disposed into books, chapters, and paragraphs, and accompanied by footnotes and index – originated in the applications of the notions of *ordinatio* and *compilatio* by writers, scribes, and rubricators of the thirteenth, fourteenth, and fifteenth centuries. By the fourteenth century the reader had come to expect some of these features, and if they had not been supplied by scribe or rubricator the reader himself supplied the ones he wanted on the pages of his working copy" (135).

[35] Margaret Aston, *Lollards and Reformers*, 108. Aston continues that "we must not forget the ability of letters to be arcane: that is to conceal rather than reveal: to be symbols that enclosed a mystery rather than

and its material form could contribute to the reader's experience of a work not by acting

as silent mnemonic or structural guideposts but instead by operating as meaningful signs

requiring their own, additional interpretation.

The *ABC* exemplifies the tension that existed between both of these approaches.

On the one hand, the letters were, of course, meant to be read and seem to have

functioned as a basic mnemonic device to which the reader could attach other

information – in this case information about the narrative of Christ's Passion.[36] On the

other, the letters and decoration of the *ABC* take on symbolic qualities, as the paraphs

become representations of Christ's five wounds and the reader is invited to "diuine"

Christ's pain through the words themselves.  The letters of the *ABC* are explicitly

described as symbolic visual representations of the wounds of Christ, but it seems

important to note that this text appears to offer a particularly vivid example of what

seems to have been a more general perception amongst late-medieval audiences that texts

and images could overlap through the material properties of the manuscript.  Margaret

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transmitting a message" (108).  Perhaps the "mystery" of letters enabled the connection between Christ's wounded body and the script on a page to be made amongst nascent – and more advanced – readers.

[36] In *The Book of Memory*, Carruthers comments that "evidence that alphabets were commonly used as a mnemonic ordering device is scattered but persistent in both ancient and early medieval books" (109).  While one of the limitations of the alphabet as a mnemonic is its relatively limited scope (as opposed to numbers which can unroll in a never-ending sequence), nevertheless "learning the alphabet is a part of grammar; this is also the point at which one lays down one's fundamental mnemonic apparatus" (110).  Thomas Bradwardine and John of Garland, she notes, "assume their students have certain 'sets' of images already in their memories – in addition to the alphabet and numbers, these include the Zodiac and the 'characteristics of animals, [*voces animantium*]' a collection of attributes that derives from the various versions of the Bestiary...Ordered lists of this sort, I propose, were deliberately memorized in order to serve as potential mnemonic heuristics, 'seats' into which one could place a variety of diverse material one would acquire in one's education and reading" (110).  The alphabet attached to the Passion would, therefore, be hugely influential not only in how students approached the manuscripts they encountered later in life – but also in how they remembered their contents.

Aston comments that for "St. Bernardino and Bishop Pecock and their contemporaries there was an equivalence of books and images which is alien to us."[37]  Because books were relatively scarce in medieval England and because the majority of readers would have potentially come into contact with only a handful of manuscripts during their lives, the way in which fourteenth- and fifteenth-century audiences might have viewed the physicality and visual potential of a manuscript page could differ substantially from modern expectations of what a book's materiality might contribute to the reading process.[38]

The *ABC of Christ's Passion*, for example, suggests that learning how to approach the visual form of the letter is a prerequisite both for reading and for understanding the wounds of Christ.  The narrator instructs the readers to:

> loke in his syde man maide and wiif . hou iewis gunne þe nailis dryue .
> þor3t foot and þor3t hond. ¶ Hoond and foot was ful wo . lettris þere
> weren many mo . withoute any doute . wiþ reede woundis and strokis bloo
> . þus was he write fro heed to too . his bodi al aboute . ¶ Now bi þis a.b.c. i
> wolde me spede . and i mi3te þuse lettris to rede . wiþoute any distaunce.[39]

This passage invites the reader into the intimacy of Christ's body as the form of this poem self-consciously exploits metaphors of reading and literacy to encourage the reader to connect the textual object and its written words with learning to read Christ and his pain (as told by the words of his wounds).  While standard ABCs enabled children to

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[37] Aston, *Lollards and Reformers*, 118.

[38] For discussion of the importance of attending to the "historical peculiarity" of the manuscript as a literary form, see Ralph Hanna, "Analytical Survey 4: Middle English Manuscripts and the Study of Literature," *New Medieval Literatures* 4 (2001): 243-264, at 248.

[39] Bodley 789, f. 152v.

move from viewing letters as meaningless signs to viewing them as meaningful ones, so too could the words, the wounds, written onto Christ's body be comprehended after one has learned how to read them.  One of the most striking lines of this passage is the declaration that "Now bi þis a.b.c. i wolde me spede . and i mi3te þuse lettris to rede . wiþoute any distau*n*ce."  The *ABC*, this statement claims, could teach the reader to understand Christ's wounds in an expedient manner, as the body of Christ and the format of the book seem to collapse into one another, both being covered with letters in black and red ink and having identical numbers of paraphs / wounds.

Because the book, as an object, is described as standing in for the body of Christ, the narrator implies that the reader can "wiþoute any distau*n*ce," without any difficulty or delay, gain access to the underlying significance of Christ's suffering for mankind.  The immediacy implied by this phrase privileges the ABC as an object that could facilitate the reader's interaction with the events of the Passion.[40]  In learning the alphabet, the student assumedly is taught to read the wounds of Christ, not only the larger paraph wounds but also the smaller letters of the words written all over his body during the torture before his crucifixion.  And there seems to be no doubt in the *ABC* that learning to read the letters –

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[40] Actually learning how to read from an ABC could take a substantial amount of time, depending on the aptitude of the student.  Orme writes that Hoole, in the seventeenth century, "knew of one child who learnt the alphabet, both names and signs, in eleven days, thanks to a toy box and wheel showing one letter at a time.  Slow witted children, on the other hand, could take a whole year, even when beaten to make them" (*Medieval Children*, 261).  John Wyclif, for example, does not see the process of learning how to read as being quick; instead, he describes it as a process which unfolds in an orderly fashion, in stages, when he comments that "a child first learns the alphabet, secondly how to form syllables, thirdly how to read, and fourthly how to understand" (Qtd. by Orme, 261).  But the *ABC of Christ's Passion* seems to muddle these steps, collapsing them by exploiting the material form of the poem and the immediacy with which it could be viewed and touched by the reader.  See also John Wycliffe, *De Veritate Sacrae Scripturae*, ed. Rudolf Buddensieg, 3 Vols., Wyclif Society, 29-31 (1905-7), i, 44.

and thus learning to "spell out" the wounds of Christ – would enable the reader to understand Christ's pain ("bi þis book men mai diuine . cristis bodi ful of pyne").  It is of note, however, that there is no assertion that the reader must first gain comfort with the syllables and then master how to read before arriving at this understanding.  The physicality of the letters and their explicit link with the body of Christ seem to allow the reader to derive knowledge from this poem even without technically reading it – especially if there was a teacher who could orally explicate the link between the letters and Christ's wounds for less-learned audiences.

The *ABC of Christ's Passion* suggests that the material embodiment of texts could be strikingly important to devotional practice in late medieval England and exemplifies how a writer might exploit the materiality of a text by including metaphors relating it to Christ's suffering body.  And indeed, the popularity of book imagery within other depictions of Christ's Passion (such as the *Charters of Christ*, the *Meditations on the Life and Passion of Christ*, and the *Orison of the Passion*) seems indicative of a wider recognition of the importance of the relationship between Christ's body and a text's physical form for the devout reader.  In a way which these other texts do not, however, the *ABC* draws attention to the apparent commonplace familiarity with the association between written words and bodies, between colors of ink and blood, and between the manuscript and Christ amongst a variety of audiences with various levels of literacy.  The existence of a text such as the *ABC* implies that even the youngest and least experienced reader might have learned at an early stage how to approach a manuscript page's layout,

rubrication, and decoration as literally part of the body of the text – and as an avenue for devout meditations on the wounded body of Christ.  These extra-textual elements seem not to have had a purely utilitarian function but instead actively contributed to how a reader might have both symbiotically and symbolically approached and comprehended the text itself.

*John Lydgate and the Image of the Text*

In "An Exposition of the Pater Noster," John Lydgate declares that the *Pater Noster* "transcendith other prayerys all" and sets out to translate and paraphrase this Latin prayer into a Middle English meditative lyric.[41]  As this 42 stanza poem comes to an end, Lydgate suggests that like a "glenere on a large lond" he has attempted to harvest the "sugre in my smal lybrarye" during his process of composition, although to little success.[42]  Having nothing else to add to this poem, he writes that:

> Good will abood in myn Inward Entent,
> The aureat lycour was in my study dreye,
> Of Calliope and al hir favour spent,
> Fond there no clauses, but shrowes al to-rent,
> No thyng enlumyned with gold, asour, nor red,
> Wich shall be Ioyned with my testament,
> Leyd on my brest, hour whanne I shall be ded.

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[41] "Exposition of the Pater Noster," in *The Minor Poems of John Lydgate*, ed. Henry Noble MacCracken, EETS o.s. 107 (London: Oxford University Press, 1911), line 28.

[42] Ibid., lines 305, 310.

The "aureat lycour" has dried up in his study, and Calliope, the Muse of Epic poetry, can

no longer provide him with "clauses" and things "enlumyned with gold, asour" or red.[43]

Only "shrowes" or "skrowys" are left (depending on the manuscript witness), the

physical remnants of his writing process – those material bits which have been rejected as

he composed.[44]  The result of this messy process is the poem as he has written it – a

physical object that is to be laid on his chest when he dies, suggesting that the

document's contact with his body would enable some of the beneficial, spiritual qualities

of his poem to continue to assist him even after death.  While the poem ostensibly was

written to be read, Lydgate suggests that the material form of the written text would also

exert a seemingly talismanic influence over his soul.  Even though, near this poem's

beginning, Lydgate writes that the *Pater Noster* is "Crowned among praieris in þe

hevenly stall / Yif it be said in parfight Charyte,"[45] the ending image of a man being

buried with this poem resting upon his chest complicates how the reader might be

expected to interact with the text.  The insistence on the poem's value both as a

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[43] While this occurrence of "aureat lycour" refers to Lydgate's poetic inspiration, the adjective "aureat" is alternately used elsewhere in Lydgate's poetry to describe the literal appearance of a written text.  In "The Testament of Dan John Lydgate," the poem to which his "Exposition" is apparently meant to be attached, Lydgate describes how St. Ignacius' heart was engraved with "aureat letteres As gold that dyd shyne" ("The Testament of Dan John Lydgate," MacCracken, line 37).  The phrase "aureat lycour," therefore, seems to have lingering ties with a manuscript's potential composition – perhaps suggesting that the best poets deserve the most ornate manuscripts.

[44] Ibid., lines 314-20.  The reading of "shrowes" is unclear in Bodleian, MS Laud 683 which is used by MacCracken as the base text of this poem.  The texts found in BL Harley 2255 and Jesus College, Cambridge MS 56, however, replace "shrowes" with "skrowys" which the *MED* defines as "a scroll; a piece of parchment or paper on which to write; a bill, document" or "a scrap or strip of parchment or paper." See the Middle English Dictionary, s.v. "scrou(e," http://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/med/.

[45] "Exposition," lines 31-2.

verbalizable text and as a touchable object allows for the significance of the text to transfer from the words written on the page to the page itself.  The poem becomes something valuable not only to read but also to see and possess.

This section examines several religious lyrics written by Lydgate that focus on Christ's Passion, investigating the overlap between acts of reading texts, images, and material objects evident in these works.  Lydgate's religious works are rooted in the vernacular and affective thematics common to Passion poetry at the end of the fourteenth and beginning of the fifteenth century, but his poetry notably brings the visual and material cultures of late medieval England to bear upon his exploration of Christ's body and the book.[46]  Writing in a culture where the images of the *arma Christi*, the Man of Sorrows, and of Christ hanging on the cross were common accompaniments of the religious experience, Lydgate makes use of these images to explore the interplay between the textual and the visual within his work.  Similarly, as a writer familiar with many aspects of textual composition, creation, and transmission, Lydgate pairs his interest in visual culture with his knowledge of how texts circulated and how they were approached

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[46] The poetry of John Lydgate, monk of Bury St. Edmund's, has garnered renewed critical interest in the past several years.  See *John Lydgate: Poetry, Culture, and Lancastrian England*, ed. Larry Scanlon and James Simpson (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006), and *Lydgate Matters: Poetry and Material Culture in the Fifteenth Century*, ed. Lisa H. Cooper and Andrea Denny-Brown (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).  The need to reaffirm Lydgate's key role in the fifteenth century literary scene is repeatedly explained as the lingering effects of Derek Pearsall's study, *John Lydgate* (1970).  "It has taken almost forty years, but Lydgate is finally recovering from Pearsall," asserts D. Vance Smith (*Lydgate Matters*, 185).  Smith goes on, however, to qualify the force of this critique by explaining that the essayists who contributed to *Lydgate Matters* do not reject Pearsall's reading of Lydgate's work – instead they demonstrate "an embrace of the very pathological traits in Lydgate's writing that Pearsall identified wittily and eloquently" (185).  The embracing of "pathological traits" falls short of being a convincing assertion of the value of the study of Lydgate's works.

by readers.[47]  Joel Fredell writes that Lydgate crafted a large body of poetry for an

audience increasingly interested in procuring texts in shorter, and cheaper, forms than the

codex.  Lydgate, Fredell states, "was fully aware of the many possible media outlets for

his poetry" and displays an acute awareness of how the textual length and format of his

works would influence their methods of circulation and, I would suggest, their

consumption.[48]  Lydgate's religious verse particularly encourages audiences to attend to

the signifying potential of the material form of his poetry in how it might be both read

and used.  Lydgate's Passion poetry explores how the text itself and the parchment or

paper that it was written upon might have functioned as a type of image – one that,

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[47] See Joel Fredell, "'Go litel quaier': Lydgate's Pamphlet Poetry," *Journal of the Early Book Society* 9 (2006): 51-73.  See also Michelle R. Warren, "Lydgate, Lovelich, and London Letters," in *Lydgate Matters: Poetry and Material Culture in the Fifteenth Century*, ed. Lisa H. Cooper and Andrea Denny-Brown (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 113-38.  Michelle R. Warren asserts that "an approach to poetry through the materials that condition the very existence of texts – payments or other kinds of support from patrons, manuscripts of previously copied texts, paper, writing and language conventions, ways of earning a livelihood between poems – can reorient both the kinds of questions critics ask and the kinds of objects they study" (113).  After considering those poems written by Lydgate for members of various crafts in London (often guild-sponsored poetry), Warren turns to a consideration of how "the book itself [functions as] an intervention in the 'materiality' and the 'publicness' of poetry" (125).  Although she does not examine how Lydgate might have considered the potential of the materiality of texts within his own poetry, she does think about how the materiality of Shirley's manuscript, Trinity College, Cambridge MS R.3.20, might provide insight into how "the various elements that make up the book reveal the material craft of poetry, the poetic resonances of materials, and the engagements of both with the social networks of guild craftsmen in London" (128-9).

[48] Fredell, "Pamphlet Poetry," 60.  Fredell asserts that "clearly Lydgate understood and exploited the design structures of his text supports.  Since Lydgate wrote poems of pamphlet length, and pamphlets were well-known in the material culture of late Middle English, and since he wrote for a wide range of patrons, audiences, and occasions rather than the rigid courtly contexts and anthologizing strategies of Hoccleve, consequently we can expect that Lydgate did exploit the pamphlet as a convenient form to enter a literary culture broader than Augustine Bury and Lancastrian Westminster" (60).  Even in his most craftsman-like moments, Lydgate, if considered as a poet who tailored his work to the tastes and desires of his contemporaries, offers modern readers a view into wide-spread medieval beliefs and understandings of religious, political, and historical themes.

although not painted or hewn from wood, could nonetheless still be affectively looked at and meditated upon.

Lydgate's religious poetry continues to remain a relatively rare subject of critical attention.[49]  Part of this oversight results from the sheer amount of work Lydgate produced; when confronted with the roughly 145,000 lines of verse attributed to him, one must narrow one's focus on a single work or theme within his poetry or else risk becoming overwhelmed.[50]  Amongst those who have focused on his religious poetry, however, there has been a decided lack of consensus about how to account for the relationship between Lydgate's work and the other devotional texts in circulation during the early fifteenth century.  His religious poetry is alternately described as consistent with its cultural moment and separate from it, as participating in fifteenth-century devotional

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[49] Due to the extensive corpus of Lydgate's work, scholars by necessity must choose smaller segments of his works to focus on.  Most admit this necessity upfront, as does Alain Renoir when he states that the exclusion of Lydgate's religious poetry "does not imply a negative judgment, but merely my own limitations and my reluctance to obscure the argument with theological considerations which apply only to a large but very special segment of Lydgate's production" (viii).  See Alain Renoir, *The Poetry of John Lydgate* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1967).  More recently, Joel Fredell leaves out Lydgate's religious verse from his analysis because "the material culture of devotional poetry is far too huge a topic to fold in here" – despite the fact that some of Lydgate's devotional verse "is pamphlet-sized and may have effectively competed with Lollard religious tracts" ("Pamphlet Poetry," ff. 50, p. 69).

[50] Pearsall insightfully comments that "the immense bulk of Lydgate's work . . . is in itself significant, apart from its physically deterrent quality, only as a mark of changing fashions and attitudes to poetry" (*John Lydgate*, 4).  Rather than assuming that Lydgate was a "hack" who could produce nothing good because he produced too much, Pearsall goes on to suggest that we should understand his work as reflecting the medieval conception of poetry (work "different only in form and style, not in kind, from other forms of discourse") and consider his output as roughly equivalent with that of more modern novelists and prose writers (4).  We should, Pearsall writes, be aware of Lydgate's work as the produce of a "highly professional and skilful craftsman" – of a pen for hire (5).  According to manuscript attributions, particularly from John Shirley's manuscripts, it seems probable that Lydgate produced many poems that were commissioned to commemorate specific occasions.  For an overview of John Shirley's manuscripts and influence, see Margaret Connolly, *John Shirley: Book Production and the Noble Household in Fifteenth-Century England* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1998).

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trends and distinguishing itself from them by returning to fourteenth-century models.[51]

Perhaps the fairest assessment has been proposed by James Simpson who reads Lydgate's

religious lyrics as both "characteristic" and "not-so-characteristic" of the "traditions of

the lay-directed, affective" lyrics of the early fifteenth century.[52]

I would agree that Lydgate's religious poetry shares many of its themes with other

devotional poems of the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries.  In general, Lydgate

portrays Christ's Passion in a relatively standard, affective style for his day (using Christ

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[51] Pearsall comments only briefly on Lydgate's Passion poetry but asserts that they "have little to do with the tradition of intimate, passionate attachment to the body of Christ which plays so large a part in medieval lyric-writing" (*Lydgate*, 265).  Instead, he suggests that these poems "are penitential rather than devotional" and although "there is a good deal of detail of the agonies of the Cross in these poems ... [it is] so laboriously accumulated and unimaginatively used as to be completely without affective power" (265). Rosemary Woolf, in contrast, sees Lydgate's portrayal of the complaint of the crucified Christ as following "the standard fifteenth-century pattern: the major part is an enumeration of the events of the Passion, whilst the concluding part pleads for love" (207).  See Rosemary Woolf, *English Religious Lyric in the Middle Ages* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968).  Walter Schirmer locates Lydgate's inspiration not in the fifteenth century but in the fourteenth century, writing that "he did not carry on the traditions of Latin and early Middle English religious lyrics..., but exaggerated the bombast and affectation present in fourteenth-century verse" (173).  He suggests that Lydgate departs from the fifteenth-century style of the vernacular religious lyric because "in popular religious poetry of the fifteenth century the visible and scenic tended to be emphasized . . . but Lydgate could not and would not continue this tradition, whereby Christ's torments were represented as suffering capable of moving ordinary mortals . . . since it did not lie within his power to express mystical ardour" (184).  See Walter F. Schirmer, *John Lydgate: A Study in the Culture of the XVth Century*, trans. Ann E. Keep (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1961).

Although this chapter does not do so, Fiona Somerset attempts to convey the need for a more robust engagement with the overlapping interests of Lydgate's devotional and secular verse in "'Hard is with seyntis for to make affray': Lydgate the 'Poet-Propagandist' as Hagiographer," in *John Lydgate: Poetry, Culture, and Lancastrian England*, ed. Larry Scanlon and James Simpson (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006), 258-78.  This is a great point, and one which will hopefully be engaged with in the near future.

[52] James Simpson, *Reform and Cultural Revolution*, The Oxford English Literary History, Vol. 2: 1350-1547 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 453.  Pearsall's suggestion that Lydgate's Passion poetry is "completely without affective power" or D. Vance Smith's embrace of the pathological traits in Lydgate's writing hint that some of the confusion over how to deal with Lydgate's poetry has been the result of modern aesthetic judgments (*Lydgate*, 265; *John Lydgate*, 185).  But if we consider Lydgate to be a product of the literary and devotional influences surrounding him, then we can cease to study how his work might fail to conform to other late-fourteenth and early-fifteenth century devotional conventions, and turn our attention to a more productive topic – how he might have developed existing devotional conventions to highlight his own concerns and interests.

as a first-person narrator, focusing on the wounds of the Passion as a warning against sin

and as proof of Christ's love, demonstrating an interest in the physicality of Christ's body

and his suffering).  And the similarity between how his poems and other contemporary

works such as the *Orison of the Passion* and the *Meditations on the Life and Passion of*

*Christ* encourage readers to interact with Christ's body can be seen by looking at

Lydgate's poem, "The Fifteen Ooes of Christ."  This work shares with the *Orison* and the

*Meditations* the request that Christ write his experience into the reader's memory.[53] After

eight stanzas that relate the general events leading up to Christ's crucifixion, the narrator

(the indeterminate "I" of the poem) beseeches, "O lord Iesu! enprente in my memorye /

Alle these tokenys of thy peynfull passioun; / Thy cros, thy deth, on Caluary thy vyctorye

/ Gravyn in myn herte w*ith* hooll affeccyoun."[54]  As in the other contemporary Passion

poems discussed in Chapter 1, reading appears to be closely associated with the process

of writing and inscription; the narrator asks that the tokens and events of the Passion be

imprinted in his memory and engraved into his heart.  This appeal is later repeated when

the narrator asks Jesus to "Gyff me grace tenprenten in my mynde / Thy gloryous

passyoun, by and by record / Alle the tokenys, that noon be lefft behynde, / Abowte thy

cros in ordre as I hem fynde."[55]  The narrator seeks to remember the events of Christ's

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[53] For a complete discussion of this trope in the *Orison of the Passion* and the *Meditations on the Life and Passion of Christ*, see Chapter 1.

[54] Lydgate, "The Fifteen Ooes of Christ," in *The Minor Poems of John Lydgate*, ed. Henry Noble MacCracken, EETS o.s. 107 (London: Oxford University Press, 1911), lines 65-8.

[55] Ibid., lines 114-7.

Passion by inscribing within in memory the tokens of that event – Christ's *arma christi* –

in the order that they occur within the text.

The most detailed association between reading about Christ's Passion and the

writing process, however, occurs near the poem's end when the narrator requests:

> Mercyful Iesu! of grace do adverte
> With thilke lycour wich þou dedyst bleede,
> By remembraunce to write hem in myn herte
> Ech day onys that I may hem reede,
> Close þe capytallys vnder þi purpil weede
> With offte thynkyng on þy bloody fface,
> Thorugh myn entraylles let þi passioun sprede,
> Marked tho karectys whan I shal hens passe.[56]

Jesus is asked to use his blood to write the remembrance of his Passion within the

reader's heart, linking the writing process with commonly held views concerning the

salvific nature of Christ's blood.[57]  His blood does not here seem to save simply by being

shed.  Instead, it must be used – must be written with – in order for its significance to be

fully accessible to the reader.  And the remaining lines of the passage further the

association between the physical act of writing and the body as a surface to be written

upon.  As a result of reading about Christ's Passion each day, the narrator requests that

Christ surround the capital letters of his text with the purple covering of his blood and

engrave the written symbols of his Passion within his entrails as proof of his devotion,

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[56] Ibid., lines 281-8.

[57] See Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast, Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987).  Bynum comments that "drinking Jesus' blood was both a metaphor for *imitatio Christi* and a ritual act (the reception of communion) that lay at the heart of religious practice.  Bleeding was a metaphor for pain and loss of self-control; it was also a metaphor for joy and redemption" (164-5).

proof that would still be able to be accessed after narrator's – or the reader's – death.

Because the term "karectys" can signify something written, as in a symbol or a charm, or

a distinguishing feature such as a scar or a mutilation, this word succinctly demonstrates

Lydgate's interest in linking bodies and texts, in joining acts of reading with acts of

writing since what one reads can indelibly leave its mark upon one's body.[58]  This

engraved symbol or mark lasts until death – until one "shal hens passe."  Finally, in its

ending lines, this poem recalls the *Charters of Christ* by linking Christ's body with the

document of a charter.  Mankind can claim to have hope of mercy after death since "... by

tytyll cleymed by thy blood, / And by thy modrys meek medyacyoun, / The charter

asselid whan þou heeng on þe Rood."[59]  This charter is authorized by Christ's blood and

Mary's mediation on behalf of mankind and shows Lydgate invoking the textual tradition

of the *Charters* while also engaging with the culturally prevalent fascination with the

potential interactions between the written text, the body (both textual and human), and

the reader.

     In comparison with other contemporary vernacular religious works, however,

Lydgate's poetry displays a heightened interest in how standard Passion iconography

could interact with affective meditative practices, written texts, and a work's material

form.  His religious verse thus offers the opportunity to explore how medieval

perceptions of visual images might have intersected with perceptions of the book and

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[58] See the MED, definitions 1 and 2 s.v. "carect(e," http://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/med/.

[59] Lydgate, "The Fifteen Ooes of Christ," lines 334-6.

textuality – particularly in how the material form of a book was understood to function alongside standard Passion iconography. Returning to the "The Fifteen Ooes of Christ," it becomes apparent that in spite of this work's similarities with the *Charters* or the *Meditations*, the poem does not encourage readers to write merely the *events* of the Passion into their hearts or minds. It specifies that the *tokens* of the Passion are what should be imprinted – and "tokens" could signify both a physical representation of Christ's Passion or the event itself (when the event is "assumed indicative of the divine will").[60] When the narrator requests that the reader imprint "Alle the tokenys, that noon be lefft behynde, / Abowte thy cros in ordre as I hem fynde," his focus seems to be on remembering the visual symbols, those of the *arma christi* ("The sharpe spere, that dyd thyn herte ryve, / The scorges & peler, to wich they did the bynde, / And speccyally thy glorious woundis ffyve"), that represent the different phases of Christ's suffering and death.[61] And these tokens are scattered around the cross "in order as I hem fynde" in a description reminiscent of the presentation of the *arma christi* in early-fifteenth-century iconography in which they occupy the background of an image of the suffering or crucified Christ. British Library MS Additional 37049 provides an example of such an image, as it portrays Christ holding his charter in front of his body with the *arma christi* surrounding him on all sides [see Chapter 1, Figure 10]. Lydgate therefore references these common images that were employed to inspire devotional meditation, inserting

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[60] See the MED, definitions 1a, 1c, and 2b, s.v. "token," http://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/med/.

[61] Lydgate, "The Fifteen Ooes of Christ," lines 116-17, and 118-20.

them into the descriptions of reading and writing texts and bodies that can be found in

other, similar Passion poems.  The reading of his poem becomes conflated with the

reading of an image or images (the tokens of Christ's Passion), and the act of

composition which takes place in the reader's memory – and on the sheet of parchment

upon which the poem is written – must therefore be able to accommodate both visual and

written texts.

The short poem, "The Dolerous Pyte of Crystes Passioun," demonstrates

Lydgate's explicit engagement with the visual iconography that permeated late-medieval

English culture.  The poem opens with the instruction that the reader:

> Erly on morwe, and toward nyght also,
> First and last, looke on this ffygure;
> Was ever wight suffred so gret woo
> For manhis sake suych passioun did endure?
> My bloody woundis, set here in picture,
> Hath hem in mynde knelyng on your kne,
> A goostly merour to euery Cryature,
> Callid of my passiou*n* the dolerous pyte.[62]

This stanza ostensibly references a representation of the Man of Sorrows, or the *imago*

*pietatis*, a common devotional image portraying Christ wounded and bleeding during his

crucifixion.[63]  The naming of this image as the "dolerous pyte" also brings to mind the

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[62] Lydgate, "The Dolerous Pyte of Crystes Passioun," *The Minor Poems of John Lydgate*, ed. by Henry Noble MacCracken, EETS o.s. 107 (London: Oxford University Press, 1911), lines 1-8.

[63] See Woolf, *English Religious Lyric*, 184-5.  Woolf describes the *imago pietatis* as "the figure of the suffering Christ [who] is isolated from the historical sequence of the Passion.  He stands in an attitude of pain, the wounds clearly marked upon His body, and the crown of thorns upon His head.  Often a part of the Cross or some of the instruments of the Passion may be seen behind Him.  Reference to historical time is deliberately evaded: Christ is shown oppressed by suffering, although the Crucifixion is past, as the wounds in hands, feet, and side bear witness.  No historical or dogmatic purpose is served by this

image of the pietà in which Mary holds the dead body of her son in her lap, although it appears that this poem primarily attempts to reference an image of the Man of Sorrow since Mary is mentioned nowhere in the poem.[64] The reader is directed to look on "this ffygure" in which Christ's wounds are set "in picture" and to keep them in mind as a "goostly merour" while kneeling. The term "ffygure" most explicitly references an exterior picture of the Man of Sorrows, but it could also refer to "a poetic composition, a poem," perhaps indicating that Lydgate is playing here with using an external image to create his own textual figure, of sorts.[65]

The subsequent six stanzas continue to draw upon standard Passion imagery as they alternately describe Christ as a knight (derived from contemporary courtly poetry) and the vine of salvation (taken from biblical literature).[66] The reader is repeatedly asked to view the image of the suffering Christ. "Set this lyknesse in your remembraunce, / Enprenteth it in your Inward sight," the narrator instructs, "Whan ye beholde this

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representation. The intention is entirely meditative, to confront the beholder with a timelessly suffering Christ and thus to arouse his compassion" (184-5).

[64] Ibid., 255, 392-4. Woolf remarks that the Pietà "is chiefly familiar nowadays from Italian Renaissance painting, but there is evidence that it was fairly common in England in the fifteenth century, though it was so inevitable an object of iconoclasm of the reformers, that this evidence consists only of the assembling of scattered traces. . . . Its chief advantage was that, like the *imago pietatis*, it had the character of an *Andachtsbild*, which normally isolated from a realistic historical scene one or two figures as objects of devotion, frozen at some moment of significant action" (255).

[65] See definition 4c for "figure" (n.) in the *Middle English Dictionary*.

[66] Woolf comments that "the idea of the lover-knight ... acquired in the fifteenth century an accretion [of the iconographic form of a shield with the five wounds upon it arranged as a heraldic device], giving it a superficial relevance to visual descriptions of the Crucifixion that it had not possessed before" (209). The images of Christ as a vine of grapes and as a grape-harvester are derived from Numbers xiii and Isaiah lxiii. For a discussion of the typological treatment of these images in the Middle Ages, see Woolf, 200-2.

dolerous pyte"; the reader must also "Of myn Image devoutly taketh heede" and "Grave this trivmphe depe in your memorie."[67] Beholding the image of Christ is described as the first step toward remembering the events of Christ's Passion and his suffering at that time. And the poem consistently refers to the figure being referenced as *this* "pyte," as if there were a specific image being referenced.[68] But as the unique manuscript witness does not include any sort of image accompanying this poem – there is no image to be referenced by "this."[69] Perhaps Lydgate hoped to allow readers the choice of pairing this poem with an image of their choice or perhaps such an image would have been thought common enough for readers to imagine easily during the reading process.[70] Either way, I would suggest that whether an image was meant to be viewed during the reading process or not, the material object of the poem was itself beheld by the reader and it – regardless

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[67] Lydgate, "The Dolerous Pyte," lines 9-10, 16, 26, 43.
[68] The reader beholds "this dolerous pyte" and is asked to envision Christ's Passion "as witnesseth this dolorous pite" (lines 16 and 24). See also lines 32, 40, and 48.

[69] While Walter Shirmer has suggested that "The Dolerous Pyte of Crystes Passioun" can be linked to a specific image and associated pardon obtainable near Lydgate's monastery, no indication of this connection can be found in MS Laud Misc. 683, the only manuscript to contain a witness of this poem; the single extant version introduces the poem as "a tretys of Crystys passyoun," thereby making no reference to the "pyte" so prominently featured by the modern title attached to this poem (MS Laud Misc. 683, f. 15v). The only definitive knowledge we have concerning the location of this manuscript before it entered the collection of Archbishop William Laud around 1639 is a note on f. 125v in which a John Stevens signs the manuscript the "15 daye Januarye 1633 de Brantrye in Essex." It is unclear, however, if this dating and location also applies to the poem written by Lydgate since this is a compilation manuscript comprised of a fifteenth century and a seventeenth century section, and this signature by John Stevens occurs in the seventeenth-century section.

[70] Writing about images is, as Woolf points out, a distinct marker of fifteenth-century poetry in general, and "often the meditative picture is only alluded to in the text, and is supplied in detail by an accompanying illustration or by a rubric referring the meditator to a statue or painting in church" (183). As a result of the numerous "devotional representations in churches, and in books of hours and other manuscripts," fifteenth-century authors often appear to have assumed that their readers "would gain knowledge of a visual image, not from a literary description provided by himself, but from a statue or a painting, and that ideally an illumination would actually accompany the poem in the manuscript" (183-4).

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of its lack of decoration, as demonstrated by the *ABC of Christ's Passion* – could also act

as a witness to the events of Christ's Passion.[71]

Lydgate's striking habit of seeming to reference external images in some of his

religious poems has been commented on before.[72] Pearsall asserts that poems like "The

Dolerous Pyte" were intended to "'explain' pictures" and that "Lydgate was particularly

active in exploring this borderland of word and picture, though he did so quite

unconsciously and would not have been aware of a borderland."[73] And two recent efforts

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[71] The poem's final stanza includes another hint that Lydgate has moved the reader's gaze from an external image to the form of the poem itself. It reads:

> From yow avoideth slouthe & necclygence,
> W*ith* contrit herte seith, meekly knelyng dou*n*,
> O Pater-n*oste*r and Auees in sentence,
> A crede folwyng, seyd with devossioun,
> xxvi thousand yeeris of pardoun,
> Over xxx dayes, ye may the lettre see,
> In remembraunce of Crystys passioun
> Knelyng be-fore this dolorous pite. (49-56)

By reciting a series of prayers while kneeling before the "pite," the reader is promised 26,000 years of pardon plus 30 days. Yet the phrase, "ye may the lettre see," again seems to complicate precisely what object serves as the impetus for the reader's prayers. The lettre, presumably that of the pardon, tempts readers to remember and meditate on Christ's Passion, just as the poem, composed of a different sort of letters, also encourages the remembrance of that event. What is knelt before, therefore, becomes more difficult to determine than it might initially seem. One could be kneeling before an image of the Man of Sorrows (either hanging on a wall or painted in a manuscript), or one could be kneeling before the book which contains Lydgate's poem and the text of the pardon.

[72] For a general discussion of the emotive power of images in late-medieval religious literature, see James Simpson, *Reform and Cultural Revolution*, 383-457.

[73] Pearsall, *John Lydgate*, 181, 179. This explanation assumes that Lydgate was entirely unconscious of the implications of what he wrote; perhaps such unconsciousness could extend to one or two poems, but his interest in images in his religious poems reoccurs with particular frequency – especially in poems concerning the Passion. It is the assertion that Lydgate used his poems to "explain" pictures, however, that I believe should particularly be placed under greater scrutiny, especially as no illuminations accompany the extant manuscript witnesses. Two of Lydgate's main Passion poems occur repeatedly in unadorned manuscript witnesses. "Cristes Passioun" and "A Prayer Upon the Cross," which will be discussed in the following pages, respectively occur in five and thirteen additional manuscripts, none of which include any complimentary images: "Cristes Passioun" is found in: Bodleian Lib. Laud Misc. 683 (12r-14v, 15th c.); CUL Kk.1.6 (194r-196r, 15th c.); Camb. Trinity College 601 (189v-193v, mid 15th c.); BL Harley 372 (54r-55r, mid-15th c.); BL Harley 7333 (147r-v, mid-15th c.); BL Addit. 31042 (94r, 94v-96r, mid-15th c.).

have been made to examine more closely the idea that Lydgate's explicit interest in

incorporating visual language and image descriptions into his religious verse offers

evidence of an explanatory impulse. Identifying Lydgate's references to works of art as

indicative of his "interest in the visual arts," Christine Cornell suggests that in writing

about specific images, "Lydgate directs our attention inward or outward, supplies images

and sensations (especially sounds) not immediately available to the visual representation,

and restrains his considerable descriptive skills in order to complement rather than

overpower the other art forms."[74] Cornell's analysis sticks rather closely to that of

Pearsall, implying that Lydgate's poems operate primarily as the textual supports of

certain images and are primarily meant to "complement" those images rather than to

create their own, stand-alone poetic text.[75]

Shannon Gayk, in contrast, offers a radically different reading, asserting that

Lydgate writes about images not to explicate them but instead to regulate them.

"Lydgate's choice," Gayk comments, "of the most popular affective visual images of the

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"A Prayer Upon the Cross" is found in: Laud Misc 598 (49a-b, 15th c.), Laud Misc. 683 (ff. 14v-15v, 15th c.), Hatton 73 (fifth stanza only, f. 4r, 1425-75), Rawl. Poet f.32 (f. 31v, 1450-1500), St. John's Oxford 56 (f. 84r, 1475-1500), CUL Hh.4.12 (f. 85r, 1475-1500), CUL Kk.1.6 (ff. 196v-197r, 15th c.); Jesus Camb 56 (f. 70v, 15th c.); Cotton Calig. A. ii (f. 134v, 1400-50); Harley 2255 (f. 111r-v, 1448?-49?); Harley 5396 (f. 294r, 1450-1500); BL Addit 5465 (f. 67v, 1400-50); BL Addit 29729 (f. 131r-v, Stowe, 1558); Huntington Library HM.140 (ff, 83v-84r, 1450-80). If no image accompanies the poem, then the poem's explanatory role seems to become more complex – as do the implications of how written texts were actually used and incorporated into devotional practice.

[74] Christine Cornell, "'Purtreture' and 'Holsom Stories': John Lydgate's Accommodation of Image and Text in Three Religious Lyrics," *Florilegium* 10 (1988-91): 168.

[75] Rosemary Woolf expresses a similar opinion in regards to Lydgate's poem, "The Testament." She states that this poem is "entirely dependent upon current iconographic forms . . . which, had they not existed, could neither have been written nor profitably read" (208).

period as his subjects demonstrates his desire to produce a clerically regulated vernacular alternative to current modes of affective piety that collapsed temporal boundaries in order to enable affective, participatory memory."[76]  Gayk suggests that Lydgate inserts himself as a mediator between the reader and the image and thereby "subordinates the image to his text by circumscribing the image within the realm of textuality"[77]  Lydgate's poems, she argues, render images "unnecessary" and undermines "the image's ability to collapse temporal boundaries by situating it as only one of a series of figural images and emphasizing the textuality of 'remembrance.'"[78]  Cornell and Gayk's markedly different readings propose two contradictory ways for understanding the role of images in Lydgate's religious verse – as either subordinate to or regulatory of the images it describes.

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[76] Shannon Gayk, "Images of Pity: The Regulatory Aesthetics of John Lydgate's Religious Lyrics," *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 28 (2006): 177.  Gayk offers a rather muddled explication of Lydgate's relationship to late-fourteenth and early-fifteenth century modes of affective piety; she begins the essay, for example, with the strong statement that "for Lydgate, images are valuable insofar as they help on remember in an intellectual rather than an affective way," but she later qualifies what she sees as Lydgate's complete rejection of affective piety, claiming that while "Lydgate's religious poetry does not conform to the affective model, . . . it certainly bears affinities to it" (176, 199).  Further, her claim that Lydgate's Passion poetry distinguishes itself from other contemporary texts  with its attempt to "remind . . . viewers how their 'trespace' has caused their alienation from Christ and their need for reconciliation," seems to overlook the fact that such an emphasis on the penitential value of religious iconography and poetry was increasingly common in early-fifteenth century religious verse as a genre (197).  Rosemary Woolf suggests that during the fifteenth century "there was a change in tone from devotion to didacticism" and that "the appeal ceases to be solely for love, and it at least equally concerned with moral reform" (183).

[77] Gayk, "Images of Pity," 190.  While Gayk suggests that Lydgate "wants nothing to do with either the suffering or the love-longing Christ central to many lyrics on the *imago pietatis*," I think this line of argument begs the question of why Lydgate, then, chose to even write about these images in the first place. It would have been easier simply to exclude any discussion of them from his poetry, as the author of the *Cloud of Unknowing* did in his long, meditative text.  The author of the *Cloud of Unknowing* explicitly rejects the use of images and figural representations of Christ in devotional practices – and, fittingly, his treatise pushes aside any description of images in its assertion of its mystical agenda.

[78] Ibid., 190.

When attending to Lydgate's treatment of not only images but also of texts and the material forms of those texts, however, the idea that the images described within his poems were intended to be explained or regulated seems too rigidly exclusionary and overlooks the more nuanced interplay between texts and images that exists in his poetry. Michael Camille has argued that medievalists often privilege the text over the image, suggesting that more attention should instead be paid to the overlap between the two forms of representation, and his critique, in this instance, seems quite pertinent.[79] Lydgate's verse finds inspiration in common iconographical images – but his poetry is, equally, intended to be read and as such partakes of standard themes and tropes of devotional literature in late medieval England.  By writing about these images, Lydgate brings them into conversation with the language of devotional literature, and by focusing on the importance of the visual culture to devotional practices, he gains the opportunity to consider more deeply how the material object of the text might resonate visually.  The interplay between text and image in Lydgate's poetry, rather than privileging either media, seems instead to be engaged with how the material object of the text resonates with aspects of both.

Two of Lydgate's main poems on the Passion, "Cristes Passioun" and "A Prayer Upon the Cross," illustrate with particular acuity his interest in the intersection between devotional images, texts, and the material object of the text.  Each poem begins by

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[79] Michael Camille, "The Dissenting Image: A Postcard from Matthew Paris," in *Criticism and Dissent in the Middle Ages*, ed. Rita Copeland (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 145.  Camille states that "in . . . many medievalisms visual art is viewed as lesser than and in opposition to writing, when it is usually in the dynamic intersection of the two discourses . . . that things happen."

referencing a common iconographic image and then alters the poem's focus to promote the central role that the poem's material form could possess in devotional practice. "Cristes Passioun," for example, begins as an apparent meditation on an image of Christ hanging on a cross, but as it proceeds, the image of the crucified Christ recedes, supplanted by the physical form of the poem hanging in veneration before the cross. Through this progression, the reader's devotional gaze is guided steadily away from the image and toward the manuscript page. At the poem's beginning, Christ speaks to the reader as he hangs "vp-on this Cross, / Crowned with thorn, woundid with a launce, / Handis and ffeet, tencres of my grevaunce / With sharpe naylles my blood maad renne dou*n*."[80] The reader is led through a list of Christ's wounds – his crown of thorns, his lance wound, and the wounds in his hands and feet – and is instructed to, "whan-euer thou felyst trouble or p*er*turbau*n*ce, / Looke on my wou*n*dis, thynk on my passioun."[81] Looking is the key action at first, that which enables the viewer to proceed to meditating on the Passion. The next two stanzas continue to instruct the reader to "looke" on his wounds, apparently asking him or her to engage visually with some representation of Christ's suffering.

But, in this poem of fifteen stanzas, the instruction to look on Christ's wounds ceases by the fourth stanza, and Christ, as the poem's ostensible narrator, begins to move the reader's attention away from exterior images and onto the text and form of the poem

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[80] Lydgate, "Cristes Passioun," in *The Minor Poems of John Lydgate*, ed. Henry Noble MacCracken, EETS o.s. 107 (London: Oxford University Press, 1911), lines 3-6.

[81] Ibid., lines 7-8.

itself.  In stanza four, Christ instructs the reader that "For cheef comfort in al wordly

dystresse / Remembre among vpon my passioun," and in stanza five, Christ claims that

"...sith my deth was to the profytable, / Man thynk among vpon my passioun."[82]  Readers

are instructed to turn their attention inward, remembering and thinking about Christ's

Passion as opposed to looking upon it.  By stanza six, the poem makes explicit its shift in

focus from an exterior image to an interior object of meditation as Christ recounts how,

when sleeping, "onkynde folk" are called to "...a-wake, & with ther Inward sight / Looke

on my tormentis, of equyte and resoun, / With goostly gladnesse, to make ther herte light,

/ Ech hour & moment, thynk on my passioun."[83]  Christ specifies that readers should look

on his torments not with their bodily eyes – but with their spiritual, "Inward" sight.  The

opening stanzas that seem to focus the reader's attention on an image have been

superseded by the instruction that the reader engage with Christ's Passion through

internal meditation and visualization.

The remainder of the poem recounts the harrowing of Hell, the origin of the

sacraments, and the proofs of Christ's divinity as evinced by his final hours – topics that

are linked to textual, not visual, sources.  The Gospel "maketh memorye" of the events of

his Passion, and Pilate "as maad ys mencoun, / Wroot dyuerse lettirs, merveyllous of

scripture, / Greek, Ebrew, Latyn, tyme of my passioun."[84]  Tokens are mentioned twice,

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[82] Ibid., lines 31-2, 39-40.

[83] Ibid., lines 43, 45-8.

[84] Ibid., lines 68, 102-4.

but both times they reference the events of the Passion that prove Christ's divinity.[85]

While tokens can, as mentioned above, signify a visual representation of an event, in

these lines, the narrator appears to be using the term to reference directly the

extraordinary events of the Passion which the reader should "enprente ... in þi mende."[86]

The reader learns of these events through textual sources (the Bible, Pilate's letters,

Lydgate's poem), thus linking the remembrance of these tokens to the reading process

and the poem's text.

The final stanza, the envoy, confirms the poem's movement from focusing on an

external image to focusing on the textuality – and materiality – of the work (both its

content and its physical form). The narrative voice of Christ that has prevailed

throughout the previous stanzas disappears, and Lydgate directly addresses his poem:

> Go, lytel bylle, with al humylyte
> Hang affore Iesu, that list for man to bleede,
> To-fore his cros pray folk that shal the see,
> Onys aday this complent ffor to reede;
> No losse of tyme, thou shalt þe better speede
> Redyest weye to ther saluacyoun,
> No bettir socour, nor support in your neede,
> Than offte thynkyng on Crystys passioun.[87]

While the opening command for the "lytel bylle" to go "with al humylyte" is echoed by

envoys in several other of Lydgate's shorter poems, the specification that this text should

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[85] During the time of his Passion, Christ describes the "Tokenys palpable, cleer as the soone-beem, / Were in that hour shewed agen nature, / What bodyes roos, kam to Ierusaleem, / There bonys Ioyned, out of ther sepulture" (lines 97-100).

[86] See the *MED* definition 4c for "token": "an extraordinary event serving as evidence of supernatural power, a miracle," http://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/med/.

[87] Lydgate, "Cristes Passioun," lines 113-120.

be hung before Jesus is unique.[88]  The poem's physical form, particularly where it is

positioned, is represented as a crucial element of its effectiveness.  The poem is to be

seen, read, and meditated upon as it hangs before either a painting or another

representation of Christ hanging on the cross.  The instruction that it should "onys aday"

be "reede" suggests that Lydgate might have envisioned the potential for a vital interplay

to emerge from the conjunction of a depiction of Christ's cross and the text of the poem,

as if the poem's material form could mediate between the two.  Just as a picture or a cross

might be hung, so too is the bill hung.[89]  The material form of the poem is presented as

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[88] Other references to poems as bills can be found in "Cristes Passion" ("Go, lytel bylle, with al humylyte" (line 113)), "An Exhortation to Priests" ("Go, lityll byll, with all humylite" (line 49)), and in "To Mary, the Queen of Heaven" ("Go, litel bille, pray to this pur virgine" (line 57)).  Lydgate also refers to several texts as treatises: "The Virtues of the Mass" ("Go lytyll tretyse, requyre the folk of grace" (line 657)); "The Legend of St. Austin at Compton" ("Go litil tretys, void of presumpcioun!" (line 401)); and "The Fifteen Joys and Sorrows of Mary" ("Goo litil tretys! and meekly me excuse" (line 309)).  The title to "An Epistle to Sibille" seems to be derived by Shirley from the final stanza's instruction, "Go, lytel pistel, and recomande me / Vn-to my ladye which cleped is Cybille" (lines 134-5).  It should be pointed out that the longest text identified as a bill tops out at 120 lines, self-identified treatises are much longer poems, ranging from 315 lines to over 600 lines in length.  A correspondence exists, therefore, between the length of a poem and the label assigned to it by Lydgate.

[89] For a general discussion of the use of bills in political and satirical discourse, see Wendy Scase's article, "'Strange and Wonderful Bills': Bill-Casting and Political Discourse in Late Medieval England," *New Medieval Literatures* 2 (1998): 225-47.  Scase comments that "in Middle English texts a *bille* is often a formal petition or plea," a definition that seems generally to correspond to the sense in which it is employed in Lydgate's verse (237).  The specification that this is a bill that must be hung before the crucifix thereby complicates the private nature of both reading and devotion, as both Christ and the reader seem to be potential recipients of supplication.  Scase remarks that bill-cast was a public method of communication, one which was intended to be read by and circulated amongst (through recopying and reposting) many individuals.  Lydgate seems keen to advance the public notion of this display, as "folk that shal the see" will pray before it.  Further, Scase suggests that "bills address those in power in the hearing of those that they represent," public beseeching that is fascinatingly similar to that of a prayer (246).  The poem supplicating Christ for forgiveness is hung where not only the reader, the "folk," but also Christ himself can "see" it.  The poem could be thought of, then, as mediating the discourse between the reader and Christ.  Between man and God lies the text.  In Lydgate's religious verse, however, the term "bille" primarily appears to refer to the form in which a poem might be written, as dictated by its length, lacking, as it does, the implicit "threat of inciting the mob" found in the political and satirical bills also in circulation in the fifteenth century (Scase, 245).

functioning as a type of image in addition to being a text that readers must both "see" and "reede" to attain the "salvacyoun" and "socour" that results from their meditations on Christ's Passion.

In a similar vein, "A Prayer Upon the Cross" also muddles the boundaries between images and texts by moving the reader's attention from viewing an image, to reading the poem, to potentially seeing the poem's material form as a meditational object in its own right. In "A Prayer," a short poem of five stanzas, Christ again speaks directly to the reader, opening his plaint with the straightforward assertion that "Upon the cros naylled I was ffor the, / Suffred deth to paye thy raunsoun."[90] This statement immediately establishes Christ's position on the cross, enabling the reader to visualize the location of the scene described by the poem. The second stanza then continues to instruct the reader to engage with the subject matter in a visual manner; Christ beseeches: "My bloody woundis doun raylyng by this tre, / Looke on hem well, and haue compassioun."[91] This request again could imply that the poem is working in conjunction with an exterior image – that, as readers consume the text, they would be regarding some type of representation of Christ's Passion. And this poem, as does "Cristes Passioun," at first seems to guide readers through their viewing of the cross, directing them from "The crowne of thorn, þe spere, þe nayles thre / Perced hand and ffeet of Indygnacyoun, /

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[90] Lydgate, "A Prayer Upon the Cross," in *The Minor Poems of John Lydgate*, ed. Henry Noble MacCracken, EETS o.s. 107 (London: Oxford University Press, 1911), lines 1-2.

[91] Ibid., lines 9-10.

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Myne herte reven for thy redempcyoun."[92]  The wounds of Christ are presented for the

reader's inspection as the poem appears to mediate his or her visual engagement with an

image of the cross.

The third stanza, however, shifts away from asking readers to "looke" on Christ to

instructing them to write the poem's contents into their memory.  The cross no longer

acts as the text's primary focus as the Christ-narrator references the gospel's account of

the events occurring after his resurrection.  After recounting how Thomas felt his wounds

to assure himself that he had truly risen from the dead, Christ instructs the reader to

"Rolle vp this mater, grave it in þi resoun."[93]  The reader is then asked, in the fourth

stanza, to "Thinke ageyn pride on myn humylyte; / Kom to scole, recorde weell this

lessoun."[94]  The events of Christ's life, the reader's school, should be rolled up, as though

a scroll, recorded, and engraved into memory.  The image of Christ hanging on the cross

has been superseded by the textually-based narrative of his resurrection; the events of his

Passion have become a text to be studied and incorporated into the reader's memory and

body.

The poem then ends on an ambiguous note in which the opening description of

the image of Christ hanging on the cross and the subsequent turn to textually-based

metaphors are thrust together within the material form of a "table."  The reader is told

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[92] Ibid., line 11-3.

[93] Ibid., line 21.

[94] Ibid., line 25.

that "Afforn thyn herte hang this lytel table, / Swetter than bawme geyn al goostly

poisoun."[95]  This statement could refer to two separate actions – the physical wearing of

the poem over one's heart or the spiritual act of keeping Christ's Passion continuously in

mind – that would enable the reader to obtain some sort of perceived talismanic

protection.  Both readings seem plausible, and perhaps they were not intended to

contradict each other.  The reader could, as in the "Exposition of the Pater Noster," both

read and wear the poem, valuing the object of the text even whilst using it as a type of

simple mnemonic as a reminder to think frequently of Christ's Passion.

And what of the "table" itself?  This term is not often used to refer to poetic

compositions, as it more generally refers to a small tablet, often made of wood, either

covered in wax for note-taking or prepared in some other fashion so that it might be

written or drawn upon.[96]  While this could be a reference to the opening image described

by the poem, perhaps an image of the crucified Christ painted upon a wooden diptych,

the language of engraving and of recording used in the poem's second half could

alternately indicate that this poem occurred at times on wax tablets that could have been

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[95] Ibid., lines 30-1.

[96] See definition 1 in the *MED*: "(a) A small, portable writing tablet made from a slab of wood or other hard material, often covered with wax in which the characters are incised; *pl.* a set of tablets, usu. tied or hinged together, a notebook, diptych; paire (of) tables; tables pendaunt, ?diptychs; reporting tables, tablets containing course or lecture notes; (b) a large flat slab of worked stone, metal, etc. bearing an incised or a raised inscription or figure, precepts, etc.; a memorial or votive tablet; also, a wooden placard or sign; box ~, a slab of boxwood prepared for an inscription; (c) one of the two stone tablets bearing the Ten Commandments; also *fig.;* tables of testament; (d) a surface prepared to receive a painting; also, the painting itself."  The Middle English Dictionary, s.v. "table," http://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/med/.  Lydgate labels one other poem as a table: "To St. Thomas (II)," "Quakyng for fere, goo forth, litle Table" (113).

worn or easily carried.[97]  Although all the surviving witnesses of this poem occur in

codex manuscripts, perhaps contemporary readers of "A Prayer Upon the Cross" would

have been just as – if not more – likely to come across this poem in a less durable form

such as a wax tablet.  If the poem was intended to provide some measure of talismanic

protection to the reader, then this type of smaller format would have been quite

functional.  In blurring the boundary between images and texts, this poem seems to invite

the reader to associate the spiritual work of remembering Christ's Passion with the

physical form of the text or image.  Lydgate suggests that the poem could function as an

object that could be engraved, rolled up, and hung up to inspire devotion in the reader,

thereby becoming a tool that could guide the reader's meditations on Christ's Passion.

As a means of conclusion, I would like to suggest that fifteenth-century readers

seem not to have been oblivious to the visual and material resonances latent in Lydgate's

verse, as the Clopton Chapel of the Church of the Holy Trinity at Long Melford (Suffolk)

appears to indicate.  In this chapel, fifty-eight stanzas of Lydgate's verse are painted on

the walls.  J. B. Trapp has studied these verses and notes that this is just one example of

how "Lydgate's poems were used, along with pictures, both in churches and secular

buildings."[98]  The notable aspect of this decorative use of Lydgate's verse is that these

stanzas are only minimally paired with other images, seeming to function primarily as

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[97] The fact that tablets were often made of wood could also be an attempt to match the material properties of the text with the subject matter, just at the *ABC of Christ's Passion* links its wooden boards to the wood of Christ's rood-tree.  The substances out of which a text was made, therefore, could be highlighted to invoke additional resonances between the subject of the poem and its material form.

[98] J. B. Trapp, "Verses by Lydgate at Long Melford," *The Review of English Studies*, n.s. 6.21 (Jan., 1955): 1-11, at 1.

large, independent blocks of picture-texts.[99]  Lydgate's verses occur in the chapel where,

at one point, "almost the whole wall-space . . . seems to have been covered with black-

letter inscriptions, now visible through the whitewash in a few places only."[100]  The

verses by Lydgate that remain are painted in two places; those from the "Testament" are

painted "upon a series of carved wooden plaques, each about 1 foot by 10 inches, running

round the chapel just below the level of the ceiling," and those from "The Lamentation of

Mary Magdalen" are "painted directly on the bressummer or girder supporting the lower

ceiling at the west end" [Figure 4].[101]  That these verses would have been read by those

who attended this church, however, is doubtful since they are placed too high on the

ceiling to read with any ease.[102]  This deployment of painted text that is, for the most part,

divorced from images is unusual before the sixteenth century, suggesting that Lydgate's

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[99] While the verses from Lydgate's "Testament" are unaccompanied by a singular image, they are a part of decorative schema in which "a man's hand, issuing from a brown sleeve, grasps the beginning of the scroll, and each plaque [containing a stanza] is connected to the next by a carved running pattern of interlaced branches, leaves, and flowers" (Trapp, 3).  The "Magdalen" verses are associated with an image, in that they are "preceded by a small painting of a hooded female penitent, presumably the Magdalen herself" (Trapp, 4).  Both of these decorative aspects, however, seem intended to compliment Lydgate's poetry in a support role; Lydgate's verse, in other words, is the main event and seems not intended to explicate or compliment the decoration affiliated with it.

[100] Trapp, "Long Melford," 3.

[101] Ibid., 3-4.

[102] Trapp comments that this "scheme of textual decoration, then, formed a very considerable part of the amenities of the chapel, as well as serving for pious edification," but he then clarifies that "the height at which the lines are placed goes some way towards defeating this latter purpose, for it is very difficult to read them with any certainty from the floor level" (4).

poetry welcomed this usage in some way that other contemporary fourteenth- and fifteenth-century verse did not.[103]

That Lydgate's stanzas might have been intended to replace the standard images which decorated churches during the fifteenth century seems borne out by the specific placement of the painted text. The verses written above the altar have been taken from Lydgate's "Testament" and instruct the reader to "Behold o man lefte up thyn eye & see / what mortall peyne I suffred for your trespace / with pitous voys I creye and seye to the / behold my wounds behold myn blody face."[104] A rood screen would probably have been placed below these verses, encouraging the viewer to gaze simultaneously at the stanzas on the wall and the image or figure of Christ on the crucifix. Although the words of Lydgate's poem might be difficult to read from the floor of the chapel, the scrollwork decoration surrounding them emphasizes the importance of their status as textual objects. The material form in which this poem occurs is thus highlighted as a crucial aspect of the text, an aspect that would be apparent even to those viewers who could not read the poem's words. This painted materiality seems to blend the textual and imagistic qualities of Lydgate's verse. The poem instructs its readers to "Behold o man lefte up thyn eye & see," highlighting the importance of sight even though its text is too high up to read easily, but as the viewer regarded these stanzas, their connection with the textual format

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[103] Trapp states that "the didactic use of wall-paintings, with or without *tituli*, seems to have been more highly developed in the England of the late fifteenth century than elsewhere, but this particular modification of the technique, *tituli* without pictures, is extremely rare until at least the sixteenth century" (5).

[104] Ibid., 5. This passage is from stanza 101 of Lydgate's "Testament" as printed in McCracken's edition (lines 754-7).

of the scroll is unavoidable.  The acts of both reading and viewing, then, seem to come together in this chapel through the decorative emphasis on the materiality of Lydgate's poetry that suggests the importance not only of what a work says but also of the object upon which it is written.

When considering the Passion poetry written in the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, it is important not to overlook the fact that these verses were composed in a culture saturated with devotional images.  The *ABC of Christ's Passion* and Lydgate's religious verse indicate that writers were not oblivious to the rhetorical power of these images – but neither were they unaware of the visual and affective potential of the material object of the text.  Lydgate's poetry painted onto the walls of Clopton Chapel demonstrates the give-and-take between texts and images in the fifteenth century and illustrates how this interplay could be guided by the material form in which texts occur. While it might be unfamiliar for modern readers to look at a page of un-illustrated text and see it as visually affecting, readers in late medieval England seem called upon to do just that, as devotional works promoted a text's material form as a potentially powerful focal point for devotional practice.

Appendix: Images



Figure 1: The Chapel of St. John the Baptist (Ewelme, St. Mary, mid-15th century)

alle oure synnes: and bringe us to þi
blisse þat neuere schal haue ende. so be it.
Here is an ab·c· of þe passioun of our
lord iesu crist þe whiche is profitable
to alle cristene men and wymmen to
In euen place men may see & to knowe.
see. whanne children to scole sette
schulen be. a book to hem is brouȝt. na-
lid to a bord of tre. þat is clepid an a-
b·c· parfiȝtliche wrouȝt. ⊂ wrouȝt is
on þis book aboute. v· partis greete
and stoute. reed as rose schaȝr. þat is
write wiþ þinne sauce doute. ful of let-
tris al aboute. lowe reed and blake.
þe blake lettris in perchemyn. maken
þe children soone aften. lettris to kno
we and see. bi þis book men may diu-
ne. crist is bodi ful of pyne. þat diede

Figure 2: Bodleian, Bodley MS 789, f. 152r (mid-late 15th century). Note the red ink (the lighter gray) used for the introductory heading and for the first paraph mark.
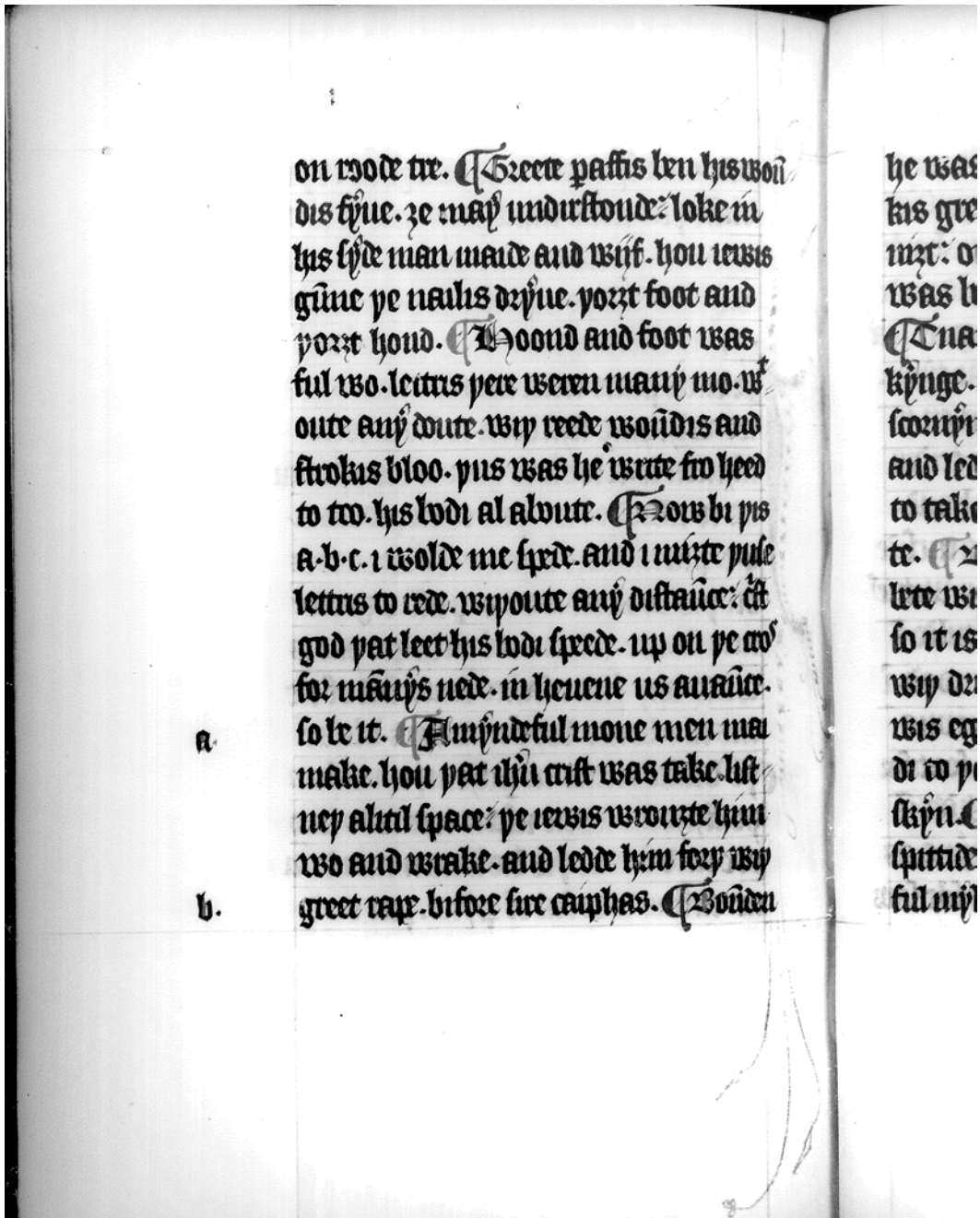
Figure 3: Bodleian, Bodley MS 789, f. 152v (mid-late 15th century).  The alternating colors of the paraph marks (¶) can be seen on this folios, as can how the letters of the ABC are set off to the side to demonstrate more clearly the progression of the text.

Figure 4: A view of the verses by Lydgate that were painted on girder at the west end of Clopton Chapel (Suffolk, the Church of the Holy Trinity at Long Melford, fifteenth-century).

Chapter 3

Consuming the Text: Devotional Literature and

Discontinuous Reading Practices

In the prologue to the "XV Joys and XV Sorrows of the Blessed Lady," John

Lydgate presents a striking scene of reading that illustrates how a late-medieval reader

might have approached a poem bound within a codex.  The narrator recounts that:

> Betwene mydnyght & þe morow fresshe gray
> nat yore ago in hert full pensyfe
> of þoughtfull syghes my peyne to put away
> Causyd by the trobyll of thys vnstable lyfe
> Vnclosyd a booke that was conte*m*platyfe
> Of fortune turnyng the book I fond
> A meditacion whyche came furst to hond.[1]

"Peyne ... of thys vnstable lyfe" leads the narrator to take recourse in reading during the

private time in the middle of the night before morning hastens new activities and duties.

To ease his pain, he opens a book of contemplation, literally unclosing it, an action which

could indicate that some type of clasp or leather tie held the book closed when it was not

being used.  He does not look for a known text, nor does he begin reading at the

beginning of the codex.  Instead the reader randomly alights upon a text that he or she

then proceeds to peruse, leaving the choice of what to read to "fortune."

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[1] Trinity College, Cambridge R. 3. 21, f. 157r.  For a manuscript description, see Linne R. Mooney, "Scribes and Booklets of Trinity College, Cambridge, Manuscripts R.3.19 and R.3.21," in *Middle English Poetry: Texts and Traditions*, ed. A. J. Minnis (Woodbridge, UK: York Medieval Press, 2001), 241-66. This poem has been edited by Henry Noble MacCracken in *The Minor Poems of John Lydgate*, Part 1, EETS o.s. 107 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1911), 268-79.

Lydgate's scene of reading additionally recounts how the decorative elements and layout of the manuscript could guide a reader's experience of a text.  As the narrator looks at this poem, he first notes that before the text begins there "... was set out in pycture / Of Mary an image full notabyll / lyke a pyte depeynt was the fygure."[2]  This image introduces the narrator to the poem's subject matter, previewing the thematic of Mary's sorrow that figures prominently in the following stanzas.  The narrator then skims the layout of the poem, stating that "By dylygence and clere inspection / I say rubrysshes departyd blak and rede / Of yche chaptre a Parafe in the hede."[3]  The rubrication and paraph marks guide his perusal of the text, showing him that the poem "Remembryd furst . xv . of her gladnesse / Next in ordre was set her heuynesse / Of eche of theym the nombre was fyftene."[4]  Lydgate illustrates how a reader could happen upon a poem, look at its introductory picture, and review its rubrication and layout to discover the organization and subject matter dealt with by the text.  An unfolding familiarity with a work results as the reader progresses through these stages. [5]

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[2] Trinity College, Cambridge, R. 3. 21, f. 157r.

[3] Ibid., f. 157r.

[4] Ibid., f. 157r.

[5] For an overview of the evolution of para-textual markers in scholastic texts, see Paul Saenger, *Space Between Words: The Origins of Silent Reading* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997), esp. 259-260.  Saenger suggests that the "from the thirteenth century to the fifteenth, subdivisions were introduced into classical and medieval texts. . . . This new mode of presenting old texts was also an integral part of the structure of newly composed texts, which were arranged in terms of chapters and chapter subdivisions, termed *distinctiones*" (259).  By the fourteenth century, Saenger suggests that "the complex structure of the written page of a fourteenth-century scholastic text presupposed a reader who read only with his eyes, going swiftly from objection to response, from table of contents to the text, from diagram to the text, and from the text to the gloss and its corrections" (260).

And yet, even as the narrator moves quickly through the text, skimming the images and layout of the poem to get a general impression of its structure and theme, it seems that this method of reading also aims to locate and dwell upon the work's most emotionally affective sections. Arriving at the poem's end, for instance, the narrator slows his brisk perusal and lingers over a second image, that of a person kneeling "deuoutly on hys knees / A . Pater noster . and x . tymes Auees / In ordre he seyde."[6] He looks on this image for what seems to be a long time, and "by and by in that hooly place," he finds that "to beholde it did myn herte good."[7] This picture of a man devoutly reciting his prayers affects the narrator strongly, easing the unrest that initially provoked his nighttime reading and thereby enabling him to cease reading any further. As his heavy heart is cheered by this picture, the narrator is motivated to revisit Mary's joys and sorrows in a more sustained fashion by composing his own poem on that subject. Lydgate's narrator engages with the poem's layout and decoration in search of an affectively powerful passage or image such as this, a passage or image that could dispel his emotional "peyne" by inciting his devotional fervor and poetic inspiration.

As the prologue to Lydgate's poem exemplifies, both manuscripts and the poems contained within them were not always read in a continuous fashion. Manuscripts could be read out of order in a discontinuous manner, and poems could be skimmed by readers

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[6] Trinity College, Cambridge, R. 3. 21, f. 157r.

[7] Ibid., f. 157r.

in search of short, affective images or passages.[8]  This chapter contends that reading

discontinuously was not undertaken only in rare or idiosyncratic cases but instead

represented a standard method by which medieval readers engaged with texts.  Through

an examination of *The Symbols of the Passion*, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, and other

late-medieval devotional texts, I suggest that these works are fundamentally invested in

influencing the manner in which readers might interact with their texts.  The material

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[8] Following Peter Stallybrass, I have chosen to describe this type of reading as "discontinuous" in contrast
to the "continuous" reading of a text (46).  Stallybrass asserts that the codex manuscript has always
demanded to be read discontinuously and that "to imagine continuous reading as the norm in reading a
book is radically reactionary: it is to read a codex as if it was a scroll, from beginning to end" (48).
Stallybrass argues that the codices functioned instead as "indexical computers" that enabled readers to find
and collate desired information quickly (74).  My reading of the discontinuous style of reading, however,
does not focus on how readers might have navigated devotional works in search of specific information but
instead on how they seem to have used manuscripts in an affective fashion, jumping around within a work
or codex in search of unknown passages that might strike them as most powerful and spiritually beneficial.
See Peter Stallybrass, "Books and Scrolls: Navigating the Bible," in *Books and Readers in Early Modern
England* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), 42-79.

   Elisabeth Dutton also comments on these two methods of reading, although she labels them as
"consecutive" and "selective."  Her interest lies, however, in determining whether both styles of reading
could have occurred in devotional settings.  She argues that yes, both reading styles could have been used
by devout audiences since "selective" reading was not just a concession to the less educated reader but
could also be engaged in by academic readers (170).  Elisabeth Dutton, *Julian of Norwich: The Influence of
Late-Medieval Devotional Compilations* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2008).  I agree that selective /
discontinuous styles of reading were not only employed by the uneducated reader, and I would like to
further her argument by suggesting that the affective focus of discontinuous reading encouraged its
widespread meditative use.  It is also tempting to associate discontinuous reading practices with the number
of miscellanies circulating during the late Middle Ages.  When one is reading a manuscript comprised of
unrelated texts, the compulsion to begin at the beginning of the manuscript and work one's way through the
contents in an orderly fashion seems less pressing.

   Judith Ferster comments that it "is the fate of any written text – to be appropriated by its readers,
who interpret it according to their own needs.  They can interpret it as they like, just as they can control the
experience of it by reading it in the wrong order, skipping, or skimming at will. . . . Conditions of reception
in the late Middle Ages highlighted the reader's role as a shaper and interpreter of the text" (181-2).  This
statement, that a reader always has autonomous control of how they read a text – despite whatever the
author of that text might have wished –has been expanded upon by scholars such as de Certeau.  And yet, I
would like to suggest that reading discontinuously was not just a habit of personal choice but was instead a
more standard and recognized method of devotional reading and that certain texts seem to have been
written to accommodate this type of textual engagement.  See Judith Ferster, "Writing on the Ground:
Interpretation in Chester Play XII," in *Sign, Sentence, Discourse: Language in Medieval Thought and
Literature*, ed. Julian N. Wasserman and Lois Roney (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1989),
179-93.

form of the *Symbols* and the narrative structure of Margery Kempe's work seem to encourage readers to engage with these texts discontinuously, while Julian of Norwich and Nicholas Love instead offer examples of how authors might instruct their readers to read their works in a continuous manner. In a culture that frequently figured Christ's body as a book, I suggest that by attending to how Christ's body was depicted in images and described in devout texts we can gain insight into how books, in general, might have been consulted and used by late-medieval readers. Although both discontinuous and continuous reading methods had proponents in late medieval England, I propose that discontinuous reading practices were more common than we have realized and parallel a similar trend in late-medieval devotional literature that encourages the affective focus of one's meditations on the fragments of Christ's body or his *arma Christi* rather than on his suffering body as a whole. By encouraging the reader to focus repetitively on particular affective episodes, reading a text in a discontinuous manner would have highlighted the importance of its material form and narrative structure since these provided crucial guideposts for the reader as to how a text was to be consumed.

*Reading the Symbols of the Passion*

BL MS Additional 22029 is a parchment roll (15th century) five inches in width and over four feet in length that contains just one text, a witness of the *Symbols of the Passion*. It was once quite sumptuous, containing many illuminations and wrapped in brown cloth attached to the roll with red and gold thread. Only shreds of the brown cloth

now remain, and several of the opening illuminations have been worn by the rolling and

unrolling of the manuscript.  The *Symbols of the Passion* has survived in eighteen

witnesses, nine of which are rolls – a truly striking number since no other medieval

religious prayers or poems have more than one surviving witness in roll form.[9]  The poem

presents, through a series of twenty-four images and accompanying sections of text, the

basic events of Christ's crucifixion and the symbols associated with Christ's divinity.

Each event or symbol is briefly described and then discussed in terms of what sin (or

sins) it might provide protection against.

The poem opens with an image depicting the face of Christ imprinted on

Veronica's veil [Figure 1, 2].  Veronica holds the veil in front of her body, completely

covering herself except for her head and hands.  Below this opening image, the poem

reads:

> The v*er*nacul - I honowre hym [and the]
> þ*at* the made throwe hys pryuy[té];
> The cloth*e* he set ovyr hys face,
> The prynte he lefte ther, of hys grace,
> Hys mowth*e*, hys nose, hys eyn too,
> Hys berd, hys here he ded also.
> Schyld me, lorde, for þ*at in* myn lyffe
> That I haue synnyd w*ith* myn wyttys fyve,
> Namelych*e* w*ith* mowthe of stlawndrynge,
> Of fals othys and bakbytynge
> And makyng boste w*ith* tonge alsoo

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[9] Rossell Hope Robbins lists only fifteen extant witnesses, of which seven are rolls, in "The 'Arma Christi' Rolls," *The Modern Language Review* 34.3 (Jul., 1939): 415.  Anthony Bale, however, usefully updates Robbins' list in *The Jew and the Medieval Book* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 175. Bale identifies the following manuscripts as roll versions of the *Arma Christi*: Edinburgh, National Library of Scotland, Blairs College MS 9; Esopus NY, Redemptorists' MS (sine numero); BL Addit. MS 22029; BL Addit. MS 32006; Beinicke Library, Osborn MS fa.24 (two rolls); Bodleian Library MS Addit. E.4; Bodleian Library, MS Bodley Rolls 16; Huntington Library, MS HM 26054; Stonyhurst College, MS 64.

> Of many synnys that I haue doo:
> Lorde of heuyn, for-zeue it me
> Throwe *ver*tew of the fygure þ*at* I here se.[10]

The poem does not begin with an image or description of the crucified Christ hanging on the cross, one of the most common representations of Christ during the late Middle Ages; nor does it begin with an image of the knife of Christ's circumcision, the chronologically logical point at which to begin this prayer sequence since it was considered to be the symbolic first moment at which Christ's blood was shed for mankind.  Instead the poem subverts the narrative order of the events of Christ's life and the Passion as portrayed in the gospel and forefronts a scene of imprinting, of Christ having transferred the impression of his facial features onto a cloth.[11]  While not explicitly linking Christ's body with the textual object being consumed, this choice nonetheless highlights the potential for Christ's body to be transformed, reproduced, and fragmented.[12]  The poem attempts to

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[10] *Symbols of the Passion*, in *Legends of the Holy Rood; Symbols of the Passion and Cross-Poems*, ed. Richard Morris, EETS o.s. 103 (London: N. Trübner & Co., 1871), lines 1-14.

[11] Vincent Gillespie comments on the lack of chronological progress in some portrayals of the Passion, rightly pointing out that:

> Metaphorical perceptions of Christ as a book, net, dovecote, stars and so on, operate particularly by removing the image of the laden cross from the linear narrative sequence of the historical events and by subjecting it to intense and continual visual and imaginative attention.  The suffering Christ is abstracted and dismembered to facilitate concentrated analysis.  The five wounds become subjects of separate veneration, the instruments of the passion are individually represented, and the evolution of iconographic motifs like the Man of Sorrows, Christ in Distress and Christ's Last Repose represents a shift from a diachronic to a synchronic perception of the temporal reality" (122-3).

Vincent Gillespie, "Strange Images of Death: The Passion in Later Medieval English Devotional and Mystical Writing," *Zeit, Tod und Ewigkeit in der Renaissance Literatur* 3 (1987): 111-59.

[12] Michael Camille suggests that "the image, not the Word, mediated most powerfully between God and the believer in late medieval spirituality," and that "images 'not made by human hands' like the Veronica were taken direct from the prototype itself, as imprints of the holy flesh."  See Michael Camille, "The Image and the Self: Unwriting Late Medieval Bodies," in *Framing Medieval Bodies*, ed. Sarah Kay and Miri Rubin (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994), 74.

affiliate itself with the sacred power of Christ's body by reproducing Christ's face in the introductory image and in the text's opening descriptive passage – a move that also foregrounds the poem's subsequent sustained interest in the pieces of Christ's body and the fragmented narrative of the Passion.[13]

    This section suggests that a parity existed between how Christ's body and late-medieval devotional texts might have been read by devout audiences.  Just as late-medieval audiences displayed an intense fascination with the ways in which Christ's body could be partitioned, meditating on his specific wounds or the weapons used against him during his Passion, so too does it seem possible that the *Symbols* was read with a similar emphasis on the affective power of the part over the whole.  I assert that both the text and its material form encourage readers to move through the *Symbols* by jumping from stanza to stanza, alighting upon those sections most pertinent to their specific devotional needs or goals.  As this poem was unfurled, a new, self-contained stanza would greet the reader, offering aid in obtaining forgiveness for one particular sin.  While some readers might have progressed through the text so that they could pray for

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[13] Miri Rubin explores what it signified for medieval men and women to "encounter the body as it was lived and experienced, in parts, rather than as whole" (101).  She comments that:

> Public judicial mutilation . . . dramatised the relation between the body and its parts; religious practice concentrated contemplation on distinct body parts or body marks: wounds, heart, face.  Images arising from the crucifixion, in the iconographic set known as *arma christi*, broke down the Passion scenes – protagonists, instruments – and then shuffled them and redistributed them in what would seem today to be a surrealistic scrambling of a powerful and naturalistic composition of the historical moment.  Similarly powerful is the ease of movement between discrete body parts and the creation of metaphors which use the very vibrancy of flesh and its radical vulnerability.  The body could be thus rearranged in the order of a document possessing a totally different order to that of a biological body (111).

See Miri Rubin, "The Person in the Form: Medieval Challenges to Bodily 'Order,'" in *Framing Medieval Bodies*, ed. Sarah Kay and Miri Rubin (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994), 100-22.

forgiveness for each sin described in the *Symbols*, I suggest that this text also welcomes

readers to tailor their reading experiences based upon those sins for which they felt they

needed the most assistance at a specific moment.  In such instances, a reader could have

used the text to foster an intense, affective engagement with a few sections of the

*Symbols* at a time – rather than reading the entirety of the text.

The thirteenth century saw an increased interest in bodily integrity and

partitioning that continued into the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.  Caroline Walker

Bynum comments that "the years around 1300 saw enthusiastic prying into the body –

studying it, severing it, distributing and scattering it."[14] And this cultural fascination with

the integrity of the body and its potential to be disturbed and fragmented echoes in

various ways throughout many religious works of the late Middle Ages.  "Artists,"

Bynum points out, "fragmented the body [as] liturgical and artistic treatment of relics

came increasingly to underline the fact that they are body parts . . . [and] depictions of the

sufferings associated with the Crucifixion – known as the *arma Christi* and the Five

Wounds – came in the later Middle Ages to show Christ's body itself in parts."[15]  Miri

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[14] Caroline Walker Bynum, *The Resurrection of the Body in Western Christianity, 200-1336* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 327.

[15] Caroline Walker Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion* (New York: Zone Books, 1992), 271.  For an overview of late-medieval Passion iconography, see J. H. Marrow, *Passion Iconography and Northern European Art of the Late Middle Ages and Early Renaissance: A Study of the Transformation of Sacred Metaphor into Descriptive Narrative* (Kortrijk, Belgium: Van Ghemmert Pub. Co., 1979).  For a discussion of the relationship between the Five Wounds and *arma Christi*, see Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England c. 1400-c. 1580* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 238-48.  For a particularly interesting overview of the use of the *arma Christi* in heraldic images, see Kathryn A. Smith, *Art, Identity and Devotion in Fourteenth-Century England: Three Women and their Books of Hours* (London: The British Library, 2003), 175-7.

Rubin similarly asserts that "the body in parts, broken, dismembered, fragmented was all too present" in late-medieval culture, as witnessed by representations of Christ's Passion that depicted "a series of wounds or wounded body parts surrounded by wounding instruments; hand, foot, side, sweaty brow."[16] But it is important to clarify that these examples of bodily fragmentation nonetheless were often conceived of as containing the spiritual presence of the whole body, whether it be that of Christ or that of a saint.[17] Just as relics were considered to possess the full measure of that saint's intercessory power, so too were the represented fragments of Christ's body, such as those included in the *arma Christi*, often presented as telescoped avenues of devotion that would enable the reader or viewer to gain closeness with the entirety of Christ.[18]

The *arma Christi* initially became associated with Passion piety during the late twelfth century at a time when the humanity of Christ was becoming an increasingly

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[16] Miri Rubin, "The Person in the Form: Medieval Challenges to the Bodily 'Order,'" in *Framing Medieval Bodies* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994), 113.

[17] Caroline Walker Bynum states that "devotional pictures of Christ's wounds underlined the horror of the Crucifixion by representing Christ himself as fragmented by our sins, but in such paintings *pars* clearly stands *pro toto*; each fragment of Christ's body – like each fragment of the eucharistic bread – is the whole of God" (*Fragmentation*, 280).

[18] Cynthia Hahn, in regards to medieval reliquaries, comments that:
> The reliquary's power is not singular but the power of the entire Church. . . . The part thus becomes more powerful in that it infers a larger and truly glorious whole. These body parts forcefully insist upon their fragmentation in order to evoke a whole beyond the individual. Just as even a small relic still contains the presence of the entire saint according to Christian doctrine, so a body part subsumed in a liturgical function conveys its evident grace in its shining sheath, and ultimately, represents the place of the relic in the whole of the church and salvation (28).

In Cynthia Hahn, "The Voices of the Saints: Speaking Reliquaries," *Gesta* 36.1 (1997): 20-31.

central focus in affective devotional practices.[19]  The Franciscans, especially those

working within the Bonaventurean tradition, were widely responsible for this shift,

emphasizing, as they did, the spiritual benefit of meditations on Christ's humanity and his

historical life.[20]  And a wide range of vernacular texts written in the fourteenth and

fifteenth centuries were composed in this vein for devout lay audiences.  Such affective

and visually-centered meditations encouraged the laity to develop an intimate spiritual,

and, at times, physical relationship with Christ.  Sarah Beckwith comments that late-

medieval "affective piety is obsessed with belonging, with the fantasy of fusion and the

bitter reality of separation, and so with the entrances to Christ's body" – resulting in the

popularity of devotions to Christ's five wounds and to the *arma Christi*.[21]  By having his

body divided into specific wounds or parts, Christ seems to have been perceived as being

more accessible for devout audiences.  While an image of the unified body of Christ

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[19] For an overview of the Franciscan influence behind this shift, see Denise Depres, *Ghostly Sights: Visual Meditation in Late-Medieval Literature* (Norman, OK: Pilgrim Books, 1989), esp. 19-54.  See also Elizabeth Salter, *Nicholas Love's* "Myrrour of the Blessed Lyf of Jesu Christ" (Salzburg: Institut Für Englische Sprache und Literatur, Universität Salzburg, 1974).

[20] Denise Despres writes that "through meditative narratives, various gospel harmonies like the *Meditations on the Life of Christ*, the Franciscans established an oral, visual, and written tradition of systemized devotions on Christ's humanity in the context of his historical life" (*Ghostly Sights*, 24).  For two recent critiques of the typical assertion that the eleventh- and twelfth-century turn to affective prayer and compassionate devotion to Christ's Passion was incited by Anselm of Canterbury, Bernard of Clairvaux, and the Franciscan Order, see Sarah McNamer, *Affective Meditation and the Invention of Medieval Compassion* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), esp. 58-115; and Rachel Fulton, *From Judgment to Passion: Devotion to Christ and the Virgin Mary, 800-1200* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), esp. 142-92.

[21] Sarah Beckwith, *Christ's Body: Identity, Culture and Society in Late Medieval Writings* (London: Routledge, 1993), 42.  Beckwith also comments that "it is precisely because of the failure of Christ's body to function as an image of unity, the impossibility of that project, that in late medieval crucifixion piety it is the borders and boundaries of Christ's body (which, as we have seen, simultaneously include and exclude so paradoxically in nearly every model and manifestation of Christ's body that we have located) that become the object of obsessive interest and attention" (42).

might have emphasized his divinity, the focus on his wounds and the objects that created

them encouraged readers to contemplate his humanity – as amply illustrated by his

suffering, bleeding flesh – with greater intensity.[22]

While it is difficult, if not impossible, to reconstruct with complete certainty how

a reader might have interacted with a text, the *Symbols of the Passion*, through its

material form, textual format, and narrative structure, provides several suggestive hints

regarding how it might have been consumed by medieval audiences.  Rossell Hope

Robbins argues that the *Symbols of the Passion* was written out in rolls so that this text

might be set on display within churches, allowing members of a community to view its

images and thereby benefit from the indulgences which are often attached to it, and his

interpretation of the use of these rolls has functioned as the standard view on how they

were used by medieval readers.[23]  He asserts that the "original function of the 'Arma

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[22] Michael Camille has intriguingly suggested that the fragmentation of narrative that results from late-medieval devotions to the *arma Christi*, "focusing upon close-ups and cutting out isolated objects, is almost cinematic in its effort to engage the person who holds these images in their hands, evoking in their memories the violence of the whole from its fragmented pieces" (119).  Michael Camille, *Gothic Art, Glorious Visions* (New York: Calmann and King, Ltd., 1996).

[23] Robbins' reading of the display purposes of these rolls has continued to carry wide-spread argumentative weight.  In a survey of Middle English lyrics, for example, Julia Boffey comments that "images and short verse texts [pertaining to the *arma Christi*] are occasionally united on manuscript rolls which would have been publicly displayed."  See Julia Boffey, "Middle English Lyrics and Manuscripts," in *A Companion to the Middle English Lyric*, ed. Thomas G. Duncan (D.S. Brewer, 2005), 1-18, at 3.  See also Douglas Gray, *Themes and Images in the Medieval English Religious Lyric* (London: Routledge, 1972).  Gray states that "it may well be that, as Professor Robbins has suggested, [the 'Arms of the Passion'] were intended to be publicly displayed to stimulate the devotion of the 'lewd' folk (the rubric which is sometimes found at the end grants an indulgence to those who *behold* them)" (51). And in *The Jew in the Medieval Book*, Anthony Bale states that "the distinctive presentation of the *Arma Christi* in roll rather than codex form has generally been assumed to reflect public or group, rather than private or individual, devotions."  Although Bale is careful to attribute this reading to Robbins, he does not actively interrogate this assumption himself except to emphasize that the roll format not only enabled congregational reading but also "is freighted with the *symbolism* of the public roll format [and] were . . . designed to partake in a documentary, administrative imaginary" (155).

Christi' was congregational," and imagines that "a friar or a parish priest would display such rolls, either holding them up himself, or hanging them from a convenient ledge or niche in the wall, or suspending them from the pulpit."[24]  These prominent positions of display would enable members of a congregation to "gain the indulgence by gazing at the roll, and while listening to the priest read the descriptions of the instruments, repeating the *Pater Noster*."[25]  Robbins bases this assumed method of consuming the *Symbols of the Passion* on the indulgences attached to some of the witnesses.[26]  He focuses his argument on the witness of the *Symbols* found in BL MS Royal 17.A.xxvii, attached to which is an indulgence that specifies "Wat man þis armes ouer-se, / For his sinnus sori *and* schereue*n* be" and "For sy3t of þe uernacul hath graunt / xl dayus to p*ar*don."[27]  The emphasis on the benefit of looking at the *arma Christi* in this attached indulgence leads

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[24] Rossell Hope Robbins, "The 'Arma Christi' Rolls," 419, 419-20.

[25] Robbins, 420.

[26] See Rossel Hope Robbins, "Private Prayers in Middle English Verse," *Studies in Philology* 36.3 (July, 1939): 466-75.  In this article, Robbins states that "the earlier texts of the 'Arma Christi' are written on long vellum rolls; and, as I have shown elsewhere, this devotion was originally intended for public exhibition in church before a congregation many of whom would not be able to read.  By the beginning of the fifteenth century, however, it evidently had proved so popular that it was taken over for personal meditation, for it is found in two devotional manuals and in one Book of Hours" (469-70).  Robbins' dating of the extant manuscripts of the *Symbols*, however, has come under revision based upon later evaluations.  Now current dating of the rolls and manuscripts suggests that there is no divide in dating that would indicate that the rolls were produced at an earlier date than those witnesses included in codices.  This revised dating of these manuscripts would seem to suggest that rather than *becoming* a text intended for personal meditations, the *Symbols* always was intended for such use – and that the roll format adds not a congregational element to this text but rather influences how the text was read and understood by its more private readers.

[27] BL MS Royal 17.A.xxvii, f. 80r.  This witness has been edited in *Legends of the Holy Rood; Symbols of the Passion and Cross-Poems*, ed. Richard Morris (London: EETS, 1871), 170-96, at lines 203-4, 216-7. Nita Scudder Baugh, in *A Worcestershire Miscellany: Compiled by John Northwood, c. 1400* (Philadelphia, 1956) suggests that the 15th century half of MS Royal 17.A.xxvii (the manuscript is comprised of two sections, the first dating from the 13th century and the second dating from the 15th century) was written out at Bodesley Abbey in the West Midlands based upon the similarities of format, dialect, and textual inclusions it shares with BL Additional MS 37787 (another Bordesley manuscript) (35).

Robbins to suggest that it was not the recitation of prayers or the reading of the accompanying text that was the intended focus of the poem – but instead the simple viewing of the images, of regarding the unrolled text set on display.[28]

In support of Robbins' proposed method of consuming these texts is the fact that other types of rolls are also thought to have been hung on walls so that they could be viewed in their entirety by groups of people. Lynne Mooney, for example, notes that out of sixteen witnesses to "The Kings of England," an anonymous text of propagandistic verse, six occur in rolls; she suggests that two of these rolls show signs of having been nailed up so that the text could be read by passers-by.[29] Some genealogical rolls also seem to make the most sense if they are read completely unfurled, allowing for the lines of connection drawn between individuals to be fully followed to their completion, even

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[28] It should be noted that the instruction that the reader "ouer-se" the *arma Christi* portrayed within the text could mean not merely to look at the roll but also to read it, to peruse it, repeatedly. The term "ouer-se" implies that an engaged, focused and repeated interaction with the text is demanded from the reader, but it does not preclude the re-reading of the text in addition to the re-seeing of the images included therein. See the MED entry for 'ouersen,' particularly definition 1a-d that defines this verb as: "(a) To observe (sth.); look over, survey; (b) to examine (a book, document, letter, etc.); read through, peruse; (c) to scrutinize (sth.); check for defects; inspect; ~ if, check whether (sth. requires repair); (d) to inspect (accounts, expenses, the conduct of a convent, manufacture of wines, etc.) in an official capacity; keep watch over." Definition 5 more explicitly links the thrust of this verb with the act of reading, stating that it can mean "To reexamine (a book), reread." The essential thrust of the signification of this verb, therefore, seems to be found in the demand that readers bring all their attention to bear upon their reading of the text – and then consistently, repeatedly repeat that reading process. The Middle English Dictionary, s.v. "ouersen," http://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/med/.

[29] Linne Mooney, "Lydgate's 'Kings of England' and Another Verse Chronicle of the Kings," *Viator* 20 (1989): 255-89, at 271. Mooney states that "six of the surviving manuscripts . . . are rolls on which the anonymous "Kings" is the principal, or only, text. Two of these, Bodleian Library Add. E. 7 and Hertford County Record Office, show signs of having been nailed up, just as Calot's poem and pedigree were hung in Notre Dame cathedral for political propaganda in 1425." (271). While Mooney seems to interpret what looks like the bottom half of a circle made by a nail or tack of some sort at the top of Bodleian Library Add. E. 7, it is quite difficult to make this judgment with complete certainty since the parchment is torn across width of the roll at this point. One detail which challenges her assumption that this roll was intended to have been hung up to be read, however, is the fact that the poem's text runs onto the back of the roll; this ending portion of the text would have been inaccessible if the roll were hung up for display.

though, at times, their length would have rendered actually reading the roll difficult.  The

roll of Bodleian, MS e. Museo 42 (c. 1467-69) demonstrates this dilemma since the

genealogy of the kings of England contained within it would have originally extended

nearly 40 feet in length when the roll was completely extended; the challenge of

consulting this work in such a format perhaps contributed to why a past owner cut the roll

into pieces so that it could be bound into a codex – a choice that undermines the

continuity of the genealogical lines even while making it easier to consult multiple

sections of the roll as desired.[30]  And, a bit further afield, in southern Italy from the tenth

through thirteenth centuries, there existed *Exultet* rolls in which the text and illuminated

miniatures faced opposite directions so that the priest could more easily read from the roll

while the congregation looked at the images.[31]

Despite these instances of the apparent public display of rolls, I suggest that,

contrary to Robbins' view, the size of the *Symbols of the Passion* rolls seems to argue for

their more private consumption.[32]  Pamela Robinson also questions whether these rolls

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[30] Pamela Robinson draws attention to BL, Cotton Roll xiv. 12 that is more than 52 feet long, stating that although "such rolls are supposed to have been hung up for display, . . . their length would make it impossible for a reader to see the topmost membranes" (44).  She instead suggests that "they were unrolled in sections to be studied privately or used as a teaching aid" (44).  See Pamela Robinson, "The Format of Books: Books, Booklets and Rolls," in *The Cambridge History of the Book in Britain*, Vol. II (1100-1400), ed. Nigel Morgan and Rodney M. Thomson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 41-54.

[31] Don C. Skemer, *Binding Words: Textual Amulets in the Middle Ages* (University Park, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006), 261-2.  See also Myrtilla Avery, *The Exultet Rolls of South Italy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1936) and Guglielmo Cavallo, *Rotoli di Exultet dell'Italia Meridionale* (Bari: Adriatica, 1973).

[32] Mary Rouse and Richard Rouse comment that "there is a relationship between the physical form of an artifact and the function that it is meant to serve; therefore, the physical form of a manuscript is evidence of the purpose for which the manuscript was made" (4).  This statement draws productive attention to the basic idea that, in all likelihood, manuscripts were not produced to make their intended use more difficult.

could ever have been intended for display based upon the basic logistical difficulty that

"the extant rolls are not nearly large enough for their pictures to be seen at a distance."[33]

BL Additional MS 22029 amply illustrates this problem since, at about five inches in

width, its miniatures are generally less than four inches wide and between one and three

inches tall. Other rolls are even narrower, such as Stoneyhurst College MS 64 that

measures only three inches in width. While the small images on these rolls would have

functioned well for a private reader who was able to hold the parchment whilst reading it,

these manuscripts would have challenged the eyesight of anyone attempting to view their

images from even a few feet away. Another seeming benefit of these smaller rolls is their

portability. Unlike the heavier codex manuscript, rolls could be easily tucked away in

pockets or stored for travel, again suggesting that the public display of such rolls might

not have been their primary purpose.[34] While such rolls might have been hung

While there was likely some type of conscious consideration of the use of the manuscript as an object in its planning and creation, it is more difficult to determine precisely what that use might have been. While the manuscript might serve as "evidence of the purpose for which [it] was made," it seems important to note that that purpose is not always self-evident nor often able to be determined with more than speculative certainty. See Mary Rouse and Richard Rouse, *Authentic Witnesses: Approaches to Medieval Texts and Manuscripts* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1991).

[33] Robinson, "The Format of Books," 44.

[34] Small rolls have often been noted for the imagined ease of their portability. Nicholas Bell suggests that music, "such as motets, were often written down on rolls or in unbound *libelli*, two formats which had the advantages of economy and portability, but from the modern perspective the disadvantage of impermanence" (466). See Nicholas Bell, "Music," in *The Cambridge History of the Book in Britain*, Vol. II (1100-1400), ed. Nigel Morgan and Rodney M. Thomson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 463-73. Pamela Robinson also makes the important assertion that, for those texts which do not exclusively occur in rolls, what they "have in common is not that the texts copied lent themselves to the roll format, as genealogical chronicles did, but that the function of a specific copy of a text seems to have dictated the choice of format. Songs, saints' lives, prayers, and statutes were equally copied into codices, but when copied into small rolls they were easy to carry. Portability seems to have been the chief consideration, as with the bishop's roll" (45).

occasionally for the benefit of a community or congregation, their size and scale strongly hint that they were primarily intended for use by a single reader or a small, intimate group of readers who consulted the *Symbols* at close range and in a private reading environment.

Bodleian, Addit. E. 4 further confirms this supposition that the *Symbols* might not have been read whilst displayed upon a wall or at a distance from the reader since the poem is paired with a second, un-illustrated text, the *Orison of the Passion*. The same scribe writes both texts in a rough *textualis semi-quadrata*, and the shared high-grade script of these two works suggests that the *Orison* was not included as an afterthought but was instead originally intended to have followed the *Symbols*. The scribe, however, did not attempt to correct the fact that the final twelve lines of the *Orison* occur on the roll's dorse, apparently because this would not have posed a problem in the reading of that text in this form. If this roll were intended to have been hung up, this format would have made the reading of its texts quite inconvenient since a reader would have had to have had enough access to the roll to flip it over and continue reading the roll's dorse to complete the *Orison*. One final thing to note is that the indulgence from BL Royal 17.A.xxvii cited by Robbins as emphasizing the value of simply seeing the images (as opposed to reading the text or reciting other prayers whilst meditating upon the images) does not, as it turns out, itself occur in the form of a roll; the witness to the *Symbols* in this manuscript has been included within a codex which includes a variety of other non-illuminated Latin and Middle English religious verse. I have no knowledge of interior

pages of a codex being hung up or publicly displayed in any fashion, except for in those

instances in which volumes were placed upon a lectern for general perusal.  I assert,

therefore, that it is more likely that the roll witnesses of the *Symbols of the Passion* were

intended to attract the sight of a private reader or intimate group of readers as opposed to

having been hung up or displayed for a larger audience.[35]

What I do find attractive and insightful in Robbins' suggestion that such rolls

could function as communal objects is his implicit assertion that the material form in

which this text occurred could be visually affecting and might offer hints of how it was

used by its medieval audiences.  While I might not agree that the roll form necessarily

indicates public use, it does seem particularly appropriate that the *Symbols of the Passion*

occur so frequently on rolls since it is a poem focused on the fragments of Christ's body

and the fragmented events of his Passion.  The text is loosely bound together through the

narrative of the Passion, although at times the organization of the *arma Christi* resists a

strict biblically-based chronological rendering of those events, and Christ's body, the

central focus of so many contemporary Passion prayers and meditations, is subsumed by

the objects that covered it, pierced it, and tormented it.  At several points in the poem the

chronological progression of events is particularly challenged: the vernacule begins the

poem, coming before the knife of circumcision; the pelican that symbolically represents

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[35] Skemer notes the similarities between *arma Christi* rolls and amulet rolls, asserting that "while Robbins might have been correct about the liturgical function of certain rolls based exclusively on the *Arma Christi*, he adduced little supporting evidence . . . [and] even if *Arma Christi* rolls were initially intended for ecclesiastical use, they might find their way into lay households for devotional and amuletic use" (261-2). Unlike Skemer, I hesitate to assign any quasi-magical powers to the *arma Christi* rolls, as this specification seems to carry with it the potential to over-simplify the associations of and reactions to religious texts such as the *Symbols of the Passion*.

Christ's bloody sacrifice for mankind in bestiaries is inserted after the knife of circumcision and otherwise has no attachment with the events of the Passion as narrated in the gospels; and the tongs that drew the nails out of Christ's dead hands and feet are followed by Jews spitting into Christ's living face.[36]

The reader seems invited, in the face of the compiled fragments of events and of objects of the Passion, to read the poem and view its images in a discontinuous fashion. As a roll containing this poem was unfurled, a new, self-contained stanza and accompanying illustration would greet the reader. Each image and corresponding stanza would then offer the reader aid in obtaining forgiveness for a particular sin. The "I" of the poem, an "I" which is transferrable to each reader and enables him or her to take on the role of the supplicant while reading through the text, requests that the knife of circumcision, for example, acts as a "socoure whan i schal diee" from the "temptacioun of lecherie."[37] The subsequent *arma Christi* provide their own specific forms of protection, some more narrow in their focus than others: the thirty pieces of silver "vs schilde fro*m* tresun *and* couetyse, / þer-in to die in no wise"; the cloth that covered Christ's eyes protects "me from ueniauns of childhod *and* of ignoraunce"; the rods and scourges with which Christ was beaten help to heal sins "of slouth *and* of idelnes"; and the lance that pierced Christ's side helps correct the reader's "stout prid þer-to, / And

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[36] Bale notes also that "the Jews' spitting, taken from Matthew 26:67, occurs in the bible before the lots and the seamless coat (Matthew 27:35), the scourges (Matthew 27:26), the crown of thorns (Matthew 27:29), the vessel of gall (Matthew 27:34) and the rod and sponge (Matthew 27:48), but in the Arma Christi verses it is Christ's ultimate humiliation, followed only by the image of the cross with three nails and/or Christ's sepulchre" (154).

[37] *Symbols of the Passion*, lines 20, 19.

myn unbuxumnes al-so."[38]  While some readers might have progressed through the text

so that they could pray for forgiveness from all the types of sin recounted in the *Symbols*,

readers might conceivably also have tailored their reading experience based upon those

sins for which they felt they needed the most assistance at a specific moment.

Andrew Taylor suggests that *arma Christi* rolls "seem to function as an aid to

meditation" and that the frequent insertion of images amongst the text caused reading to

slow and become "a sustained exercise in affective piety."[39]  But in addition to its

inserted images, the *Symbols'* material form and narrative structure also appear to

demand a meditative and perhaps discontinuous style of reading.  If a reader only

unrolled one or two images at a time, then his reading experience could very easily have

been slowed down – not only by the fragmentation of the text by these images but also by

the material form of the roll – as he meditated on the *arma Christi* and the accompanying

stanza associated with it.  And the poem's narrative structure does little to propel the

reader through to the poem's end since only a rough outline of a narrative arc exists in the

text.  Christ's crucifixion, for example, is described as follows (and here I'm excerpting

the text from five stanzas to draw out only the narrative sections):

> The nayles throwe fete and handys also, . . .
> The hamyr bothe stern and grete,
> þat droffe þe naylys throw hand and fote, . . .

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[38] Ibid., lines 31-2, 55, 68, 119-20.

[39] Andrew Taylor, "Reading and Privacy in Late Medieval England," in *The Practice and Representation of Reading in England*, ed. James Raven, Helen Small, and Naomi Tadmor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 59.  Although, unlike scrolls, the medieval roll, when unrolled from the beginning, would have necessitated that the reader pass by the beginning of the poem in order to access later sections of the poem.

> The vessel of aysylle and of galle, . . .
> Whan þou thrystyd sore with-alle,
> They gaffe the eysyll with byttyr galle; . . .
> Lord, the spere so scharpe I-grownde,
> þat in thyn herte made a wownde, . . .[40]

These brief narrative markers seem unlikely to have encouraged the reader's continuous

engagement.  They are, at times, repetitive (as when one stanza states that the nails went

through Christ's hands and feet and then the following stanza repeats the statement that

the hammer drove the nails through Christ's hands and feet); and they are additionally

divided from each other by prayers for intersession and images of the *arma Christi*.  The

nails, for example, are separated from the hammer's description by the request, "Lorde,

kepe me owt of synne and woo, / That I haue in myn lyffe doo, / With handys handyld or

on fote goo" and by the drawn image of a hammer.[41]  When facing such a lack of

narrative cohesiveness, it seems quite possible that a reader would have felt little impetus

for reading the *Symbols* as a continuous text and could have instead chosen a section of

the *arma Christi* to read or meditate upon as he or she deemed necessary.

The form of the roll would also have aided in the personalization of such a

reading experience.  While the rolls of the *Symbols* appear to have been too narrow to

have been read from afar, they were also too long for a reader to unfurl in their entirety as

they were being read.  British Library, Additional MS 22029 extends over four feet in

length, necessitating that, in instances of private reading, this roll would have had to have

been perused in segments.  And the fact that the opening stanzas of many rolls,

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[40] *The Symbols of the Passion*, lines 97, 101-2, 105, 109-10, 115-6.

[41] Ibid., lines 98-100.

Additional MS 22029 included, often appear to be more worn than subsequent sections

could provide a hint as to how – and how often – such manuscripts were used.  If the

manuscripts were intended to have been unrolled completely during the reading process,

one would expect the wearing pattern to be fairly consistent throughout the manuscript;

instead the worn sections often occur much more frequently near the beginnings of rolls,

a sign that perhaps the opening stanzas or images were referenced more often than the

later portions of a text.

Much criticism focuses on how rolls might have functioned and signified as

communal objects, and it has been argued that one of the benefits of the roll format is its

integrity as a whole document.  Anthony Bale comments that "the advantage of the roll

format in 'official' settings (guild records, monastic mortuary rolls, armorial registers,

alchemical texts, genealogies) is that sheets cannot be removed and so the record's

integrity is absolute," and he goes on to assert that  "the roll is usually displayed in order

to be read, and must be displayed as a whole."[42]  But this display of integrity and

wholeness seems to lose prominence if a roll were in the hands of the private reader.  It

would be distinctly more cumbersome to unroll the entirety of a four foot roll while

reading it than to unroll shorter segments as required – and, indeed, this is how such rolls

are read today by scholars examining them in their respective archives. Of course,

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[42] Bale, 154.  This statement suggests that a perceived relationship with legal records might have provided the *Symbols of the Passion* with a hint of added authority, linking this religious text subtly with official, legal documents in a fashion similar to the *Charters of Christ*.  But Pamela Robinson cautions against too closely associating literary rolls with their legal cousins, stating that "it may be that the roll imbued copies of the statues with a 'quasi-public authority', since the roll was associated in England with royal record keeping, but that can only have been incidental" (45).

consulting a roll in such a manner, unfurling it a section at a time, would not have precluded the reader from reading the poem through to its end.  But the continuous consumption of this text should not be assumed and could even be thought of working against the poem's textual and visual representations of specific fragmented scenes of Christ's Passion and its emphasis on how each scene could individually work to benefit the reader through prayer.

Finally, it is important to note that the *arma Christi* were also perceived as dwelling somewhere between the status of the purely representational and the reality of the crucifixion, and as such, they appear to have been thought of as possessing qualities similar to relics in their ability to protect readers or viewers.  Flora Lewis asserts that "the image of the *arma Christi* shared in the power of the actual relics, expressed in promises of indulgence and protection."[43]  Lacking relics, in other words, of Christ's body, the images of his *arma Christi* filled this void for devout audiences, and the indulgence attached to BL Royal 17.A.xxvii demonstrates the potentially protective power associated with the *arma Christi* included within the *Symbols*.  This indulgence offers general forgiveness to the reader / viewer, stating that "wat man þis armes ouer-se, / For his sinnus sori and schereuen be," – while also offering more specific types of protection based upon an individual's situation.[44]  Pregnant women in labor, for example, receive

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[43] Flora Lewis, "The Wound in Christ's side and the Instruments of the Passion: Gendered Experience and Response," in *Women and the Book: Assessing the Visual Evidence*, ed. Lesley Smith and Jane H. M. Taylor (London: The British Library and University of Toronto Press, 1996), 208.

[44] *Symbols of the Passion*, lines 203-4.

special comfort, "meke and mild" upon seeing the vernacle.  As laboring women would not, in all probability, engage in reading the entire text at that moment, one can imagine that a roll could have been held up for the woman to gaze at during the birthing process, and she would have gained this comfort by viewing just a section of the text or a particular image.

Anthony Bale points out that other *arma Christi* poems were also used in a similarly amuletic fashion, a point most vividly emphasized by the late fifteenth-century vellum roll, London, Wellcome Historical Medical Library, MS 632.  This roll contains *arma Christi* images and was "heavily used as a birth girdle ('sengter'), wrapped around a woman's body during pregnancy and labor."[45]  Bale suggests that the usage of Wellcome MS 632 "takes to a logical extreme the physical involvement, the corporeal identification, medieval worshippers often sought in their reading," and that "whilst the girdle has a spiritual use, its materiality and luxury was no doubt its attraction, and thus the girdle's prayers fuse spiritual and material acquisitiveness."[46]  The prevalence of the roll form for the *Symbols of the Passion*, then, could also demonstrate, or at the very least cater to, an audience that valued a work's textual content as well as its material form. And because the text's materiality seems to have formed an active and important part of the reader's devotional engagement with the poem, the roll form might have been thought to offer spiritual benefit or protection even if only a portion of the poem was read, seen, or held.

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[45] Bale, 159.

[46] Ibid., 159.

Although this section has primarily considered those witnesses to the *Symbols* that

survive in rolls, it should be briefly noted that nine witnesses are also found in codices,

typically grouped with other devotional works in English and, at times, Latin, and located

primarily in smaller manuscripts.  The witnesses to the *Symbols* that occur in codices are

written out in single columns and also include illustrations (often illuminated) of the

*arma Christi* that accompany virtually every verse of the poem – a *mise-en-page* that

strongly resembles that employed for those witnesses that occur in rolls [See Figures 3, 4,

and 5].  And of the nine witnesses surviving in codices, the majority seems – like the rolls

– to have been intended for private use.[47]  While all the codices containing the *Symbols*

are of moderate size and therefore portable, MS Douce 1 provides a striking example of

how, just as with rolls, the material object of the *Symbols* could have functioned as a

crucial element in shaping the reception of this text.  MS Douce 1 is a tiny manuscript

from the mid-fifteenth century, measuring only 3 inches by 2 3/8 inches, and its miniature

size necessitates that the *Symbols* spans from f. 54v – f. 69v, leaving room for roughly

one stanza per page.[48]  The division of this text over sixteen folios could have promoted

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[47] The *Symbols of the Passion* survives in the following manuscript codices: CUL MS Ii.6.43 (ff. 103r-115v); Harvard University, Houghton Library, MS Typ 193 (ff. 183r-190v); BL Royal MS 17.A.xxvii (ff. 72v-81r); Longleat House MS 30 (ff. 8r-20r); Bodleian Library, MS Douce 1 (ff. 54v-69v); Oxford, Queen's College, MS 207 (ff. 165v-174r); Princeton, Firestone Library, MS Taylor 17 (ff. 2r-8r); Huntington Library, MS HM 142 (1r-9r).  Rossell Hope Robbins suggests that four codices containing witnesses to the *Symbols* (CUL Ii.6.43, BL Royal 17.A.xxvii, Longleat 30, and Douce 1 (Bodleian 21575)) - in addition to Lambeth 559 and Bodleain 27691 – are manuscripts produced for readers who "felt the greater need for personal and intimate prayers expressed in the mother tongue," and as such they fall into the category of "manuals of Latin and English devotions and prayers and meditations, in prose and verse" (466).  See Rossell Hope Robbins, "Private Prayers in Middle English Verse."

[48] The witness of the *Symbols* found in Douce 1 has been previously edited by John C. Hirsh; for the poem's text and for a description of MS Douce 1, see John C. Hirsh, "Two English Devotional Poems of the Fifteenth Century," *Notes and Queries* n.s. 15.1 (Jan., 1968): 4-11.

the ease with which a reader could have chosen to focus on just a stanza or two at a time as he read.[49]  In general, regardless of whether the *Symbols* was included on a roll or in a codex, the basic layout of the text remains the same in both forms, with the images of the *arma Christi* dividing the text into uneven stanzaic sections and providing the reader with clear visual markers that he or she could have used to guide his choice of what to read at any given time.

The *Symbols*, as a poem deeply invested in both fragmentation and physicality during its representation of the events of the Passion, seems to welcome its audience to read its words, view its images, or attend to the materiality of the text in a variety of ways.  The text and images could be seen, read, and meditated upon, while the object of the text could be held and touched.  The fact that this text has survived in more rolls by far than any other vernacular devotional text from the fourteenth or fifteenth century seems particularly suggestive of the poem's status as a personal devotional object – one that could operate as if a relic, enabling readers to meditate on the fragmented body of Christ as a way of accessing his suffering during his Passion.  While saints' bodies might have actually been partitioned and the *arma Christi* portray Christ in parts in works of art, sculpture, and literature, it is notable that these bodily fragments (and narrative fragments, as found in the *Symbols*) were not considered to be subordinate to the entire body or text but instead appear to have been valued as an avenue by which one could

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[49] See the manuscript description found in *A Summary Catalogue of Western Manuscripts in the Bodleian Library at Oxford*, IV (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1897), 489.

access the intercessory power of the unified body or text.[50]  In the following section, I

suggest that late-medieval devotional readers could find the fragmented images of the

*arma Christi* and discontinuous narratives of Christ's Passion just as emotively powerful

and spiritually effective as pictures of the un-fragmented, unified body of Christ and

continuous narratives.  Bodies were fragmented and texts were read selectively and in

parts, I argue, precisely because focusing on these pieces of the whole was seen to be an

efficacious way to stir the reader's devotional fervor – even without a continuous

narrative to bind them all together.


*Discontinuous and Continuous Reading Practices*

As the *Symbols* demonstrates, the text's format and its subject matter could focus

the reader's attention on how the poem and Christ's body were similarly able to be

partitioned and divided into pieces, thereby seeming to encourage the discontinuous

consumption of both the poem's stanzas and Christ's fragmented body.  This section

examines several works that include instructions for readers, often in prologues or

epilogues, which direct them to progress continuously through a text or free them to

meander through it, alighting upon and returning to those sections which attract their

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[50] Rosemary Woolf, in her foundational study of the Middle English lyric, writes that the "emblematic treatment of the Passion [evinced by the *arma Christi*] has not the emotive force of continuous narrative: these instruments, isolated from the historical scene, though they might demand the honour of a pater noster or be reminders of guilt, could hardly stir to a responding love."  I disagree with this statement and suggest that readers could, in fact, be stirred to a "responding love" by engaging with a text discontinuously.  The part seems to have been as affecting as the whole for many late-medieval readers. Rosemary Woolf, *English Religious Lyric in the Middle Ages* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968), 209.

interest most strongly.[51]  After providing an overview of the reading practices espoused

by several major devotional treatises, I turn to the work of Margery Kempe and suggest

that she employs repetition and thematic threads as the main organizational elements of

her narrative to encourage readers to engage with her text in an affective and

discontinuous manner.  Just as Kempe can quickly be brought to tears by a glance at a

mother holding her child, so too would reading discontinuously promote the frequent

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[51] While this section examines only devotional texts, others have noted the divide between continuous and discontinuous reading practice in other genres.  Judith Ferster, for example, has touched upon Chaucer's descriptions of readers who choose not to read texts continuously.  Ferster comments that "Chaucer's works are full of descriptions of the audience's power to use literary works as it will. . . . Troilus is a prime example of a reader who imposes his will on a text.  In Book II, he reads Criseyde's letter selectively, suppressing signs of her hesitation and emphasizing her willingness to love him" (11).  Judith Ferster, *Chaucer on Interpretation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

   In "Miscellaneity and Vernacularity," Ralph Hanna also comments that "in contrast to Latinate culture, fourteenth- and fifteenth-century vernacular book production tends to imitate prominent forms of literary production.  For in the contemporary literary scene, which lacked any extended tradition (prose spiritual literature had perhaps the most lengthy history, but only stretching back to the 1190s), the most typical production is the discontinuous poem.  Most obviously, the greatest work of the period – and the only one still securely canonical – Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, takes this form, being a group of stories joined by repeated thematic concerns" (49).  Hanna's observation fascinatingly suggests that the discontinuity found in medieval manuscripts, the congruence of texts from a variety of genres, mirrors some of the most prominent narrative trends found in works by major medieval writers.  The comfort with readers jumping around within a text might also be a reflection of this interest in miscellaniety – or vice versa.  See Ralph Hanna, "Miscellaneity and Vernacularity," *The Whole Book*, ed. Stephen G. Nichols and Siegfried Wenzel (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996), 37-51.

   A discontinuous style of reading also resonates suggestively with late-medieval practices of *ordinatio* and *compilatio*.  As M. B. Parkes specifies that the practice of *compilatio* resulted from "the drive to make inherited material available in a condensed and more convenient form" and led thirteenth-century scholars to apply new "thought and industry" to their acts of compilation (127).  Parkes continues that "the compiler adds no matter of his own  by way of exposition (unlike the commentator) but compared with the scribe he is free to rearrange (*mutando*)," thereby imposing "a new *ordinatio* on the materials he extracted from others" (128).  In M. B. Parkes, "The Influence of the Concepts of *Ordinatio* and *Compilatio* on the Development of the Book," in *Medieval Learning and Literature*, ed. J. J. G. Alexander and M. T. Gibson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), 115-41.  While the tendency to compile fragments of other texts to create a new "whole" text would seem to include a type of selective, discontinuous approach to reading, the type of discontinuous reading that I discuss aspires primarily to incite affective fervor in a reader of a *single* text.  Reading discontinuously, I argue, would allow readers to excerpt with an eye toward selecting those passages that might affectively influence themselves most strongly – as if they were engaging in *compilatio* – but these selected passages were not often likely to have been written down and did not have to be re-organized in a way that would have made sense to other readers.  See also Janet Coleman, *Medieval Readers and Writers, 1350-1400* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1981), esp. 197-202.

return to texts or scenes of Christ's Passion that most effectively incite compassion and pity. Readers can choose to return repeatedly to the depiction of Christ being flogged or having his body stretched so that it fits on the cross, essentially breaking down the narrative into brief flashes of action and scenes of torment. I do not intend to construct an argument for how the physical characteristics of the extant manuscript witness of a text might have contributed to how readers approached it. Instead I examine how the basic commonplaces of manuscript layout and decoration, i.e., the standard inclusion of chapter headings, rubrication, and paraphs, might have influenced the narrative structure of late-medieval devotional works since they enabled readers to move quickly and easily from section to section within a text.

Both discontinuous and continuous reading practices seem to have been common for medieval readers. Cambridge University Library MS Kk.1.6, a fifteenth-century manuscript containing primarily devotional verse, includes a text entitled "Meditacyons vpon the vii dayes of the woke" that begins with a prologue explicitly instructing its readers in how to approach the text. This collection of devotional material is attributed to "Alyanore Hull" who drew "out of Frensche all this before wreten in this lytyll booke," and her treatment of the "Meditacyons" appears to be a unique compilation of texts by a variety of authors, the primary ones being "Seynt Austyn ... Seynt Ancelm ... [and] Seynt

Barnard."[52]  The narrator's instructions are worth quoting at length; the text, it is

declared, is intended:

> To enflawme the hert & the corage of hem þat redyn it in the love of god
> & for to make a man to know hymself / Thei be not to be red in noyse but
> in quyete / not lyghtly & corantly but lytell & lytell in gret abydyng &
> with grete entent of mynd / Ner þo þat redyn this shode not set ther
> ententes for to rede hem all oun at onys / But to take at onys as moch as
> thei felyn þat a vaylyth hem with the helpe of god for to encrese in hem
> gode will & devocyoun for to pray / ner it nedyth allweys to be gyn at
> euery tyme at the begynnyng herof but þer as hym best lykyth & hath
> most devocyoun to rede & for þat cause thei ben demed by captell lettres
> þat þei may begyn wher them lust & leve when þem lust By cause the
> redyng shold not turne hem to enoye for to long redyng But for the reders
> shold gadre & kepe tho thinges wherfor þei ware made / þat is Pyte of hert
> & will to love god & for to knowe him self.[53]

A picture of how one might read this text, under ideal circumstances, emerges from the

passage.  The reader should withdraw from others, away from "noyse," and devote

sustained attention (a "grete entent of mynd") to reading short passages.  Warning against

reading too much at once because this can "turne hem to enoye," the narrator requests

that the reader instead pick and choose passages of the text to which he or she is most

drawn ("as hym best lykyth & hath most devocyoun to rede").  As seen in Lydgate's

poem, the decorative schema again seems positioned as a primary method by which the

reader can easily identify transitions and important moments in the text.  Capital letters

are singled out in this instance as the signs by which the readers may decide to "begyn

wher them lust & leve when þem lust."

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[52] CUL Kk.1.6, f. 148r.  See also the unpublished edition of this work: *Dame Eleanor Hull's Meditacyons Vpon the VII Dayes of the Woke: The First Edition of the Middle English Translation in Cambridge University Library MS. Kk.i.6*, ed. by Shelia H. Conard (Dissertation: University of Cincinnati, 1995), 1.

[53] CUL Kk.1.6, f. 148r.

This passage is not unique to this text but instead derives from Anselm of

Canterbury's late-eleventh-century Latin text, *Prayers and Meditations*, a section of

which is also translated as part of this work.  Derivations of these instructions were

incorporated into many other textual situations and translated into diverse languages in

the following centuries.[54]  The original passage reads:

> The prayers and meditations written below, since they are intended to
> excite the reader's mind to the love or fear of God and are uttered in
> conversation with him, are not to be read where there is noise but in quiet,
> nor superficially and at speed but slowly, with intense and profound
> meditation.  Nor is a reader to think to read any of them all the way
> through, but only as much as, with God's help, will do to kindle a longing
> for prayer, or as much as is satisfying.  Nor need anyone always begin at
> the beginning but wherever suits best.  For this reason, the prayers are
> subdivided into paragraphs, so that one may begin or end where one
> chooses, in case too many words or frequent repetition of the same section
> should lead to boredom.  Let the reader take from them instead what they
> were meant to provide, the warmth of devotion.[55]

The later fifteenth-century version differs from the Latin original in two notable ways.  It

specifies that capital letters, not paragraphs (or paraph markings), are to be the guiding

decorative cue for the reader who wishes to navigate through the text, and the point of

reading the respective texts is not to attain "the warmth of devotion" but instead for the

reader to acquire "Pyte of hert & will to love god & for to knowe him self."[56]  Aside

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[54] See *The Idea of the Vernacular*, eds. Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, Nicholas Watson, Andrew Taylor, and Ruth Evans (University Park, Penn.: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999), 212.

[55] Qtd. in *The Idea of the Vernacular*, 212-13.

[56] This emphasis on the reader learning about and improving himself through the act of reading is echoed in short theological tract found in BL MS Harley 2371.  The author gives advice on several topics, of which reading is one, and comments that "þene thee mych to redinge, take to thee meditacion of scripture, besy thee in the lawe of god, haue a custumable vse in diuine book*es*, redinge what thou shall cheese; redinge tellith what thou shuldist drede; reding tellith whider thou goost; In reding witt and vndirstondinge

from these small differences, however, both passages emphasize the benefits of discontinuously reading a text and of only reading as much at a time "as is satisfying."

The question then becomes – why did Alyanore Hull choose to include this prologue alongside her specific textual translations?  While these instructions might make sense in their original Anselmian context, as the preface to a collection of "private, non-liturgical prayers," they seem counterproductive to the basic structure of the "Meditacyons vpon the vii dayes of the woke."  The entire basis of this work and others like it, such as the *Hours of the Cross* or Nicholas Love's *Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ*, is to guide readers through meditations on the Passion which unfold in a linear, chronological fashion over the course of a day or week.  And yet in this instance, the narrator opens the door for readers to reject such strict chronology in their own reading practices; they do not always have to begin at the beginning when reading the text.  Being able to skip around in the text, jumping from capital letter to capital letter, highlights the tension that could emerge between a text's content and manuscript layout – tension that seems, in this instance, to have been embraced.  That even such a seemingly chronologically-structured text could recommend a more discontinuous style of textual consumption implies the prevalence of this reading method.  And the instruction that the reader should return as desired to the most devotionally powerful moments suggests a reading experience guided by the search for those scenes which inspire the most intense

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encrecith. thou shalt much profite in redinge yf thou ar as thou redist" (f. 143r, the transcription is mine, as is the punctuation).  This passage emphasizes the reader's transformation into what he reads – "yf thou ar as thou redist" you will gain much profit.  The Anselmian passage, however, asserts a more general call that the reader should come to know himself in the course of his meditations.

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emotional reaction – a reading experience punctuated by short bursts of devotional fervor rather than a more steady engagement with a text.

The invitation to audiences to read discontinuously, to jump around in a text or a book as devotion moves them, can be found in other instances as well. Following in the Anselmian tradition, *A Talking of the Love of God* instructs that it should be read "esylich and softe. So as men may mest in Inward felyng. and deplich thenkyng. savour fynden. and that not beo dene. But biginnen and leten in what paas so men seoth. that may for the tyme yiven mest lykynge."[57] The *Pseudo-Augustinian Soliloquies* also reference Anselm's prologue, directing that "ne the [redere] schalle not entende that he rede eche of hem alle over, but as muche as he may or kan goostly feele; or so muche that he may througli Goddes grace and helpe avayle, and inflawme his affeccions to prayer or to swete meditacions; or els as moche as for the tyme may be delyte hym to stere his soule to the love of God."[58] And again this work emphasizes the importance of decoration in directing a reader through the text, asserting that "ne allwey it is not nede to begynne at the begynnyng, but where it plesith hym best. And therfor every chapeter is distincte wyth paraphes, that where it lyketh hym he may begynne and also ende, ne lest often repeticion of one thing schulde make hevenesse."[59] The appearance of the text on the page gains added importance in this manner of reading, as the location of a paraph mark or the inclusion of a capital could powerfully direct the reader's attention to certain

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[57] "*A Talking of the Love of God*: Prologue," in *The Idea of the Vernacular*, 223.

[58] "*Pseudo-Augustinian Soliloquies*: Prologue and Digression," in *The Idea of the Vernacular*, 225.

[59] Ibid., 225.

passages, highlighting their importance.[60] *Handlyng Synne* also includes the provocative

statement that "Whedyr outys thou wylt opone the boke, / Thou shalt fynde begynnyng

on to loke. / Oueral ys begynnyng – oueral ys ende, / Hou that thou wylt turne hyt or

wende."[61]  The ending or beginning of a work is presented as being entirely dependent on

the reader's interaction with the text, upending any sense that the work aspires to present

a narrative progression that must be followed.  The work's beginning is determined by

how the text is *used* – instead of being an authorially-predetermined point in the

narrative.[62]

At times, this lack of chronological progression through a narrative appears to

have been built into the structure of a work, such as can be seen in the *Symbols of the

Passion* and in the *Meditations on the Life and Passion of Christ*, discussed in Chapter 1.

The *Symbols*, as I have argued, has only a modicum of narrative structure binding its

fragmented images and descriptions of the *arma Christi* together, and, at times, the order

in which the objects pertaining to Christ's Passion are presented subverts the

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[60] Illuminated capitals, in general, occur more frequently at chapter or section headings or important transitions within a text; paraph marks or capitals decorated with just a simple stroke of red or blue, in contrast, are more frequent and tend to indicate more subtle shifts of topics within a chapter or section.

[61] Robert of Brunne, *Handlyng Synne*, ed. Frederick J. Furnivall, EETS, o.s. 119 (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., 1901), lines 121-4.

[62] Vincent Gillespie points to a passage from the *Orchard of Sion* that instructs readers to "chese if ȝe wole of xxxv aleyes where ȝe wolen walke, þat is to seye, of xxxv chapitres, o tyme in oon, anoþir tyme in anoþir," and he asserts that this passages demonstrates that "an old text is being read in a new way."  He goes on to state that "although the vast majority of spiritual miscellanies continued to be governed by an apparently inscrutable internal logic, some attempts were being made to facilitate and accommodate the different usages and needs of the changing readership of such texts in the fifteenth century.  There may not always have been a multiplication of many books but there does seem to have been a multiplication of the ways of reading those that they had."  See Vincent Gillespie, "*Lukynge in haly bukes*: *Lectio* in some Late Medieval Spiritual Miscellanies," *Spätmittelalterliche Geistliche Literatur in Der Nationalsprache*, Band 2, 106 (1984): 1-27, at 26-27.

chronological progression of that event.  In the *Meditations*, the repeated returns to

scenes of Christ's Passion cause his suffering to be inserted into the narrative at multiple

points and thereby confuse the narrative's progression.  Even had readers wished to

proceed straight through this text, their reading experience would have been punctuated

by frequent digressions and narrative eruptions of scenes from the Passion, as if

simulating the reading experience of one who read a passage here and a passage there of

other, more chronologically-organized works.[63]

But of course this discontinuous or fragmented style of reading was not the only

way in which meditational texts were read.  Some works push against this Anselmian

tradition, asking that their text be read continuously, from front to back, or that it be read

in its entirety without explicitly directing the reader to progress through the narrative in

any order.[64]  Some narratives of the Passion, such as the translation of the Pseudo-

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[63] Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* provides an example of a literary text that appears to embrace a
discontinuous style of reading.  In the "Miller's Prologue," Chaucer famously suggests that readers "turne
over the leef and chese another tale" if they disagree with the content of the one they were perusing at that
time (3177).  The reader is free to consult the *Canterbury Tales* in a discontinuous manner, suggesting that
Chaucer might not have expected his tales to have always been read in order.  And it is worth noting that
Chaucer does not appear to have found this manner of reading frustrating but instead liberating, as it
enables him to dwell at length on bawdy, non-religious subject matter while also transferring the blame to
the reader if he or she finds a tale offensive – it is the audience's fault for reading a tale not Chaucer's fault
for writing it.  Chaucer asserts that he has written plenty of stories that "toucheth gentillesse, / And eek
moralitee and hoolynesse," and he therefore relieves himself of responsibility if a reader consults the
bawdier tales, boldly instructing his audience to "blameth nat me if that ye chese amys" (3179-80, 3181).
Geoffrey Chaucer, "The Miller's Prologue," in *The Riverside Chaucer,* 3rd edition, ed. Larry D. Benson
(Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1987).

[64] The *Cloud of Unknowing*, for example, beseeches its readers "bi þe autorite of charite, þat 3if any soche
schal rede it, write it, or speke it, or ell*es* here it be red or spokin, þat þou charge hem, as I do þee, for to
take hem tyme to rede it, speke it, write it, or here it, al ouer.  For p*ar*aue*n*ture þ*er* is som mater þ*er*-in, in
þe begi*n*nyng or in þe middel, þe whiche is hanging & not fully declared þ*er* it stondeþ; & 3if it be not þer,
it is sone after, or ell*es* in þe ende.  Wherefore, 3if a man saw o mater & not anoþ*er*, p*ar*auenture he mi3t
li3tly be led into erro*ur*" (2).  See *The Cloud of Unknowing and The Book of Privy Counseling*, ed. Phyllis
Hodgson, EETS o.s. 218 (London: Oxford University Press, 1944).

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Bonaventuran *Meditationes vitae Christi* by Nicholas Love, titled *The Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ*, contain built-in time frames that seem intended to influence when and how a reader would experience the narrative arc of Christ's crucifixion. Marlene Hennessy describes such works as encouraging "serial meditation" based upon the structure of the mass, the days of the week, or the liturgical hours.[65] Love's *Mirror*, for example, grafts the narrative of Jesus' life onto the days of the week; his translation of the original Latin prologue emphasizes the importance of this organization, asking that "for as mich as þis boke is dyuydet & departet in vij parties, after vij dayes of þe wike, euery day on partie or sume þerof to be had in contemplacion of hem þat hauen þerto desire & deuocion; þerfore at þe Moneday ... bygynneþ þis gostly werke."[66] Alternately readers could adapt their reading schedule to the liturgical year "fro þe bigynnyng in to þe Natiuite of oure lorde Jesu, & þere of after in þat holy feste of Cristenmesse, & so forþ of oþer matires as holy chirch makeþ mynde."[67] Directions such as these seem to offer a flexible meditative schedule to readers while still encouraging them to progress through the text in an orderly and continuous fashion. Denise Despres suggests that part of the power of the directed reading style found in the Latin original of the *Meditationes* was that the "biblical narrative of Christ's life [was integrated] with the penitent's," enabling

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[65] Marlene Villalobos Hennessy, *Morbid Devotions: Reading the Passion of Christ in a Late Medieval Miscellany, London, British Library, Additional MS 37049* (Dissertation: Columbia University, 2001), 278.

[66] Nicholas Love, *The Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ: A Reading Text*, ed. Michael G. Sargent (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2004), 13. Hennessy comments that "dozens of Middle English devotional texts and poems used the liturgy as an organizing principle and were meant to be read serially" while others chose to structure their texts "according to the primer pattern of the liturgical hours" (278).

[67] Love, *Mirror*, 13.

the reader to participate, through meditation, "vicariously in Christian history, achieving a type of *imitatio*."[68]  Through orderly meditation, then, the reader supposedly can engage more fully in the meditative work of imitating the life and Passion of Christ.

And yet, perhaps in response to the variety of reading styles of his day, Love includes at the end of his text a seeming refutation of the pseudo-Bonaventuran instruction to progress through the text in an essentially orderly fashion.  Love admits that he has altered the text's original Latin structure, stating that "it is here þus writen in english tonge lengir in many parties & in oþere manere þan is þe latyne of Bonauenture."[69]  The changes that he has made, then, appear to open the door for readers to make their own deviations from the Latin original, and Love comments that, due to his alterations, "it semeþ not conuenient to folowe þe processe þerof by þe dayes of þe wike after þe entent of þe forseide Bonauentur, for it were to tediouse as me þinkeþ."[70]  Instead the reader ("every deuout creature þat loueþ to rede or [to] here þis boke") is encouraged to "take þe partes þerof as it semeþ moste confortable & stiryng to his deuocion, sumtyme one & symtyme an oþere."[71]  These instructions to the reader occur at the end of the text, after – one imagines – he or she has already progressed through the work's entirety as the prologue instructs.  Yet, having arrived at the end, the reader is then freed to alight on those passages which most effectively incite a devotional response in future

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[68] Denise Despres, *Ghostly Sights: Visual Meditation in Late-Medieval Literature* (Norman, OK: Pilgrim Books, 1989): 47, 48.

[69] Love, *Mirror*, 220.

[70] Ibid., 220.

[71] Ibid., 220.

readings of the text.  Love seems to be trying to accommodate both styles of reading in his work, nodding toward the value of reading a text in its entirety while also acknowledging that chronological reading habits might lack, at times, the affective power and immediacy to invoke a powerful devotional response in an audience.

Julian of Norwich's texts, *A Vision Showed to a Devout Woman* and its expansion known as *A Revelation of Love*, likewise unfold in a generally structured, continuous manner.  Her *Vision* operates within a chronological framework (Julian becomes ill, experiences a vision of Christ's Passion, and receives divine instruction before her recovery) and employs basic organizational cues that overtly guide the reader through her text.  Her short text emphasizes the chronological progression of her narrative with the frequent repetition of the phrase "and after this," indicating a linear chain of events that unfolds as her book progresses.[72]  Julian regularly returns to the list as a common structuring device for the presentation of her revelations.  This tendency shows itself when she recounts that she desired "thre graces be the gifte of God" and is shown "thre degrees of blisse."[73]  And her lists can increase in size, as when she states that in her first showing she "sawe sex thinges in mine understandinge," or they can be shortened into a simple binary, as when she receives the understanding of her visions in "twa parties" or in "twa manerse."[74]  Yet the narrative also seems to contain a hint of repetitive return

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[72] Julian of Norwich, "A Vision Showed to a Devout Woman," in *The Writings of Julian of Norwich*, ed. Nicholas Watson and Jacqueline Jenkins (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006), 77.

[73] Julian of Norwich, "Vision," 63, 79.

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when she goes back to the same image of the suffering Christ in order to deepen her comprehension of the spiritual meaning behind her vision.  The narrative structure of the two versions of her work suggests the fecundity of both structured narrative progression and of repetitive meditation which can engage her and her reader in an extensive and thorough exploration of the spiritual meaning behind the physical visions that she experienced.

One manuscript of the long version of Julian's *Revelation* has an *explicit* which firmly directs readers to consume her text in its entirety as opposed to focusing on certain, specific passages.  British Library Sloane 2499 (c. 1650) is generally accepted as a copy of a fifteenth-century witness to the work that has not survived and includes an *explicit* not found in the other extant manuscripts.[75]  In this final passage, either Julian or the scribe warns: "take not on thing after thy affection and liking and leve another, for that is the condition of an heretique.  But take everything with other."[76]  This statement

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[74] Ibid., 71, 93, 97.  Julian numbers several other aspects of her revelations, such as the "foure maner of dredes" (117) and the "twa maners of sekenes" that men have (115).  The longer version of her text continues to structure her vision using similar temporal and structural cues.  See, for example, her presentation of the interaction between the lord and servant in the fifty-first chapter (273-289).

[75] See Watson and Jenkins, "Introduction," *The Writings of Julian of Norwich*, 11.

[76] See the textual notes to Chapter 86 of the *Revelation* in Watson and Jenkins, *The Writings*, 415.  In the "Introduction," Watson and Jenkins comment that the headings and rubric of this passage "are so pertinent that they seem likely to originate from Julian's immediate circle."

Janet Coleman also rightly highlights the potential threat perceived by orthodox authorities concerning how laymen might interpret the texts (especially religious) that they read.  Coleman writes that "throughout the fifteenth century, ecclesiastical authorities . . . became increasingly obsessed with the dangers of vernacular literature when put in the wrong hands" (211).  The danger of encouraging heterodox methods of reading seems to be a particular concern in this epilogue, as any type of discontinuous reading might lead to a mis-interpretation of the text.  But in light of the prevalence of encouragements to read discontinuously (even at the end of the *Mirror of the Blessed Life of Christ*, an Arundel-approved text), it seems that the piece-meal consumption of a text was not considered, in and of itself, a heterodox way to

suggests that, even if Julian herself might not have originally intend her work to be read in this fashion, later readers advocated that her text be read in its entirety, as a cohesive unit.  While this instruction does not place any overt restrictions on whether the text should be read in the order in which it is recorded in the manuscript, it seems safe to assume that such a style of reading was being advanced, especially in light of the generally chronological progression of the text.  The rubrication and chapter headings are clearly established in the Sloane manuscript, however, so that once a reader did read the work in its entirety he or she could easily maneuver around the text while working to understand a passage in light of earlier or later sections of the text.

The Book of Margery Kempe, however, aligns itself strongly with those texts that defy a chronological progression within their narrated events.[77]  At the moment when the priest is recopying Kempe's narrative so that it might be more widely read, he makes explicit that "thys boke is not wretyn in ordyr, every thyng aftyr other as it wer don, but lych as the mater cam to the creatur in mend whan it schuld be wretyn, for it was so long er it was wretyn that sche had forgetyn the tyme and the ordyr whan thyngys befellyn."[78]

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read.  Janet Coleman, *Medieval Readers and Writers, 1350-1400* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1981).

[77] There are hints, too, that certain styles of reading could be promoted within certain reading communities, such as those that might be found in a monastery.  Nicholas Love and Margery Kempe, for example, both share connections with Mount Grace priory – a community about which David Lawton suggests that "there is evidence that many of its members practiced an extreme form of devotion to the body of Christ and the affective cult of the Passion" (112).  If the priory fostered a specific form of devotional practice amongst its members, it seems reasonable that certain styles of reading, such as Love's belated support of discontinuous reading, might have been shared as well.  David Lawton, "Voice, Authority, and Blasphemy in The Book of Margery Kempe," in *Margery Kempe: A Book of Essays*, ed. Sandra J. McEntire (New York: Garland Publishing, 1992), 93-115.

[78] Margery Kempe, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, ed. Barry Windeatt (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2004), 49.

The narrative's lack of chronological clarity is explained as being the result of time's passage; Kempe has simply forgotten the exact order in which things occurred because she relates events from decades ago.  This explanation for the chronological inconsistency of the narrative has been interpreted by some as an *apologia*.  Wendy Harding, for example, reads this comment from the priest as an outburst of his "consternation at the task of rendering an oral account into writing" and as "a trace of the confrontation between the clerk's linear, historical orientation with its insistence on the precise recording of dates."[79]  But I would suggest that the lack of chronological coherence found in the *Book of Margery Kempe* instead brings to mind the Anselmian directions from the prologue of the "Meditacyons vpon the vii dayes of the woke" which instruct readers that they can and should maneuver around the text as their devotional needs direct them.  Narrative chronology gives way to a style of remembrance and reading that focuses on the devotional highlights.

*The Book of Margery Kempe* is, at its root, a book about the creation of a book. Throughout the text, not only is its composition discussed in relative depth (and the trials that Kempe underwent in order to bring it into existence), but much of the narrative describes Kempe's struggle to communicate the truth of her experiences to others and to render her revelations into language.  Because of the frequent anxiety she expresses concerning whether she can – and how she might better be able to – express the meaning behind her tears and visions, it seems plausible that the discontinuous telling of her

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[79] Wendy Harding, "Body into Text: The Book of Margery Kempe," in *Feminist Approaches to the Body in Medieval Literature*, ed. Linda Lomperis and Sarah Stanbury (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993), 171.

narrative betrays some level of conscious planning and is not just an unintended result of

Kempe's wandering memory.[80] During her narrative, she describes herself as an

effective storyteller, as someone who entertains others and stirs their emotions. On her

return voyage to England from Jerusalem and Rome, for example, she finds herself

penniless and turns to storytelling to earn some extra money. She "happyd to meten wyth

other pilgrimys, whech yovyn hir iii halfpenys, in-as-meche as sche had in comownyng

telde hem good talys."[81] Later on, while she is imprisoned awaiting her trial for being a

suspected Lollard, she tells tales from the window of her room of confinement,

recounting how she spent time "lokyng owt at a wyndown, tellyng many good talys to

hem that wolde heryn hir, in-so-meche that women wept sor and seyde wyth gret hevynes

of her hertys: 'Alas, woman, why schalt thu be brent?'"[82] Kempe knows, apparently,

how to relate a good story and how to entertain – both for monetary gain and to incite

compassion and pity from her audience – and her overt positioning of herself as someone

who can relate an effective tale suggests that the narrative structure of her book was

consciously crafted to invoke a desired response from the reader.

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[80] Timea K. Szell reads the chronological inconsistency and repetitious return to certain images and emotions as narrative elements that express and compensate "for the precariousness of the would-be holy woman's identity, the beleaguered and wavering nature of Kempe's sense of self (and others' perception of it), and her need for the unceasing interpretation and testing of perception" (81). While I do not rule out the possibility that the narrative might have been influenced in some fashion by Kempe's insecurity or attempts to shape how others might view her spiritual authority, the representation of Kempe as a talented storyteller and the wider cultural acceptance of reading books in a repetitive, non-chronological fashion seem to blunt the certainty of Szell's psychological reading of Kempe's narrative structure. See Timea K. Szell, "From Woe to Weal and Weal to Woe: Notes on the Structure of *The Book of Margery Kempe*," in *Margery Kempe: A Book of Essays*, ed. Sandra J. McEntire (New York: Garland Publishing, 1992), 73-91.

[81] Kempe, 215.

[82] Ibid., 260.

While Kempe depends upon the help of two priests in the actual writing out of her book, she nevertheless depicts herself as an active participant in its composition.  The priests, in fact, seem to retard the process more than they aid it at times, with the first priest writing in such an "evel" manner that the second priest could barely understand it "for it was neithyr good Engliysch ne Dewch, ne the lettyr was not schapyn ne formyd as other letters ben."[83]  The second priest resists helping her for over four years, fearful of aligning himself with such a maligned member of his community.  When he finally does attempt to assist her in earnest, he finds the original manuscript easier to read than before (a fact attributed to divine intervention since Kempe prays that he might acquire the "grace to reden it and wrytyn it also").[84]  But while the priests' efforts are essential to the physical creation of the book – they must shape the letters correctly and transcribe her dictation into recognizable English – Kempe also actively contributes to her book's crafting.  Kempe listens, for example, to the second priest read the original manuscript aloud and she helps "where ony difficulte was."[85]  She devotes so much attention to the construction of her narrative that she begins to neglect her devotional habits; she admits that "the sayd creatur was mor at hom in hir chambre wyth hir writer, and seyd fewer bedys for sped of wrytyng than sche had don yerys beforn."[86]  Writing seems to become such a compulsion for Kempe that it even takes on a healing aspect.  She states that "sche

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[83] Ibid., 47.

[84] Ibid., 49.

[85] Ibid., 49.

[86] Ibid., 379.

was many tyme seke whyl this tretys was in writyng, and as sone as sche wolde gon

abowte the writyng of this tretys, sche was heil and hoole sodeynly in a maner."[87]

Working on her narrative resembles an obsession for Kempe, and, with such sustained

attention and focus devoted to its composition, the excuse that she cannot remember

events in order seems less credible. Instead, her description of the narrative's

composition suggests an active and engaged crafting of her *Book*, an effect bolstered by

Kempe's opinion of herself as an able storyteller and by her aural consumption of other

devotional treatises circulating around the beginning of the fifteenth century.

      Although Margery Kempe is not thought to have been literate herself, she

nonetheless participated in literate society by listening to several devotional treatises

which were read to her by a young priest.[88] The priest "red to hir many a good boke of

hy contemplacyon and other bokys, as the Bybl wyth doctowrys therupon, Seynt Brydys

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[87] Ibid., 383.

[88] Scholarship often suggests that Kempe was an illiterate laywoman. The one statement in her *Book* which could contradict this assumption occurs in Chapter 88 when Christ tells her in a vision that "whethyr thu preyist wyth thi mowth er thynkist wyth thin hert, whethyr thu redist er herist redyng, I wil be plesyd wyth the" (381). Windeatt notes, however, that "the distinction between reading and hearing works read may betoken that MK had some ability to read; but the language here echoes the 'read or hear read' formula often found in indulgences attached to prayers and books" (n., 381). See also Margaret Aston, *Lollards and Reformers: Images and Literacy in Late Medieval Religion* (London: The Hambledon Press, 1984). Aston comments that "the example of Margery Kempe indicates that when we speak of literacy in the later fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, we are using a word which covers a wide range of abilities. Book learning did not necessarily imply a capacity for letters. And leaving aside the distinction between *literati* and *illiterati*, there were many degrees of skill belonging to the lettered page. . . . books themselves might be penetrated vicariously and remained objects to be heard as well as seen" (195). Aston also comments that "the common practice of reading aloud ... meant that a knowledge of letters and book-learning were compatible with very little direct contact with the page itself" (195). See also Jacqueline Jenkins, "Reading and *The Book of Margery Kempe*," in *A Companion to* The Book of Margery Kempe, ed. John H. Arnold and Katherine J. Lewis (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2004), 113-28. Jenkins argues that Kempe's "presentation of herself as the illiterate (non-reading) 'Margery' is a deliberate self-construction" and "a part of the carefully scripted performance of late medieval devotion the *Book* consciously enacts" (113).

boke, Hyltons boke, Boneventur, Stimulus Amoris, Incendium Amoris, and swech other"

for the most part of "vii yer er viii yer."[89]  "Hyltons boke" is thought to refer to Hilton's

*Scale of Perfection*, a devotional treatise directed to an anchoress to instruct her in the

appropriate methods of meditation, in how to distinguish between visions sent by God

and by the devil, and in how to conduct her devotional practices correctly.  At the end of

Book 1, Hilton comments upon how readers should approach his text, stating that "yif

ony word be thereinne that stireth or conforteth thyn herte more to the love of God,

thanke God, for it is His gift and not of the word. And yif it conforteth thee nought, or

ellis thou takest it not redeli, studie not to longe theraboute, but lei hit biside thee til

anothir tyme, and gyve thee to praier or to othir occupacion. Take it as it wole come, and

not al at onys."[90]  Hilton offers the reader the encouragement to engage with his text in a

discontinuous fashion, privileging the reader's affective benefit above any notion that a

text must be read in its entirety in order to be grasped fully.  The reader, not the text,

seems in control.  The *Incendium Amoris*, by Richard Rolle, does not explicitly direct the

reader in how to progress through the text, but a modern editor has commented that this

text "is quite without the structural plan, so dear to medieval writers, and in particular to

S. Bonaventura."[91]  After describing some necessary considerations to take into account

before becoming a recluse, Rolle includes a brief biographical section before ending

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[89] Kempe, 280.

[90] *The Scale of Perfection*, ed. Thomas H. Bestul (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 2000), lines 2618-22.

[91] Margaret Deanesly, "Introduction," In *The Incendium Amoris of Richard Rolle of Hampole* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1915), 41.

"with a series of discourses strung together with no particular plan."[92]  Even if one read

this work continuously, its narrative structure would mirror the effects of a discontinuous

style of reading, emphasizing devout engagement with the part rather than with the

whole.[93]  The *Stimulus Amoris* and the *Liber Celestis* of St. Bridget make no self-

referential comments directing the reader in how to approach their respective texts, but it

seems significant that two of the four texts referenced by Kempe as being objects of

study appear to display marked preferences for a discontinuous style of textual

consumption.  This correspondence further hints that Kempe's own effort at crafting her

*Book* could have been intended to create a narrative structure mirroring that of those

devotional works which had proved foundational in her own spiritual development.

The *Book of Margery Kempe* is similar to other narratives of Christ's Passion in

that it is focused around a handful of central, recurrent images.  Barry Windeatt suggests

that "chronology has given way to patterns of episodes recounting loss, shame and

powerlessness, succeeded by vindication and precarious triumph, and followed in turn by

renewed disempowerment and beleaguerment."[94]  To this list expounded by Windeatt,

Kempe's frequent return to scenes of Christ's Passion should also be added.  Just as

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[92] Deanesly, "Introduction," 41.

[93] Barry Windeatt describes the narrative construction of the *Incendium Amoris* as a "heady example of a text where non-linear, wavelike explorations of contemplative rapture and moral reflection are interleaved with passages vividly projecting the personality of its idiosyncratic author as a passionately striving but fallen exile from heaven" (14).  Barry Windeatt, "Introduction: Reading and Re-reading *The Book of Margery Kempe*," in *A Companion to* The Book of Margery Kempe, ed. John H. Arnold and Katherine J. Lewis (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2004), 1-16.

[94] Barry Windeatt, ed. "Introduction," In *The Book of Margery Kempe* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2004), 26.

Christ's Passion acts as the operative center of the *Meditations on the Life and Passion of Christ*, *The Symbols of the Passion*, and the "Meditacyons" translated by Hull, so too does Kempe's narrative center around a progression of emotional focal points often related to Christ's Passion, especially in the latter half of her book. Kempe uses the Passion as a narrative touchstone; it becomes a central element not only of her own devotional experience but also of the reader's experience of the progression of the text.

The intimate connection between Kempe's tears and Christ's Passion highlights the centrality of the subject to Kempe's narrative. When she visits Jerusalem, the vision of Christ suffering on Calgary compels her to tears, and this reaction "was the fyrst cry that evyr sche cryed in any contemplacyon."[95] The association between Kempe's meditations on Christ's Passion and her voluminous tears, once established in this scene, replays itself frequently throughout the text.[96] The sight of a woman suckling her son causes her to burst out in tears, "as thei sche had seyn owr Lady and hir sone in tyme of hys Passion"; when Kempe suffers illness, "the Passyon of owr merciful Lord Crist Jhesu wrowt so in hir sowle that for the tyme sche felt not hir owyn sekenes but wept and sobbyd in the mend of owr Lordys Passyon, as thow sche sey hym wyth hir bodily eye sufferyng peyne and passyon beforn hir"; and on one Good Friday, as regularly happened when she attended mass, she visualizes the scene of Christ's crucifixion and this "gostly

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[95] Kempe, 163.

[96] Although Kempe's visit to Jerusalem is presented as the first time she is graced by her violent outbursts of tears, the narrative nonetheless shows her weeping over Christ's Passion at earlier points in the narrative. For example, during one meditation in which she visualizes Mary's pregnancy and Christ's nativity, Kempe jumps from the scene of Mary and Joseph's exodus to Egypt to many other "swet thowtys and hy meditacyons, and also hy contemplacyons, sumtyme duryng in wepyng ii owyres and oftyn lengar in the mend of owyr Lordys Passyon wythowtyn sesyng" (79).

beheldyng [was] wrowt be grace so fervently in hir mende ... that sche sobbyd, roryd, and cryed."[97]  There are many other scenes which return their focus to Christ's Passion, and this repetitive narrative return to Kempe's tearful and violent response to these scenes gradually loses any chronological importance.[98]  Her meditations and tears become a constant event, seemingly resistant to change as a result of time's passage, and she eventually begins introducing her outbursts with the indeterminate temporal cues, "on a tyme" and "another tyme."[99]  As the order in which these meditations on Christ's Passion are presented loses its importance, the fact that they are frequently revisited gains importance.  Christ's suffering and pain are highlighted as subjects that should be meditated upon frequently – narrative centers that seems to model Kempe's meditative practice for a reader as a potentially affective method of navigating a prayer book or devotional manual.  The same page, when it incites the reader to devotional fervor, can (and, indeed, should) be returned to again and again, even if one sacrifices a larger sense of the text as a whole in this process.

When considering late-medieval devotional literature as a genre, the above texts demonstrate that it is crucial to understand how literary works might have been approached and consumed by contemporary readers, as medieval conceptions of how these works were to be read can differ substantially from our own.  Rather than

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[97] Kempe, 202, 273, 275-6.

[98] There are many other scenes that highlight the connection between Kempe's tears and Christ's Passion; see, for example, Kempe, 219, 286, 309, 312, 313, 325, 337, 340, 345, 347-8, 368, 369, 419-420.

[99] Kempe, 368.

emphasizing the importance of reading a text continuously and in its entirety, the roll format of the *Symbols of the Passion* appears to promote an intense, affective focus on one or two stanzas at a time as the poem is unrolled.  And while Nicholas Love and Julian of Norwich construct their arguments in an apparently linear fashion, generally encouraging the reader to consume their texts in their entirety, Margery Kempe's work appears to do the opposite, opening the door to being read discontinuously and thus suggesting that attempts to comprehend her work as a "whole" text should be reexamined.

Although the texts in this chapter do not directly engage with the metaphor of Christ's body as a book, they nonetheless fixate on Christ's Passion, encouraging readers to meditate over scenes of his torment and modeling, at times, how such meditations should unfold and be read.  If, as I have argued in previous chapters, devout audiences were accustomed to "reading" Christ's body via the object of the text, then they would have been accustomed to dwelling upon the words on the page as if they were his wounds and to lingering over the ink as if it were his blood.  Discontinuous reading similarly allows for the affectively-guided consumption of a text, enabling readers to search out those passages that most incite their devotional fervor – just as devout audiences might, at times, choose to focus their meditations on pieces of Christ's body rather than its whole form.  The apparent prevalence of discontinuous reading practices, as evinced by the prologues and epilogues of devotional works and by the form and layout of manuscripts, encourages the reevaluation and re-reading of additional medieval texts and

compilation manuscripts that might otherwise seem to lack narrative structure or coherence.  Attempts to locate an organizing logic in manuscript miscellanies or in longer, episodic texts becomes more difficult when one considers the possibility that reading a book in its entirety could have been the exception rather than the rule if late-medieval readers searched written texts to find and repeatedly dwell upon the most affectively stirring passages.
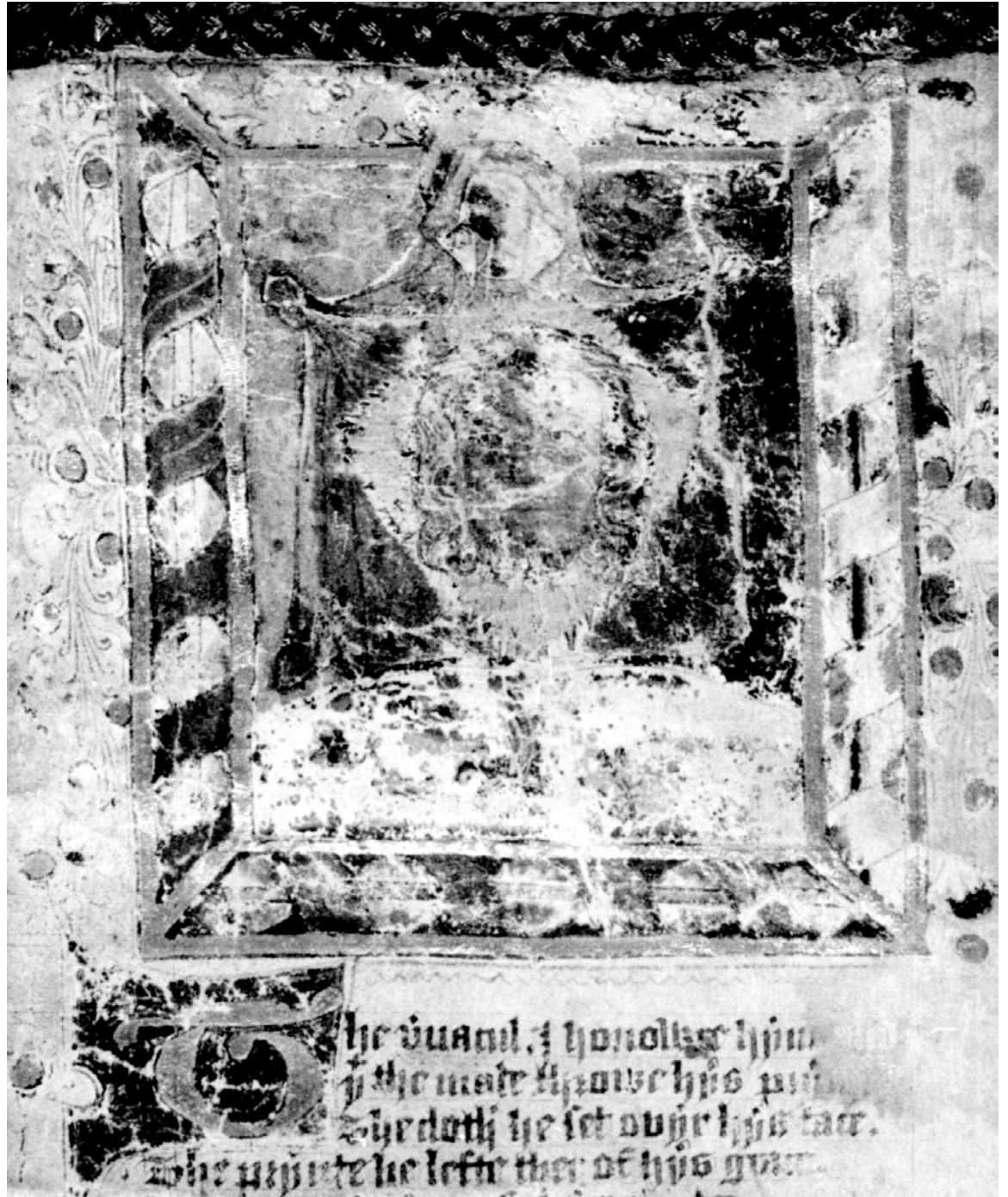
Appendix: Images



Figure 1: British Library, Additional 22029 (15<sup>th</sup> century)

Figure 2: British Library, MS Royal 17.A.xxvii, f. 72v (15th century)
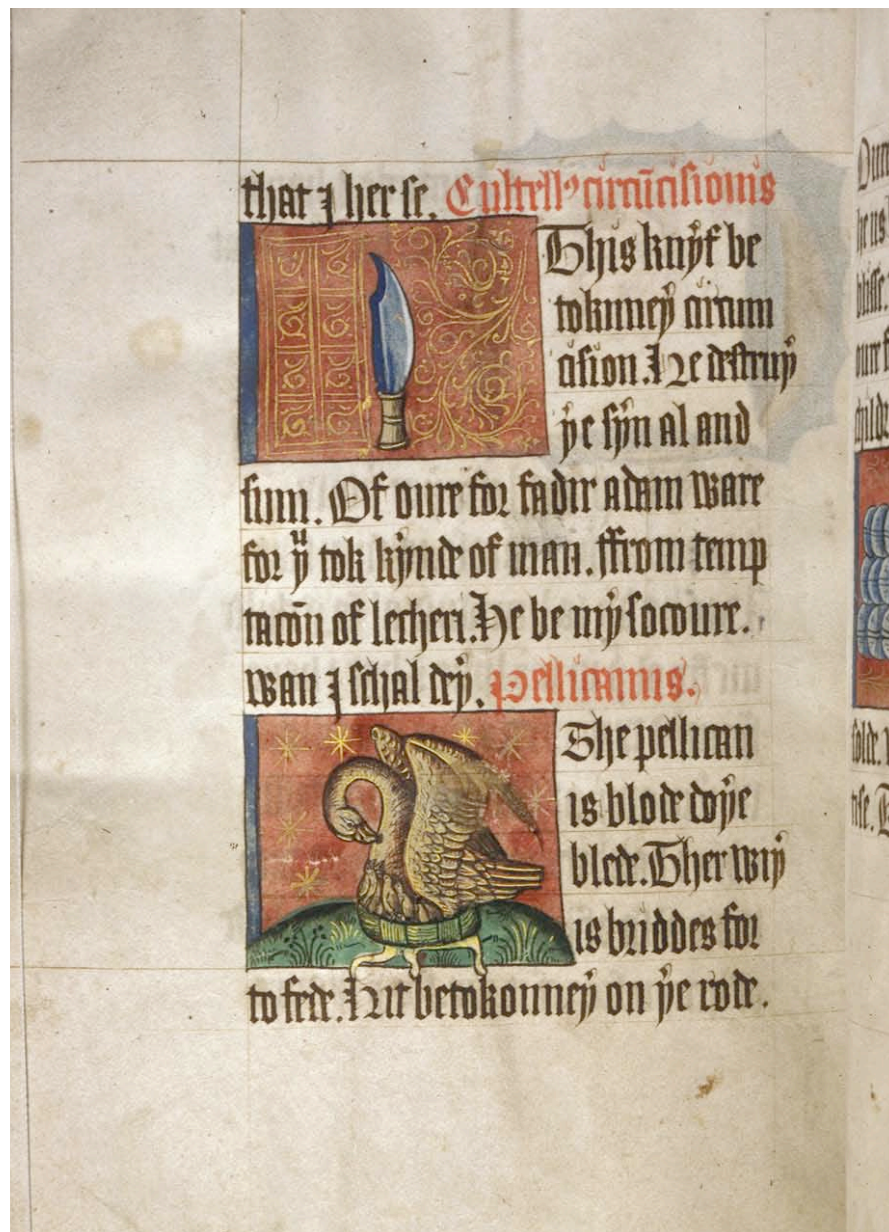
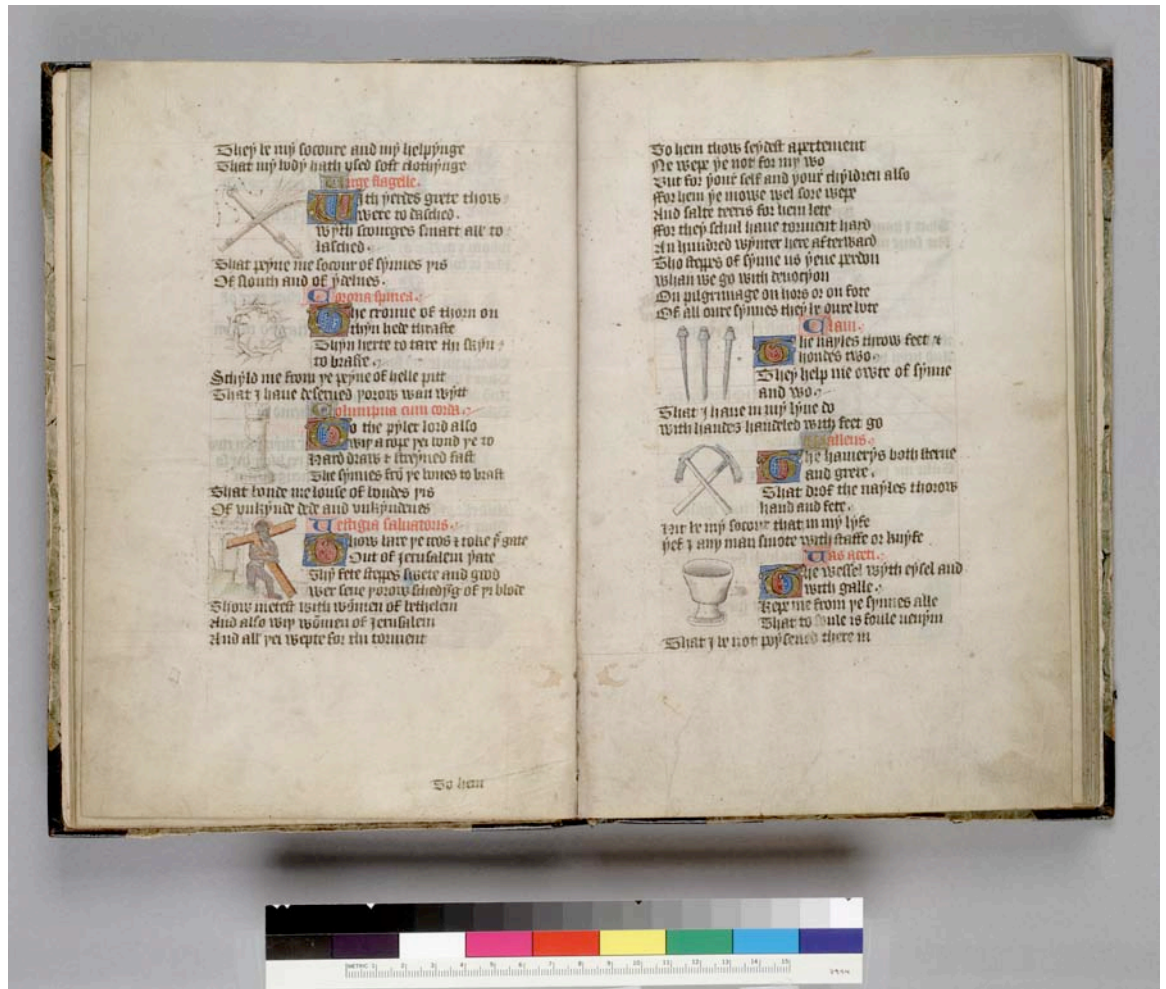Figure 3: Harvard University, Houghton Library, MS Typ 193, 183v (c. 1490)

Figure 4: Huntington Library, MS HM 142, ff. 7v-8r (mid-15<sup>th</sup> century)
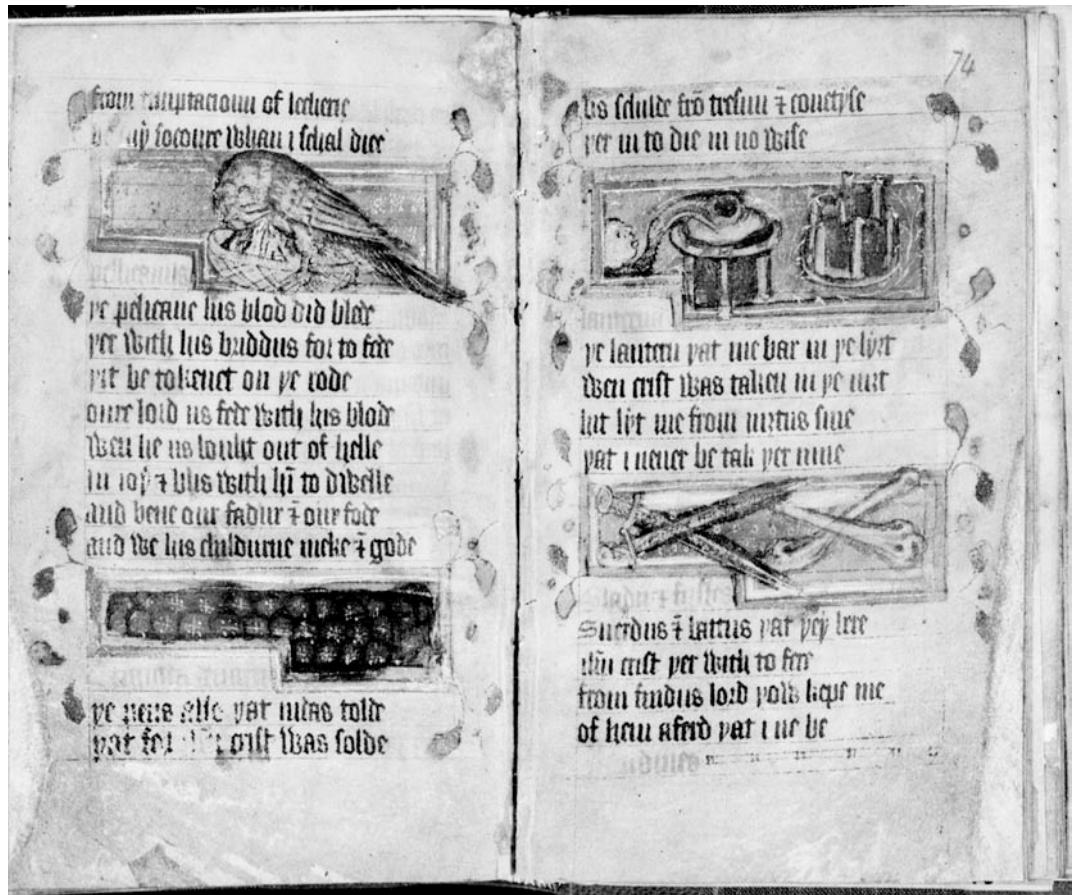
Figure 5: British Library, Royal MS 17.A.xxvii, ff. 73v-74r (15th century)

Chapter 4

Listening to the Body of Christ: Aurality and Music in

Late-Medieval Passion Lyrics

"Cume hithere, Ioseph," calls Mary Magdalene in the "Burial of Christ," a

fifteenth-century play preserved in MS e. Museo 160.[1]  As they both gaze at Christ

hanging from the cross, she says "beholde & looke / How many bludy lett*er*s beyn write*n*

in þis buke, / Small margente her is."[2]  The "buke" that is Christ hangs before them, and

they proceed to read it, contemplating the numerous red letters that have been scratched

across its surface so that only a narrow margin remains on the page.  Joseph continues to

develop this metaphor with his response that "Ye, this parchement is stritchit owt of

syse."[3]  Christ's skin, the book's parchment, has been stretched and distended by those

who nailed him to the cross, making a large, taut surface upon which words could be

written and read.

Then the subject of conversation changes, moving the play's focus away from the

metaphor relating Christ's body to a book and onto the pain that Christ suffered during

his crucifixion.  After looking at (and presumably reading) Christ's body / book, Joseph

laments:

> O derest lorde! in how paynfull wise
> Haue ye tholit this!

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[1] "The Burial of Christ," in *The Digby Plays*, ed. F. J. Furnivall, EETS o.s. 70 (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., 1896), 169-200, at 180, line 271.

[2] "The Burial of Christ," lines 271-3.

[3] Ibid., line 274.

> O, all the pepill that passis here-by,
> Beholde here inwardlee with your Ees gostly,
> Consider well & see,
> Yf euer ony payn or torment
> Were lik vnto this which this Innocent
> Haves suffert thus meklee!
> Remembere man! remembere well & see."[4]

Joseph moves quickly from regarding the parchment of Christ's skin to proclaiming the

extreme torment that Christ underwent during his Passion, suggesting that readers can

gain a better understanding of the pain that Christ suffered by "seeing" and, it seems,

reading his book / body.  To gain full comprehension of that pain, readers must internally

visualize him hanging on the cross even as they read the written text, mingling their

internal meditations with their act of reading.  The material object of the text seems to

provide readers with a point at which to start their meditations, enabling them to look at

the page of the text, relate its surface to the body of the crucified Christ, and then expand

their meditative focus to considerations of the pain that body must have endured or to the

larger scene of the Passion in general.  The page of the manuscript provides readers not

only with the narrative of the events of the Passion but also with an object they can use to

begin their devout meditations.

    After the discussions of similar moments relating Christ's body to a book in

previous chapters, this dialogue from the "Burial of Christ" conforms to the wider

cultural interest I have described concerning the relationship between bodies and books.

I have argued for the importance of recognizing that the material object of a text could

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[4] Ibid., lines 275-83.

shape how devotional works were read and could also become a focal point for the devout reader's meditative practice. Again, this scene from the "Burial of Christ," drives this point home, as Christ's skin is described as parchment with words / wounds running across almost its entire surface – except for a very slim margin of unmarked parchment / skin. As in the *Charter of Christ* and the *ABC of Christ's Passion*, amongst others, the metaphor relating Christ's body to a book highlights here the visual and tactile power of even the un-illuminated page. No additional image seems required to guide the reader's interaction with Christ's body, a body described as resembling a large block of uninterrupted text, because the book / body and the text written on it function as visually significant images in their own right. This passage highlights the basic familiarity that most audience members must have had with the standard layout and composition of manuscripts – the knowledge that books were made of skin, could be written upon with various colors of ink, and often had margins of blank space surrounding the body of the text. In many ways, this passage is unremarkable in its substance and subject matter, reliant upon a traditional trope of vernacular devotional literature that was popular in late medieval England.

And yet, this occurrence of the metaphor relating Christ's body to a book occurs in a *play* – a literary form that might have been read from a book but was more likely to have been watched as a live performance.[5] As audience members would have heard

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[5] Stanley J. Kahrl strongly argues that "no one in the medieval period experienced drama as 'literature,' i.e., as matter to be read" (85-6). While I would not suggest that "no one" read medieval drama, I would agree that watching a play was probably much more common than reading it in a manuscript. See Stanley J.

these lines – presumably at a location in which no books were present – this metaphor

would have lacked the tactile immediacy and visual affectiveness that I have argued is

central to its meditative power.  The choice to include this metaphor in a work of this

genre, then, raises a crucial point that remains to be addressed: how might the metaphor

relating Christ's body to a book have been understood – or even have been pertinent – in

a work that was intended to have been consumed aurally?  And this question becomes

more pressing when we consider that a large number of readers in late medieval England

were probably only familiar with literary and devotional texts by having heard them read

aloud.  Mark Chinca and Christopher Young, for example, note the frequency with which

written works could have been consumed aurally, writing that:

> There were few books destined for an exclusively reading public or an
> exclusively listening public; rather vernacular books were written both for
> a reading public (which was very small, consisting typically of court
> clerics and noblewomen) and for reading aloud to a listening public.
> Recital – or, to use Joyce Coleman's term, 'aurality' – was the
> predominant reception format, not just because allowance had to be made
> for the many lay people who could not read, but also because even those
> members of the public who had literate training would only occasionally
> possess or have direct access to a manuscript.[6]

In an environment of such limited textual resources, it was possible that readers / auditors

would have rarely had the opportunity to interact privately with the book that Christ's

body is purported to become in many devotional texts.  Of course, medieval audiences

Kahrl, "Secular Life and Popular Piety in Medieval English Drama," in *The Popular Literature of Medieval England*, ed. Thomas J. Heffernan (Knoxville, TN: The University of Tennessee Press, 1985), 85-107.

[6] Mark Chinca and Christopher Young, "Introduction," in *Orality and Literacy in the Middle Ages: Essays on a Conjunction and its Consequences in Honour of D. H. Green* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2005), 7.

would still have been able to associate Christ's body closely with books even if they only

occasionally saw, let alone touched, books themselves.  In this situation, the book and

Christ's body might have seemed to share a similar aura of sanctity and rarity as an object

seldom accessible to the reader.  The metaphor relating Christ's body to a book could, in

such cases, have been perceived as a way to promote not a sense of immediacy between

the reader and Christ's body but instead a sense that Christ's body was an object to be

looked upon with awe but only infrequently, if ever, engaged with directly.

This is not the type of relationship, however, proposed by many affective,

devotional works of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.  Many such vernacular and

Latin texts participate in the tradition of *imitatio christi* by encouraging readers to

visualize themselves walking alongside Christ and to witness and even imagine

themselves taking an active role in the events surrounding his crucifixion.  Some women

religious would actively inflict pain upon themselves or enact some sort of physical

affliction (such as a crying fit) while in the midst of their meditations; and religious lyrics

and devotional treatises can, at times, include passages of surprising intimacy, such as

when a narrator beseeches entrance into the protective shelter of Christ's body.[7]  The

popularity of the metaphor relating Christ's body to a book, therefore, thrived during a

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[7] For examples of late-medieval affective devotional practice, see the works of Caroline Walker Bynum, especially her study, *Holy Feast, Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1987); Sarah Beckwith, *Christ's Body: Identity, Culture and Society in Late Medieval Writings* (London: Routledge, 1993); Karma Lochrie, *Margery Kempe and Translations of the Flesh* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991); Jennifer Bryan, *Looking Inward: Devotional Reading and the Private Self in Late Medieval England* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008); Jessica Brantley, *Reading in the Wilderness: Private Devotion and Public Performance in Late Medieval England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007).

time when there concurrently existed a lack of access to books for many potential readers of vernacular religious texts and an aspiration to enter into a spiritual (and at times physical) intimacy with Christ.  If many readers primarily experienced devotional literature by having it read, recited or sung to them, then how might this metaphor have resonated differently for them than it did for readers who consumed a manuscript privately, holding the parchment and seeing the words first-hand?

At the core of this chapter, then, is an attempt to grapple with that fact that the metaphor relating Christ's body to a book or a document seems to have included a keen awareness of the aural / oral potential of written texts.  I suggest that Christ's transformation into a book bears witness, in several of its occurrences, to the possibility that medieval audiences considered the material forms of texts to be infused, in a sense, with sound.  I explore the performative and verbal characteristics that seem to have been essential aspects to the late-medieval perception of books as objects, and, indeed, of written language in general.  Through an examination of an understudied witness to the *Short Charter of Christ* and a late-fourteenth-century "O-and-I" lyric that highlights the musical potential of Christ's body, this chapter aims to provide an analysis of the performative and corporeal qualities of language and of the aural potential perceived to reside in books and documents.  These two poems demonstrate how human bodies and the pain they suffer could be expressed through both the written page and the vocalized text, providing audiences with the opportunity to give voice to, listen to, and participate in Christ's suffering during his Passion.

*Hearing Written Text and Feeling Spoken Words*

That manuscripts were read aloud to listening audiences is now a well accepted fact.[8] Margaret Aston, for example, has argued that books "remained objects to be heard as well as seen – after, as before, the invention of printing" and that "in many cases [books] were used primarily for acoustic communication."[9] M. T. Clanchy specifies that "the traditional emphasis on the spoken word caused reading to be coupled more often with speaking aloud than with eyeing script."[10] And Janet Coleman has consistently drawn attention to the importance of aurality in the understanding of manuscript consumption and circulation.[11] Where the contention lies, however, is in how prevalent the aural consumption of texts actually was, how this method of "reading" was culturally positioned in relation to more private (and silent) reading practices, and how literary scholars should incorporate the public reading of literary works into their otherwise textually-determined studies of medieval poems and prose. This last point of contention

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[8] Vincent Gillespie comments that "'reading' still implied 'hearing read' for large sections of the [late-medieval] population" and points to the following passage from the *Cloud of Unknowing* which states: "All is one in maner, redyng & heryng; clerkes redyn on bookes, & lewid men redyn on clerkes, whan þei here hem preche þe worde of God" (14). Vincent Gillespie, "Lukynge in haly bukes: Lectio in some Late Medieval Spiritual Miscellanies," *Spätmittelalterliche Geistliche Literatur in der Nationalsprache, Band 2*, Analecta Cartusiana 106 (Salzburg: Institut Für Anglistik und Amerikanistik, 1984); Phyllis Hodgson, *The Cloud of Unknowing and the Book of Privy Counseling*, EETS o.s. 218 (London: Oxford University Press, 1944), 71.

[9] Margaret Aston, *Lollards and Reformers: Images and Literacy in Late Medieval Religion* (London: The Hambledon Press, 1984), 195.

[10] M. T. Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record, England 1066-1307* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1993), 232.

[11] Joyce Coleman, *Public Reading and the Reading Public in Late Medieval England and France* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 1996); Joyce Coleman, "Interactive Parchment: The Theory and Practice of Medieval English Aurality," *The Yearbook of English Studies* 25 (1995): 63-79; and Joyce Coleman, "Aurality," in *Middle English*, ed. Paul Strohm (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 68-85.

is particularly fraught, as there is the tendency to acknowledge that manuscripts were read aloud in late medieval England and then to continue a line of argument that focuses exclusively on how a text might have affected a private reader. A. C. Spearing comments that "until the very end of the Middle Ages books were usually written to be read aloud to a group; and it takes some effort to recall that precisely this fact puts the twentieth-century literary critic at a severe disadvantage in dealing with medieval literature."[12] It seems that the sheer number of scholars who have stated and restated the fact that manuscripts were read aloud is a sign, perhaps, of how difficult it is to feel as though we are adequately accounting for the aural and oral elements of medieval poetry, situated as we are within a modern reading culture in which texts are most often consumed privately and silently.

Discussion has recently welled up regarding the nature of the relationship between oral and literate modes of textual consumption. Rather than advocating a simple binary between the experiences of hearing a text read aloud and of reading it privately, more interest has been turned to how these two processes might have existed in tandem and thus would have both contributed to how medieval audiences experienced written works.[13] Andrew Taylor has additionally asked how manuscript studies might be able to

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[12] A. C. Spearing, *Criticism and Medieval Poetry* (London: Edward Arnold, 1972), 17.

[13] See Mark Chinca and Christopher Young, eds., *Orality and Literacy*. Chinca and Young comment in the Introduction to this volume that "there is . . . no pure literacy and no pure orality in the Middle Ages. Emphasizing this opens the way for fresh research whose basic assumption is the interplay, rather than the polar opposition, between the written word and oral networks of communication, in both clerical and lay contexts" (4). Likewise Marc C. Amodio argues orality and literacy are "mutually dependent and enriching cultural components" and states that "it may be appealing to portray the movement from orality to literacy in terms of a new technology and its subsequent complete displacement of an older one – a model of

contribute to the investigation of the interplay between private and public methods of

reading.  He comments that:

> Modern bibliography has fought to call attention to the overlooked, the
> apparently trivial or insignificant details of a text's physical form that turn
> out to play a crucial role in defining a literary work and its readership.  But
> among scholars working with printed materials, this physical form is most
> often taken to refer to the book as a tangible object and to its *visual*
> appearance.  This is not because social bibliographers are indifferent to the
> myriad ways in which a book can be performed.  On the contrary, the
> 'history of the book' that has been written during these last few decades
> has been equally a history of reading.[14]

And while a history of reading might often focus on how texts were read privately,

Taylor suggests that it could also provide insight into how texts might have been read

aloud – and to whom.  He calls upon book historians to expand their interest in the

tangible or visual aspects of a text to take into account how extra-textual characteristics

might have influenced how the text itself was read, in private and in public.[15]  Through

this approach, manuscripts might function as silent witnesses to the texts they contain,

intended for visual consumption, but also as objects that could have directed the

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change with which we are especially comfortable, given the frequency with which we encoutner it in
contemporary society – but in the Middle Ages the interaction of orality and literacy was not nearly so
simple, sequential, and unidirectional as the *grand récit* of cultural development and progress has often
posited it to be" (1-2).  In Marc C. Amodio, *Writing the Oral Tradition: Oral Poetics and Literate Culture
in Medieval England* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2004).

[14] Andrew Taylor, *Textual Situations: Three Medieval Manuscripts and Their Readers* (Philadelphia, PA:
University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), 19.

[15] Paul Saenger has demonstrated the potential rewards of such an approach.  See, for example, Paul
Saenger, *Space Between Words: The Origins of Silent Reading* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press,
1997), esp. 18-51.  Saenger's exploration of word separation in medieval manuscripts uses paleographical
and codicological evidence to suggest that a slow transition occurred from voiced to silent reading during
the thirteenth through fifteenth centuries.  See also Paul Saenger, "Books of Hours and the Reading Habits
of the Later Middle Ages," in *The Culture of Print*, ed. Roger Chartier (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University
Press, 1989), 141-73.

performance of those texts, influencing how they were read aloud through the

manuscript's layout and decorative additions.[16]

Taylor then goes on to argue that book historians and literary critics need to

reevaluate the question of the aural performance of literary texts since it poses severe

methodological challenges, and, although his argument is primarily focused on

addressing the methods used in the study of minstrel performance, his point is pertinent

for scholars studying other medieval texts as well.[17] Taylor rightly emphasizes the

difficulty of recovering "the ephemeral nature of vocalization" – or of reconstructing the

scenes of such oral performances.[18] Of the medieval manuscripts that have survived to

this day, only rarely is any information included within them about how, where, and by

whom they were used.[19] Titles and headings can, at times, indicate the occasion for

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[16] See Paul Zumthor, 'Jongleurs et Diseurs: Interprétation et création poétique au moyen âge,' *Medioevo Romanzo* 11 (1986): 3-26. In this article, Zumthor famously suggests that "le texte n'est que l'occasion du geste vocal" (3). This approach, however, considers the vocal potential of manuscripts as being dependent upon the situations in which they were read; manuscripts gained a voice only when a person, standing over a lectern or holding a book, physically read aloud from the written page. Mark Chinca and Christopher Young argue, however, that the limitation of Zumthor's argument arises from "its foregrounding of the voice, thus covering up again precisely the phenomenon to which it was intended to draw attention, namely the interaction of orality and literacy, of hearing, speaking and seeing" (*Orality and Literacy*, 5). This argument seems precisely to the point, suggesting that we should not focus our attention solely on the voice (especially since it can never be recovered) but instead explore how reading, for medieval audiences, seems to have been a multi-sensory experience.

[17] Andrew Taylor, *Textual Situations*, 20.

[18] Ibid., 20.

[19] Scenes of public reading can be found in literary works and, as Joyce Coleman has explores, many works are addressed to all who read or hear them. Chaucer, for example, includes a scene of public reading in *Troilus and Criseyde*, as Criseyde and several other young women read sit within a courtyard and read aloud a work on the Siege of Thebes. Pandarus enters Criseyde's house "and fond two othere ladys sete and she, / Withinne a paved parlour, and they thre / Herden a mayden reden hem the geste / Of the siege of Thebes, while hem leste" (II, 81-4). While this scene, however, provides information about how a narrative about the Siege of Thebes might have been read, it is difficult to extrapolate from a fictionalized account

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which a poem was composed or can give an indication of where a work was performed, and prologues and epilogues sometimes address themselves to both hearers and readers, as if it was assumed that a work was expected to have been read aloud as well as read privately.  But confirming the truth behind the statements of when or where a work was read or untangling conventional forms of address from any authentic attempt to address potential audiences can be challenging.

These very real difficulties face scholars attempting to trace out how texts might have been read aloud and to whom.  For the purposes of my current argument, however, I am less concerned with reconstructing specific historical situations in which the texts relating Christ's body to a book might have been read than in the simple fact that manuscripts were often read aloud – and that, as a result, the book into which Christ transforms could have had both material and aural resonances for late-medieval readers. Manuscripts and written language, in general, seem to have had a more direct connection to spoken language and aural forms of communication than they have often been interpreted as having.  And late-medieval and early-modern audiences appear to have had an acute sense of the potential for manuscripts to be imbued with sound, the otherwise dead skin and ink infused with a vocal life.  Before turning then to the two poems that are the focus of this chapter, I would like to touch upon the possibility that a text and its manuscript setting could be associated with verbal performance not only when that work

such as this specific evidence of how, where, and why such readings took place and to whom they were directed. Geoffrey Chaucer, "Troilus and Criseyde," *The Riverside Chaucer, 3rd edition*, ed. by Larry D. Benson (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1987): 473-585.

was read aloud but also as a result of how written language, as a visible image of spoken

language, was imagined.

Medieval scholars often explicate the relationship between written and spoken

language by turning to the works of the late classical authors, Isidore of Seville and

Priscian.  Isidore writes that "Litterae autem sunt indices rerum, signa verborum, quibus

tanta vis est, ut nobis dicta absentium sine voce loquantur  [Letters are the indices of

things, the signs of words, in which there is such great force that they speak to us without

spoken sound things said by those absent]."[20]  Priscian similarly states "that a letter is a

mark of an element (sound value) and an image (*imago*) of *vox literata*."[21]  Mary

Carruthers states that Isidore understood "letters [to be] signs of sounds (*voces*) which in

turn signify things.  Thus a written word has visual shape (its *painture*) and calls to mind

sound (its *parole*)."[22]  Written texts, in these articulations, seem to have been perceived

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[20] Found in Isidore's *Etymologiae* 1.3.1, qtd. and trans. Martin Irvine, "Medieval Grammatical Theory and Chaucer's *House of Fame*," *Speculum* 60.4 (Oct., 1985): 850-76, at 870.  Irvine asserts that "in medieval grammatical theory, *litterae* are likenesses of *voces* which represent the *sensus mentis* or *intentio* of the author, and reading reverses the process of writing by reactivating the *voces articulatae literatae*" (869).

[21] Paraphrased by Martin Irvine, "Medieval Grammatical Theory," 869.

[22] Paraphrased by Mary Carruthers, in *The Book of Memory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 224.  Carruthers also states that Isidore of Seville "says that written letters recall through the windows of our eyes the voices of those who are not present to us (and one thinks too of that evocative medieval phrase, 'voces paginarum,' 'the voices of the pages.')  So long as the reader, in meditation (which is best performed in a murmur or low voice), reads attentively, that other member of the dialogue is in no danger of being lost, the other voice will sound through the written letters" (169-170).  Although Carruthers makes the argument here that reading was often a vocal (not silent) act, the specification that, when reading a dialogue, the voice of the other participant will sound through the letters makes a different claim for the vocal potential of the written language – a claim that considers the potential for written letters to contain vocal qualities as part of their *raison d'être*.
    It is notable, however, that Isidore's assertion that writing invokes, via sight, the voices of those not present does not extend to musical sounds.  Concerning music, he writes that "Nisi enim ab homine memoria teneatur, soni pereunt, quia scribi non possunt [Unless sounds are remembered by man, they perish, for they cannot be written down]" (Qtd. by Cattin, 81).  While written words, then, might provide a

as an extension of speech.  A written text would render speech visible even as the images

of its words would call to mind the voices of those who were absent, seemingly

regardless of whether these texts were read silently or aloud.

The potential for a written text to slip back and forth between its visual and aural

forms seems to have been a particular point of interest for medieval writers.  In his

twelfth-century work, the *Metalogicon*, John of Salisbury nods to Isidore of Seville when

he states that "fundamentally letters are shapes indicating voices" and that "they represent

things which they bring to mind through the windows of the eyes.  Frequently they speak

voicelessly the utterances of the absent."[23]  Letters are represented as visual symbols, but

their connection with spoken words resides just below their surface, barely concealed

from the reader.  These letters "speak" while remaining silent, invoking the utterances of

those speakers who are separated from the reader by time or space.[24]  The thirteenth-

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general sense of someone else's voice, Isidore suggests that music could not be translated to a page so
easily.  This could indicate either a true perception of difference between the aural characteristics of the
speaking and the singing voice or a simple acknowledgement that no good system of musical notation
existed.  It was not until the early eleventh century that Guido d'Arezzo would "collate and popularise a
skilful synthesis of experiments being made in various countries, when he set out his own system of
notation in the *Prologus in Antiphonarium*" (59).  Guilio Cattin, *Music of the Middle Ages I*, trans. Steven
Botterill (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984).

[23] Qtd. and trans. in M. T. Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing,
1993).  See *Metalogicon*, Bk. 1, ch. 13, ed. by J. B. Hall and K. S. B. Keats-Rohan (Turnholti: Typographi
Brepols Editores Pontificii, 1991).  The original Latin reads: "Littere autem, id est figure, primo vocum
indices sunt; deinde rerum, quas anime per oculorum fenestras opponunt, et frequenter absentium dicta sine
voce loquuntur" (32).

[24] Michael Camille, in a discussion of Richard de Bury's *Philobiblon*, pinpoints the fact that de Bury
"refers often to great authors of the past, ancient and modern, but as though they were speaking to him in
his library rather than being bound between boards on parchment pages that he has actually to open to read.
There are no actual books in this treatise on the love of books, only the echo of voices" (44).  While de
Bury's treatise depicts his love of books, his distillation of the book as an object into the book as the echo
of spoken voices suggests the strong vocal qualities that at least some medieval readers perceived of as
having pertained to written texts.  Michael Camille, "The Book as Flesh and Fetish in Richard de Bury's

century canon of Amiens cathedral, Richart de Fournival, offers a different view of the

assertion that letters "speak voicelessly," explaining that a text has both *parole* and

*painture* since "all writing is made in order to signify *parole* and in order that one should

read it: and when one reads it aloud, writing returns to the nature of *parole* [speech].  On

the other hand, it is clear that it also has *painture* because the letter does not exist unless

one paints it [that is, unless one gives it a visible form]."[25]  Letters might not, themselves,

literally speak, but readers can breathe life into them as they read aloud, transforming

them back into "the nature of *parole*."  *The Mirror of Our Lady* argues for a similar close

association between reading a written text and speaking, instructing its readers that "syth

youre holy rewle forbydeth you all vayne and ydel wordes in all tymes and places, by the

same yt forbyddeth you redynge of all vayne and ydel thynges.  For redynge is a maner of

spekeynge."[26]  The prohibitions applicable to speech are also applicable to reading a

written text since the written word is just the spoken word in an alternate, albeit visual,

form.[27]  Written language, as articulated by these writers, is described as possessing two

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Philobiblon," in *The Book and the Body*, ed. Dolores Warwick Frese and Katherine O'Brien O'Keefe (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997), 34-77, at 44.

[25] Qtd. by Carruthers, *The Book of Memory*, 223.  The original Old French reads: "toute esripture si est faite pour parole monstrer et pour che ke on le lise; et quant on le list, si revient elle a nature de parole.  Et d'autre part, k'il ait painture si est en apert par chu ke[?] lettre n'est mie, s'on ne le paint."  See Richard de Fournival, *Li Bestiaires d'Amours*, ed. by Cesare Segré (Milan: Riccardi, 1957), 5.

[26] "The Mirror of Our Lady," in *The Idea of the Vernacular: An Anthology of Middle English Literary Theory, 1280-1520*, ed. Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, Nicholas Watson, Andrew Taylor, and Ruth Evans (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999), 261.

[27] As already referenced in the second chapter, in the fifteenth century, the English Carmelite, Thomas Netter (c. 1377-1430) similarly asked in a pointedly manner: "for what is writing but a certain picture and an image of a word of the mind or voice?" Qtd. in Lawrence G. Duggan, "Was Art Really the 'Book of the

characteristics: a visual form and a vocal quality.  Both qualities exist concurrently in the written text, although the vocal quality seems to hover just below the written surface, as if waiting expectantly for a reader to release it from its physical embodiment.

If writing was considered to be a type of painted or illustrated speech, then manuscripts housed the tangible representations of spoken words.  Mary Carruthers notes the frequency with which medieval writers describe sounds in relation to visual signs or images, asserting that "material presented acoustically is turned into visual form so frequently and persistently, even when the subject is sound itself, that the phenomenon amounts to a recognizable trope."[28]  The relationship between hearing sounds and seeing a written symbol of that sound, however, takes an unexpected turn when we also consider that, in the metaphor relating Christ's body to a book, the written words of a text could be perceived as representations of Christ's wounds.  Could the letters / wounds on Christ's body have been intended only to be read as visual symbols – or could they have also been intended to have resonated aurally or even corporeally when they were heard or spoken by the reader?[29]  Perhaps, as a text was read aloud, the lector was thought to wield his

Illiterate'?," in *Reading Images and Texts: Medieval Images and Texts as Forms of Communication*, ed. Mariëlle Hageman and Marco Mostert (Turnholt: Brepols, 2005), 63-107, at 79.

[28] Carruthers, *The Book of Memory*, 18.  Carruthers also references "Guido d'Arezzo, the eleventh-century Benedictine music master whose annotation schemes profoundly influenced the writing of music," stating that he "likens the values of the chord to the letters of the alphabet – one writes with each: 'Just as in all writing there are four-and-twenty letters, so in all melody we have seven notes'" (18).  The original Latin reads: "Sicut in omni scriptura xx. et iiii. litteras, ita in omni cantu septem tantum habemus voces."  Cited in and translated by Carruthers (n. 13, 291); the original citation is found in Guido d'Arezzo, "Epistola Guidonis," ed. Martin Gerbert, in *Scriptores ecclesiastici de musica sacra potissimum*, vol. 2 (San-Blaise, 1784), 43-50, at 46.

[29] And could spoken words also have been perceived as bear some relationship with Christ's body – either with his wounds or with that which creates them (as the pen-stroke across a sheet of unmarked parchment

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voice as a scribe might have wielded his pen when he inscribed the words of the text onto the manuscript page.  And while wounds, themselves, might seem resistant to vocalization, perhaps the groans and moans that would have accompanied the actual wounding could have been thought to reside just below the visual surface, waiting for a reader or viewer to transform them back into some form of speech.[30]  The book that is Christ's body, then, seems to possess two levels of signification for readers – that of the text's content and that of the letter's symbolic potential.  By attending to how both categories might have been understood to resonate aurally for late-medieval lay readers, we can gain a more nuanced understanding of how the scholastic opinion that letters "speak voicelessly the utterances of the absent" might have been adapted and reinterpreted by less-learned, devout audiences as they engaged in affective meditation.

Several late-medieval devotional texts demonstrate that devout audiences might have been alive to this potential connection between spoken and written language and the active wounding of Christ's body.  In *Handlyng Synne*, for instance, Robert of Brunne relates a tale about a rich man who swears "grete oþys" as "ryche men vse comunly."[31]

both inscribes text and scores the surface of the page with the pen's nib)?  I have dwelled at length in previous chapters (Chapters 1 and 2) discussing how the materiality of a text, the ink of its letters and the parchment of its pages, could be intimately linked to Christ's body and the wounds it suffered during his Passion.  His body not only suffers in the text written on the page but also through the writing out of the page itself.

[30] In her recent study exploring the relationship between liturgical practice and literacy, Katherine Zieman cautions against applying modern notions that writing is "a transparent reflection of speech," and her point seems particularly pertinent in this instance.  See Katherine Zieman, *Singing the New Song: Literacy and Liturgy in Late Medieval England* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 118.

[31] Robert of Brunne, *Handlyng Synne*, ed. Frederick J. Furnivall, EETS, o.s. 119 (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., 1901), lines 692, 691.

This narrative was not a part of the original *Manuel des Pechiez* from which Brunne translates the majority of his work but was instead an addition to the translated text. The moral of the story emerges when, during a bout of illness, a rich man has a vision of a moaning woman (Mary) holding a small child (the infant Christ) in her arms. The child has been shockingly mutilated, as "Al to-drawe were þe þarmys; / Of handys, of fete, þe flessh of drawyn, / Mouþe, y3en, & nose, were all to-knawyn, / Bakke & sydes were al blody."[32] These vicious wounds are the result of oaths sworn by the rich man, the woman explains, since "with þy oþys wykked and wylde; / . . . hys manhede, þat he toke for þe, / þou pynyst hyt, as þou may se"[33] and when the man "vpbreydyst hym of þe rode; / Alle hys flessh, þan þou teryst, / whan þou falsly by hym swerest."[34] Every time the rich man swears an oath on a part of Christ's body ("by armes, and by blood and bones," swears Chaucer's Miller in a similar moment), that portion of the infant Christ is wounded and shredded accordingly.[35] The words of these oaths are even described as wounding Christ more grievously than the Jews did during the course of his crucifixion, since Christ's Passion lasted only a day while the torment he receives from the rich man's oaths must be endured for days on end; Mary states that "þyn oþys done hym more greuesnesse / þan alle þe Iewys wykkednesse. / þey pyned hym onys, & passed a-way, / But, þou, pynest

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[32] Ibid., lines 702-5.

[33] Ibid., lines 712, 717-8.

[34] Ibid., lines 724-6.

[35] Geoffrey Chaucer, "The Miller's Prologue," in *The Riverside Chaucer, 3rd edition*, ed. Larry D. Benson, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1987), line 3125.

hym euery day."[36]  Although Christ is not actually visible to the man as he swears these

oaths, these spoken words are depicted as inflicting physical (not spiritual or emotional)

wounds on Christ's body, emphasizing the power of the speech to affect tangibly those

toward whom it is addressed.  Speech is rendered visible in this narrative – but by being

written onto Christ's body instead of onto the manuscript page.

The presentation of the potent power of spoken language to wound portrayed in

this tale is not unique.  A text written in a similar vein can be found in Gonville and Caius

MS 174/95 and is positioned in the manuscript just before a version of the *ABC of*

*Christ's Passion*, simply called *Alphabetum*, which emphasizes the potential of written

words to represent parts of Christ's body and the events of his Passion.  In this

manuscript, then, the spoken word's ability to wound and the written word's ability to

represent wounds coexist.  MS 174/95 is comprised of eight sections, all apparently

written at different times and intended for inclusion in separate manuscripts.  The fourth

section, to be discussed here, was written out near the end of the fifteenth century; it

spans from page 451 to 486 and is comprised of a single quire of twenty paper leaves.

Collected in this quire are two religious poems by Lydgate, a short romance (*Robert of*

*Cisyle*), two religious poems by William Litchfield (d. 1447), the *Alphabetum*, and a

short political poem (*In Erth It Es a Litill Thing*).  A single scribe wrote out the entirety

of this quire, and the roughness of the script, a blend of secretary and anglicana, and the

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[36] *Handlyng Synne*, lines 720-2.

quire's lack of decoration suggest that he or she intended this collection of texts for personal use.

The placement of the second poem by Litchfield (incipit: "O man yff thow wylt my mercy gete") just before the *Alphabetum* is particularly suggestive, as it seems to illustrate a potential node of intersection between oral and written conceptions of language that I would like to tease out. Christ's Passion, not the narrative of the event but instead the suffering and wounds that he endured during its duration, is the subject of both poems. Litchfield's poem offers a similar version of the tale of the swearing rich man found in *Handlyng Synne*, except in this version oaths wound the adult Christ rather than the infant Christ and Christ (not Mary) directly addresses the reader (rather than a rich man) in the first-person. The poem opens with Christ asking the reader why, if men desire salvation, they "Ech day on crosse . . . doyst me new / With thy othys many and gret."[37] Swearing oaths re-crucifies Christ each day, and spoken language, as in the tale from *Handlyng Synne*, is represented as possessing the capacity to inflict – or write – painful wounds onto his body. Man's tongue acts as a weapon, causing Christ to lament that "Wyth thy tonge þou me alto teryst."[38] Such acts of verbal / physical violence are again compared by Christ to the torment inflicted upon him by the Jews, as he states that "Wyth thy onkyndnes þou me more deryst / Than they that rent me on the rode."[39] This

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[37] Gonville and Caius MS 174/95, 481.

[38] Ibid., 481.

[39] Ibid., 481.

poem suggests again that spoken language was perceived to possess a type of physical force that could wound and affect those towards whom it was directed. The speaker is able to wound Christ with his spoken language as surely as if the he had physically hit his body.[40]

The ability of speech to wound Christ's body in these narratives appears to represent an extreme of what Martin Irvine identifies as the medieval belief that "spoken utterances [could] have a corporeal substance – air."[41] Speech was considered, as argued by Priscian, to consist "of struck air" that is "corporeal since it touches the ear and is divided into three ways which pertain to corporeal things, namely, in depth, breadth, and length."[42] The extreme portrayal of language's corporeal power found in the *Handlyng Synne* and in the poem by Litchfield raises the question, then, of the status of written

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[40] There is another tale in *Handlyng Synne* that also illustrates the power of spoken language to materially influence the physical world, titled "The Tale of the Witch and her Cow-sucking Bag" by modern editors. In this tale, a witch has a bag that milks the cows in the pasture when she says a certain charm. The witch is brought before a bishop to show him how the bag works. Once he learns of the charm that activates the bag, the bishop attempts to activate the bag himself but to no effect. The witch tells him that is does not work for him since "3e beleue nat as y do: / wlde 3e beleue my wrdys as y, / Hyt shulde a go, and sokun ky" (544-6). Spoken words, in this narrative, can activate the bag – but they have to have the force of the speaker's belief behind them. In "The Friar's Tale," Chaucer also suggests that the intention behind a statement is crucial to its performative potential. A summoner and a devil see a man cursing his cart which is stuck in the road, saying, "the devel have al, both hors and cart and hey!" (1547); the devil refuses to interpret this statement at face value, however, since "it is nat his entente, trust me weel" that the devil actually take his horse, cart, and hay (1556). This emphasis on belief and intent as necessary for spoken language to become effectual, however, seems somewhat contradictory to the effectiveness of language described in tale describing the wounding power of oaths. Nowhere in the narrative is it mentioned that the rich man intended to cause pain to the infant Christ; this wounding was an unintentional effect of his swearing. See Geoffrey Chaucer, "The Friar's Tale," in *The Riverside Chaucer, 3rd edition*, ed. Larry D. Benson (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1987): 123-8.

[41] Martin Irvine, "Medieval Grammatical Theory," 855.

[42] Qtd. by Irvine, 855. Irvine argues for the wide-spread influences of Priscian's view on the corporality of speech, writing that the "grammatical definition of *vox* [articulated by Priscian] became so well-known that it often appeared in other contexts, especially in treatises and encyclopedia entries on logic an music" (855).

language as pictures of spoken words.  It is thus notable that directly following

Litchfield's poem is an *Alphabetem* that describes how the letters of the alphabet can be

seen as representing specific events of Christ's Passion.

The *Alphabetem* appears to be an abbreviated and loose interpretation of the *ABC*

*of Christ's Passion* discussed in Chapter 2 as it lacks any sort of introductory prologue

and is much shorter.  It begins by stating, "Cryste crosse me spede and seynt nycolas / A.

b. c. A doth syngnifye / The anguysch that he suffyrd in grete duras / B the blede that he

bled so plentyffuly."[43]  The letters of the alphabet, as in the other version of this text, are

presented as being intimately linked with Christ's body and the pain he suffered during

his crucifixion.  And as the poem continues, the associations between letters and the

Passion accumulate.  C, for example, is "the crosse that Iudas so traytorly / D ys the

dolefull deth of hym so to dye / E eggyng of hys enmyes betokyunyth / ff the fals wytnes

of the Iuys is."[44]  Although this *Alphabetum* does not contain the emphasis found in the

*ABC of Christ's Passion* on the explicit relationship between written letters and Christ's

wounds, several letters are singled out as descriptive of certain, specific wounds.  The

letter N, for example, represents "hys nakyd body with wound*es* & knockys," while the O

symbolizes "the opynnyng of hys hert cu*m* lancia."[45]  If one learned the alphabet from a

poem such as this, then every "a" one saw would reference Christ's anguish during his

Passion, every "b" would remind one of his blood, and every "o" would symbolize the

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[43] Gonville and Caius MS 174/95, 482.

[44] Ibid., 482.

[45] Ibid., 483.

wound in Christ's side.  The text seems to encourage readers to approach every written

word as a different and fresh combination of suffering, body parts, and emotional states.

The letters and the words created from them might not re-wound Christ's body as they

are written out, but they nonetheless seem to have the essence of Christ's wounding

contained within them.  Each written word on a page would offer the reader the

opportunity to re-imagine and re-experience the events of Christ's Passion in ever

changing orders and arrangements.

Before turning to the two poems that will serve as the focus for the remainder of

this chapter, I would like to reiterate that, in late medieval England, written language

operated in a space tantalizingly situated between the verbal, visual, and corporeal.

Letters could function both as pictures of spoken words and as signs that enabled written

text to be transformed back into its original verbal state.  And while books were often

read aloud to listening audiences, it seems possible that the inherently verbal echoes

perceived within written language could have led medieval readers to comprehend

manuscripts not as containing texts that could only be heard when read aloud but also as

objects that always already contained a residue of the verbal.  The narratives describing

the wounding potential of oaths on Christ's body suggest that, while written letters might

have retained a hint of their verbal origin, spoken words alternately seem to have

possessed some sense of corporeality in their own right – an impression of physicality

that could wound and effect change in a body other than that of the speaker.  A complex

mingling between the physical and immaterial seems to emerge, then, in how spoken

language and written texts were understood to have related to each other, as evinced by the fact that speech could wound and written words could dematerialize back into voiced speech. And in the case of the metaphor relating Christ's body to a book or document, it is important to recognize that Christ's body / book could be read privately or seen, but it could also be heard. The letters of the book are described as Christ's wounds, but, as I will discuss further in the next section, these wounds and the scene of Christ's wounding could be experienced anew by devout audiences as they vocalized or listened to such texts being read aloud or sung.

*Body into Song: the* Short Charter of Christ

As I describe in Chapter 1, the *Charters of Christ*, a family of popular religious poems dating from c. 1350, recount the process of textual creation in which Christ, during his violent Passion, transforms his body into a written, legal document. In expanded versions of the lyric, Christ's skin becomes the parchment, his blood the ink, and the scourges the pens; in all versions, Christ's pierced heart either acts as the document's seal or bleeds to create the document's sealing wax. With the association of the object of the manuscript with Christ's body, the poem makes use of the physical aspects of the manuscript page to increase its rhetorical affect and to suggest to readers that they can gain access to Christ's body and his painful sacrifice for mankind through its pages which can be viewed, touched, and physically verified.

While the *Charters of Christ* have recently attracted increased interest amongst medieval scholars, one manuscript witness to this text has been widely overlooked. In 1500, a witness to the *Short Charter of Christ* was included in a song-book, possibly written by or under the direction of Robert Fairfax, containing nearly fifty songs of the Early Tudor court.[46] Today this manuscript is British Library, Additional MS 5465, also known as the Fayrfax Manuscript, and is one of three extant manuscripts that preserve almost all that is known of secular and devotional song in early Tudor England. The Fayrfax manuscript contains a variety of songs, but courtly love-songs and religious songs figure most prominently. John Stevens, the manuscript's modern editor and one of the few modern scholars to devote sustained attention to it, describes the song-book as having belonged "indisputably to the court circle" of Henry VII and concludes that it "reflects the taste of the court under the first Tudor king."[47] At a time when many songs were unrecorded and transmitted orally, the careful layout and clear script of this manuscript suggest the importance that the works included within it had for members of Henry VII's court.

The Fayrfax witness of the *Short Charter of Christ*, titled "Be it Known to All" by Stevens, seems not to have received much attention because it is does not correspond

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[46] The witness to the *Short Charter* included within this manuscript is untitled within the manuscript, Steven titles it "Be it known to all," after the song's first line. John Stevens, ed., *Musica Britannica: A National Collection of Music, Volume 36: Early Tudor Songs and Carols* (London: Stainer and Bell, Ltd, 1975), 146-50. Stevens also mentions that the Fayrfax contains political and ceremonial songs as well as songs "for entertainment," although "the distinctions between these kinds cannot, and should not, be too sharply drawn" (xvi).

[47] Stevens, 5, 4.

easily with modern interpretations of the other, non-musical witnesses to this text. The

majority of interest in the *Charters* has focused on its documentary (and occasionally

religious) elements – its adaptation of a legal genre, its decorative schema, and how its

organizing metaphor was used by both orthodox and heterodox readers.[48] These topics of

investigation have rightfully drawn much attention since this lyric so richly conflates

Christ's body with the material process of a text's creation. But in this section, I seek to

consider how the musical setting of the lyric found in the Fayrfax manuscript might also

demonstrate the power that this poem possessed as a heard text – in addition to one that

could be seen and touched. It becomes more challenging to focus exclusively on the

text's material form, I suggest, when the lyric has been transformed into a carol and put

to music that has been described as "massively proportioned" and "musically ambitious"

– music that "exploit[s] a wide range of harmonic ... as well as melodic and textural

effects."[49] The legal conceit of the *Charter* can no longer gain affective immediacy from

the page or the parchment leaf that can be placed in front of a reader and perused.

Instead Christ's charter and body are transformed into heard objects, becoming de-

textualized from their manuscript and documentary setting.[50] But even as an aurally

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[48] See my discussion of the *Charters of Christ* in Chapter 1. Briefly, a few studies that primarily engage
with this lyric from the perspective of its documentary form are as follows: Emily Steiner, *Documentary
Culture and the Making of Medieval English Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003);
Laura Ashe, "The 'Short *Charter of Christ*': An Unpublished Longer Version, from Cambridge University
Library, MS Add. 6686," *Medium Aevum* 72 (2003): 32-48; Richard Firth Green, *A Crisis of Truth:
Literature and Law in Ricardian England* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999).

[49] John Stevens, "Introduction," in *Muscia Britannica*, xvii.

[50] Despite modern interest in the physicality of the legal document of Christ's charter and in how these
poems might have been seen and consumed by private readers, it is not unknown for legal charters to have

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consumed text, the connection between the document of the charter and Christ's body

remains a crucial and evocative part of the text – and suggests that medieval audiences

could conceive of even documentary forms as being imbued with sound and perhaps

music.[51]

The *Short Charter of Christ* found in the Fayrfax manuscript was not intended to

have been read privately but to have been performed. Stevens specifies that "the

polyphonic songs which have survived in such elaborately written manuscripts as *Henry*

*VII's MS* and *The Fayrfax MS* were sung chiefly by professionals on courtly occasions."[52]

And the composition, "Be it known to all," conforms to this assessment as its music

would have probably been too complex to have been performed by amateur vocalists.

The witness to the *Short Charter*, then, was probably put to music and performed to

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been both read on the page and read aloud to a listening audience. M. T. Clanchy, for example, argues that charters bore witness to events by being both heard and seen, and that the legal procedures would have been evident to one listening to it being read or to one looking at the layout and format of the document. Clanchy states that: "Documents changed the significance of bearing witness by hearing and seeing legal procedures, because written evidence could be heard by reading aloud or seen by inspecting the document. In John of Salisbury's definition, letters 'indicate voices' and bring them to mind 'through the windows of the eyes'. Once charters were used for conveyances, 'hearing' applied to anyone hearing the charter read out loud any time, instead of referring only to the witnesses of the original conveyance" (*From Memory to Written Record*, 255).

[51] In *Singing the New Song*, Katherine Zieman comments on the medieval distinction between reading and singing in pedagogical practices, asserting that "they function as two complementary modes of Christian textual practice whereby communal singing from memory evinced the choral community's full internalization of its texts, while 'reading' from the book performed these texts' scriptural origin" (31). While it is tempting to think of a sung text as more apt to be internalized, or as the proof of its internalization, the scriptural origins – and thus its origins as a written text – would have remained prominent in many texts, such as with the *Charter of Christ*. Even thought this text was sung, the trope of its documentary origin would have remained a prominent element of the song, suggesting that written texts or proof of their "scriptural origin" could coexist, at times, with the effort of internalization enacted by the singers.

[52] Stevens, *Music & Poetry*, 43.

provide devout entertainment for the members of Henry VII's court, and the fact that its text was in Middle English and not Latin might have encouraged listeners (and singers) to reflect more intently upon the interaction between the text and its music during the song's performance. While the text of the song is decidedly medieval in origin, however, the music that accompanies it has been described as representing "something fresh and new" that, unlike the poem's text, "breaks drastically away from the only English tradition of medieval vernacular religious song of which we have any knowledge – that of the medieval carol."[53] Although traditional medieval carols are not known to have used texts that focus on the Passion, the composer of "Be it known to all" nonetheless turned to this musical tradition as inspiration for his composition even while, at the same time, updating it by imposing upon it a more "restricted set of stylistic conventions – triple metres, discant-and-tenor progressions and cadences, metrical or rhythmic word-setting."[54] As a composition, this lyric therefore appears to straddle medieval and early modern literary and musical traditions, setting a medieval lyric into an ambitious, updated carol form.[55]

"Be it known to all" divides the original version of the *Short Charter of Christ* into four sections. The first eight lines become the refrain, or burden as it was referred to

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[53] Stevens, *Musica*, xvii.

[54] Ibid., xvii.

[55] The late date at which this witness to the *Short Charter* was written also indicates the extended period during which this lyric proved popular in England. By 1500, this poem had been in circulation for roughly 150 years – and yet its text and content was still perceived as pertinent enough to have been set to a new style of music and performed at the royal court. The longevity and adaptability of this lyric seem strong indicators of its cultural importance during the late-medieval period.

in fifteenth-century carols, and the remaining lines are broken into three verses [See appendix]. Written for three vocal parts, the carol begins with the performance of a single voice that articulates the opening lines of the lyric: "Be it known to all that bin here / And to all that here after / To me shall be lief and dear" [Figures 1–4].[56] Joined by a second voice which imitates the first, the two singers then repeat these three lines again before a third and final voice enters the song; all three vocal parts then combine in a homophonic texture on the words: "That I, Jesus of Nazareth, / For thy love, man, have suffered death / Upon the cross with woundes smart / In head, in feet, in handes, in heart."[57] The gradual addition of voices found in this opening section culminates with the declaration of who is speaking and for what reason, conforming to standard, formulaic legal language of the late-medieval period and prominently introducing the fact that Christ composes his charter to guarantee salvation for mankind. And it is important to note that these lines would have been repeated three more times as the song continued since the song's burden was sung after each of the three verses – and with each repetition, the carol would have returned the listeners' focus forcefully to the strong legal thematic at the text's center.

But the burden does more work than this – it also ends with the statement, made by Christ, that "and for I would have thine heritage again, / therefore I suffered all this

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[56] Stevens, *Musica*, 146.

[57] Ibid., 146.

pain."[58] This couplet is unique to this witness of the *Short Charter* and could have been

inserted, in part, to create a balance between the length of the burden (8 lines) and the

song's three verses (8-10 lines each). It is unclear who added these lines to this witness,

whether they were in an *exemplum* that has not survived but was used by the composer or

whether they were added by the composer himself. Either way, however, by choosing to

end the burden with the word "pain," the composer ensures that Christ's suffering is

prominently emphasized within the song in a way that it is not in other witnesses to the

*Short Charter*. This couplet not only would have been repeated four times as the song

was sung – but also would have been the final words of the song, ensuring that the legal

language of the burden's opening was repeatedly yoked with an emphasis on the bodily

suffering that accompanied the charter's creation. And the composer does not downplay

the burden's final word, "pain," but instead musically accentuates it through the inclusion

of four to five bars of ornamentation (comprised of eighth and sixteenth notes) written for

each of the three vocal parts after the burden's final word [Figures 1–4]. The shorter

notes of this ornamentation contrast with the quarter and half notes of the majority of the

rest of the song, and they could have been intended to articulate the violence of Christ's

intense pain while he suffered during his crucifixion. The ornamentation generally

begins on higher notes and proceeds to fall back to the anchoring tone of G; while all

three voices participate in this repeated falling trend, they do not always harmonize.

Dissonance emerges between them, at times sharply evident, as if the composer were

trying to establish a musical setting that could appropriately complement the scene of

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[58] Ibid., 147.

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Christ's Passion – and the painful suffering experienced by him as he was crucified. The

dissonance hints that while the moans and cries of someone in pain might seem just a step

away from musical vocalizations, their cries might, in fact, be painful to listen to. This

dramatic, corporeal, and dissonant ending to the burden would have provided the

impression that Christ's pain resonated throughout the song with each of its four

repetitions.

At the end of the second and third verses, two additional sections of musical

ornamentation occur. In these two locations, the words "live" and "mercy" are musically

emphasized by several bars of vocal flourishes. The ending of the second verse is the

least musically ornate, including only two bars of vocal ornamentation, but only at this

point in the piece is the half note divided into triplets rather than duplets.[59] In the

thirteenth century, only triple division was sanctioned (for any note value) and was

associated with the Trinity. The fourteenth century put duple division on equal footing

with triple division, but triple division of note values continued to be related to the Trinity

since they were both comprised of a grouping of three.[60] The final line of the second

verse instructs the audience to "witness, bodies that rose from death to live," and the

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[59] The practice of dividing whole notes into triplets was also known as perfect prolation. The classification of the prolation of a piece as "major" occurs when each semi-breve, i.e. whole, note is divided into three minims (unlike in modern notation where each whole note is most often divided into two half notes, and each half note into two quarter notes, etc.). For a discussion of medieval views on prolation, see Anna Maria Busse Berger, *Mensuration and Proportion Signs: Origins and Evolution* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993).

[60] While "the tempus defined the durational relationship between breve and semibreve, either perfect (triple) or imperfect (duple); while the prolation governed the relationship between semibreve and minim, either major (triple) or minor (duple)" (49-50). Allan W. Atlas, *The Norton Introduction to Music History: Renaissance Music, Music in Western Europe, 1400-1600* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1998).

music seems intended to emphasize the miraculous nature of the raising of the dead. The change to triple division in the final bars of the second stanza – especially since it occurs nowhere else in the piece – might have been intended to highlight the apparent divine nature of this event through a change in the piece's rhythmic structure; bodies rise from death as proof of Christ's godhead, and the composer attempts to mirror this divinity by reflecting the perceived perfection of the Trinity in the composition's musical structure.[61]

The third stanza's final lines do not dramatize a specific event but instead juxtapose the mercy shown to man through Christ's sacrifice on the cross with the bodily pain he suffered in the process. The stanza ends by recounting the sealing of Christ's charter; Christ remarks that "the wound in mine heart the seal it is, Y given upon the mount of Calvary, The great day of man's mercy."[62] The ornamentation in the music at the end of this verse extends for three bars after the final word, "mercy," and is on a similar scale with that accompanying "pain" at the end of the burden. Since the burden would be repeated one final time after the third verse, the ornamentation at end of the third verse sets up a play between the "mercy" granted as a result of Christ's death and the "pain" of that death – the pain which marks the closure of both Christ's life and the

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[61] John Caldwell writes that "whereas the word *tempus* referred to the beat itself, the word *prolatio* ('setting-forth') was used to describe the arrangement within the beat" (161). Each whole note, or beat, then would be broken into thirds in major prolation; minor prolation broke each whole note into halves, as is commonly done in modern music. John Caldwell, *Medieval Music* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1978).

[62] Stevens, *Musica*, 149, 150. Clanchy also writes that even seals could possess vocal registers for medieval audiences. He points out that "John of Salisbury, writing on behalf of Archbishop Theobald of Canterbury about the safekeeping of seals, says that 'by the marks of a single impress the mouths of all the pontiffs may be opened or closed.' Just as letters 'speak voicelessly the utterances of the absent', seals regulate that speech. Emphasis on the spoken word remained" (259).

song.[63]  There is a unifying motive underlying the musical ornamentation accompanying

both "mercy" and "pain" (B-flat, A, G, D) in the same rhythm.  The ornamentation

accompanying "mercy," however, has a softer feel to it since its notes are longer and

remain at a higher pitch.[64]  This ending note of mercy, then, appears to encourage

listeners to marvel over the generosity of Christ as he created this document, even as the

final repetition of the burden would have, once again, forcefully reminded listeners of the

suffering Christ experienced to attain that pardon for mankind.

The document of the charter seems more closely linked with Christ's bodily pain

in this witness to the *Short Charter of Christ* than in others, I suggest, because of the

repetition of this burden with its inserted couplet that focuses on Christ's pain during his

crucifixion.  No other witness dwells upon his pain to such an extent or returns to it again

after the document has been sealed and dated.  And the close association between the

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[63] The specification that the charter was created on "the great day of man's mercy" describes the conferral of mercy as a verifiable event, one which can be used for dating this document.  The blood Christ shed during his crucifixion is described as possessing a type of legal authority, one that encloses and, so it seems, validates the bill of mercy that must be shown to gain admission into heaven.  The *Short Charter* becomes a bill of mercy, serving as legal proof that mankind had been pardoned.  Lydgate relates Christ's crucifixion to a "bylle of mercy" in his verse translation of a psalm, "On De Profundis."  The three sisters, Myserycorde, Pacyence and Pyte, must "put vp our bylle of mercy ful plente, / enclosed above for our Redempcyoun, / With bloody dropis shad on the roode tre, / At Paradys gate to haue ingressioun."  John Lydgate, "On De Profundis," in *The Minor Poems of John Lydgate, Part 1*, ed. Henry Noble MacCracken (London: Oxford University Press, 1911), 141, 142-44.

[64] A later reader of the Fayrfax manuscript wrote in a second layer of notation that changed, for example, the B-flat to a B-natural in measure 110 (the final measure of ornamentation accompanying the word "mercy."  This write-in creates an aural effect of uplift since the B-natural raises the B-flat by a half step, and it was perhaps intended to convey the spiritual uplift inherent in Christ's mercy.  This alteration, however, was not included in the score as it was originally written, so I do not address it in my main argument.  A similar addition can be found in measure 44, where the later reader again changed a B-flat to a B-natural, emphasizing the word "king" in the text.  I am very grateful to Dolores Pesce for working through the score with me and helping me to untangle the different layers of notation found in the manuscript.

lyric's use of formulaic legal conventions and the pain of the document's creation poses

the question: how might audiences and singers have responded to such a combination?

While the reaction of an audience to this song is impossible to know for certain,

Katherine Zieman usefully suggests that public speech, especially ecclesiastical and legal

speech, "had as much to do with the relationship between speaker and speech and with

the closely related dynamics of representation (who speaks in whose voice on whose

behalf?) as it did with the question of audience (to whom does one speak?)."[65]  The

singers, in this case, would each have spoken in the voice of Christ, taking on his

*persona*, and each time the song was sung and each time the burden was repeated within

the song, Christ's pain would have been rearticulated as his charter was recreated by the

three voices that intertwined to create the composition's dissonant texture in the song's

burden.  Perhaps, as the song was performed, the singers and audience members might

have gained the impression that they were participating in Christ's Passion both through

the vocalization of his pain and through the reenactment of his transformation into a

document, as if the singers wielded their sung words as scribes wielded their pens in the

writing out of Christ's charter.[66]  And this thought leads me to the heart of my interest in

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[65] Zieman, *Singing the New Song*, 153.

[66] Just as the actual act of writing was often described as being an uncomfortable, and even painful, task, so too has Bruce Holsinger argued that the process of learning to sing religious songs correctly, especially plainchant, and the actual act of singing were often closely associated with physical pain.  Corporeal punishment, he suggests, "played an especially vivid and mimetic role . . . in musical pedagogy," and this connection between song and pain continued even after the initial educational stages" (272).  He recounts how "entire genres of sacred music [were] composed for the express purpose of performance during self-flagellation" – a reflection of how "many devotional writers imagined . . . the unique propensity of musical sonority to embody and channel extreme somatic experience, particularly pain" (197, 208).  Singing provided a vocalist with the opportunity to express and participate in the pain they sung about.  And their

this particular witness to the *Short Charter*.  If a charter, albeit a mock, literary charter, was considered to be a suitable subject for a song, then this blend of literary and musical genres suggests the power of the cultural perception of books and documents as heard objects and of the performative potential of both written and spoken language at the end of the fifteenth century.

In his study of medieval musicality, Bruce Holsinger briefly comments on the metaphor that relates Christ's body to a book, asserting that some texts extend the image of "Christ-as-book to include music."[67] Although he does not mention the witness of the *Short Charter* found in the Fayrfax manuscript, he looks at the fourteenth-century devotional treatise, *Book to a Mother*, that includes as one of its "operative metaphors . . . the imagery of the body of Christ as text, a book read and meditated upon."[68]  He points out that in this text readers are not only called upon to read Christ's body / book but are also instructed to sing from it since the book that is his body is also "þe harpe and þe sauterry of ten strynges."[69]  As a result, "music and writing converge in the body of Christ," and Holsinger calls upon scholars to extend their readings of "the corporality of

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own associations of singing with pain, either whilst learning how to sing or as a result of a self-inflicted penance, might have encouraged the impression that the body in pain was, in part, a musical body.  The cries of the suffering and the moans of those in pain could be participated in and articulated through song. Bruce Holsinger, *Music, Body, and Desire in Medieval Culture: Hildegard of Bingen to Chaucer* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001).

[67] Holsinger, *Music*, 200.

[68] Ibid., 200.

[69] qtd. in Holsinger, 200.

medieval manuscript culture to include embodied musical experience."[70]  Holsinger's

analysis of this text is astute and timely, but I would like to push a bit on his call that

increased attention be paid to the "embodied musical experience."  In whom or what, it

seems important to ask, is musical experience embodied – in the reader or the

manuscript?  Holsinger states that readers perusing a manuscript book "[participate] in its

musical surface" and also that "the textualization of musicality induces an empathic and

extralinguistic participation from readers."[71]  These statements make two distinct

arguments.  The first suggests that the surface of the manuscript page – its parchment or

vellum – could have been perceived by medieval audiences as having been inherently

"musical"; the second statement highlights how the incorporation of musical metaphors

or tropes into a text might have encouraged audience participation and an embodied

experience of a work – or, to state it another way, a reading experience in which the

reader's body becomes the musical vehicle for the text.  The second statement alleges

that the music occurs in the reader (not in the manuscript page) and "involves intensive

reflection upon the violence entailed in certain forms of musical experience."[72]

　　　　Holsinger's argument focuses primarily on this second point, how music is

embodied in and by the reader, and he considers musicality to provide "access to a

devotional realm beyond the reach of textuality."[73]  But I believe the implications of his

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[70] Holsinger, 200, 201.

[71] Ibid., 200, 201.

[72] Ibid., 201.

[73] Ibid., 200.

first statement – that the physical book has an aura of innate musicality – should be considered in a more sustained fashion, especially in regards to the witness of the *Short Charter of Christ* found in the Fayrfax manuscript.  As I demonstrate in the first section, written texts are discussed, at times, as if they possess both a visual form and a vocal quality.  And as works were read aloud (or sung) their visual embodiment was returned to speech which was itself understood to have a corporeal form, in a sense.  By putting the *Short Charter* to music, then, the composer translates a written text back into its verbal form, providing singers and audience members with an alternate way of interacting with the materiality of the charter created from Christ's body and the pain that he suffered during its creation.  Through listening to the charter-made-song, audiences could have an aural experience of and participation in the creation of a document – even while listening to how, through the song's burden and accompanying ornamentation, this textual creation could be linked to the body and fraught with pain.  As this carol was sung and listened to, Christ's pain would have been emphasized as being a fundamental part of the charter. The materiality of the document is redefined through the musicality of the song, providing readers, singers, and audience members the opportunity to experience Christ's Passion as both a corporeal and an aural event that guaranteed their salvation.

*Beating the Drum of Christ: The Musicality of a Medieval "O-and-I" Lyric*

Medieval texts employing the metaphor relating Christ's body to a book often describe the parchment of that book as having been made with Christ's skin – skin that

has been stretched taut and dried upon the cross so that it might be a suitable writing

surface.[74]  This image of tautness, however, has an intriguing correlation with another

late-medieval devotional poem found in MS Ashmole 41 (c. 1400) that illustrates how the

skin of Christ could be thought of not only as a writing surface but also as an instrument

of sound.  Although this poem does not include an explicit reference to Christ's body as a

book, it offers an extreme example of many of the themes that have been discussed in this

chapter, particularly the interplay between written texts and speech and how verbal

expressions of Christ's pain could have allowed the reader or audience members an

additional method by which to experience that event.  While the *Short Charter* found in

the Fayrfax manuscript offers a glimpse of how a document could be translated into a

musical composition, "Throw hys hond" illustrates an alternate situation – how

musicality could be incorporated into a written text.  The scene of Christ's Passion in

"Throw hys hond" is latent with a rhythmic musicality resulting from the beating of

Christ's body and the moans of those who suffered, and the author employs alliteration

and a repeated refrain to render these vocalizations into a written, visual form.

     The incipit of this short, 69-line poem reads "throw hys hond wyth hamir knack.

þai mad a gresely wound," although at least three lines have been lost from the text's

beginning.[75]  While the poem presents a relatively standard account of the events of the

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[74] See, for example, the long-text of the *Charter of Christ*.  Christ cannot find any parchment to write his charter upon, so he uses his own skin which was "y-straynyd vpoon a tre / As parchement ow3t to be" (CUL, Ii. 3. 26, 157-8, ed. by Mary Spalding).

[75] "Throw hys hond," ed. Von Karl Hammerle, in "Verstreute me. und frühne. Lyrick," *Archiv für Studien der Neureren Sprachen* 166 (1935): 195-204, at 196-7.

Passion, the language with which these events are described is fresh and engaging, and the rhyme scheme, six-line stanzas rhyming aaaabb, deviates from the typical couplet structure found in many vernacular works on the Passion.  Amidst its vivid portrayal of the violence of Christ's crucifixion that lingers over Christ's pain and the wounds inflicted on his body, the poem's third stanza ends with a metaphor that describes the crucified Christ as follows: "Als touit als any tabour skynne our lord lay tyght on tente."[76] The subsequent stanza repeats this image, reiterating that "Our lord lay touyd in tente j ty3th. no tabour ti3ht So tou3ht / Wyth rope drawan was hys skynne to twy3ht. of hym as þai na row3ht."[77]  The skin of Christ's body is the focus of these lines, although, instead of being related to the parchment pages of a book, the stretched skin has been put to a different use, becoming the taut covering of the top of a tabor.  A tabor was a "small cylindrical drum slung from the player's piping shoulder by a leather strap," and with this comparison, Christ's skin is described as a musical instrument that resounds as it is beaten.[78]

When one reads the poem aloud, its rhythmic progression and prevalent alliteration seem to suggest that the image of Christ's body as a tabor is not intended as an isolated image but instead as a sustained metaphor that reveals the musicality of the poem's composition.  The fifth stanza, for example, illustrates a particularly regular and

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[76] "Throw hys hond," line 15.

[77] Ibid., lines 16-7.

[78] Suzanne Lord, *Music in the Middle Ages: A Reference Guide* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2008), 151.

rhythmic section of the poem's verse.  Coming after the stanza describing Christ's body

as a drum, the poem proceeds as follows:

> In þat mortayse it 3afe a dasche. hys body alto dasched
> No payn passyd syche a pasche. hys brayne it alto pasched
> þe lyer lowsed with þat lasche. þe veynes alto lasched
> þe synnes craked with þat crasche. þat all þe joyntes to crasched
> With a. o. and a. j. to crasschyd þai war a soundyr.
> þe blode brast out at ylk a joynte. he grunt it was no woundyr.[79]

The alliteration and repetitious rhyming is immediately apparent and, when read aloud,

this passage develops a strong rhythm, especially in the second half of each line – each of

which has two major stresses that seem to mirror the metaphorical drumbeat of Christ's

torment.  The alliteration is primarily concentrated in the first four lines of the stanza,

each of which have extended first half-lines containing three stresses.  While traditional

alliterative verse, i.e. Old English alliterative verse, has an alliterative pattern of aa // ax,

these lines have a basic pattern of aaa // xa, although the first and fourth lines of the

stanza deviate from this pattern, structured as xxa // xa and xaa // xa, respectively.

While the alliteration drives much of the rhythm inherent in these lines, the rhyme

scheme contributes substantially to the impression that each half-line ends with an

especially powerful stress.  The line, "No payn passyd syche a pasche. hys brayne it alto

pasched," for example, the alliteration of "pa" in four of the stressed syllables seems to

encourage these words to be almost spit out, violently emphasized, as they are read aloud.

And the rhyming of "pasche" (a striking blow) with "pasched" (struck violently) infuses

the line with both a rhythmic musicality and a sense that the author is attempting to

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[79] "Throw hys hond," lines 22-7.

convey the violence of the events of the Passion, as if the blows raining down on Christ's head could correspond to the rhythm of a beaten drum. And this steady drumbeat of blows continues throughout the first four lines, repeating with rhyming pair of dasche / dasched, pasche / pasched, lasche / lasched, and crasche / crasched. It is as if Christ's body resounds as these words, spoken by a lector or read by a reader, strike his taut skin, establishing the rhythm that underlies the entire poem.[80]

The final couplet of the stanza does not include the same alliterative, rhythmic drumbeat of consonants found in the preceding lines, instead lingering over vowel sounds and adding an almost melodic ending to the stanza. The lines, "with a. o. and a. j. to crasschyd þai war a soundyr / þe blode brast out at ylk a joynte. he grunt it was no woundyr," seem designed to require that these words be read slowly. It is almost impossible to rush the reading of the "o" and "i"; these vowels lengthen as they are pronounced, suggestively resembling the sighs and moans of someone in pain. And

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[80] The use of alliteration in this poem does not, in and of itself, suggest that this poem was intended for oral performance. The relationship between an oral tradition and the alliterative verse of the fourteenth century, especially the unrhymed alliterative verse, is particularly questionable. David Lawton strongly states that "there is no corpus of Middle English poetry more clerkly, literate and essentially bookish than the alliterative" (6). My argument that the alliteration of "Throw hys hond" would have rendered this poem quite powerfully rhythmic when read aloud is not intended to extend claims of oral delivery to other examples of alliterative verse. Instead, I argue that the genre of "O-and-I" poems, a genre which appears to have been derived from a common background of dance or song, seems to have – more than other alliterative verse – welcomed reader to read these texts aloud. David Lawton, "Middle English Alliterative Poetry: An Introduction," in *Middle English Alliterative Poetry and its Literary Background: Seven Essays*, ed. David Lawton (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1982), 1-19.

Richard Osberg additionally discusses the continued use of alliterative verse in plays through the fifteenth century, writing that "plays provided . . . a vast repository of alliterative lyric types in which, under the influence of the alliterative long line, functional alliteration in rough syllabic structures was maintained" (346). The persistence of alliteration in fifteenth-century drama demonstrates how alliteration might have been an especially potent poetic form in verse that was intended, at times, to have been read aloud, recited, or sung. See Richard H. Osberg, "Alliterative Lyrics in 'Tottel's Miscellany': The Persistence of a Medieval Style," *Studies in Philology* 76.4 (Autumn, 1979): 334-52.

while "crasschyd" and "brast" seem to express a sense of quick violence as they are pronounced, they are surrounded by mono-syllabic words (except for the final rhymes of "soundyr" and "woundyr") that impede any attempts to read these lines quickly.  This final couplet slows the reader down, forcing him or her to linger over the vowels of the "o" and "i" refrain – in addition to the "o" and "u" assonance found in the final "soundyr"/"woundyr" rhyme and in the three words found in the last line ("out," "joynte," and "grunt").  The sharpness of the short "a" found in the initial four lines of the stanza softens into the more extended moaning of the "o," "u," and even "i" in the final couplet.

But while the beating of Christ is compared to the beating of a tabor drum, these drums were traditionally played along with a pipe, and both instruments would have been played by the same person.  Suzanne Lord writes about the popularity of pipe and tabor players, stating that "from around the thirteenth century, [they] were in great demand at trade fairs, tournaments, and other festive occasions," and that "there were still players working in parts of Britain as late as the nineteenth century."[81]  Tabors and pipes seem to have been closely associated with each other, and when one was played, the other would probably have been played as well.  "Throw hys hond" has no explicit reference to a pipe that would have accompanied the beating of Christ's tabor, but the repeated mouthing of "an o. and a. j." tantalizingly appears to take on the musical role of the pipe, offering a counterpoint to the drum strikes of the wounds inflicted upon Christ.  Since the medieval

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[81] Lord, *Music*, 151.

pipe could only play four primary notes as it had only three tone holes, the dual sounds of

"o" and "i" would have been in line with the pipe's limited musical range.  And as this

phrase is repeated in each stanza, the sounds of sighs and moans – or, perhaps, the

melody of a pipe – seem to be incorporated into the poem's narrative.  When the

statement is made that "with an o. and an j. þat wound blede als bylyue" or that "with an

o. and a. j. þai drewen hym on lenght," it is as if one can hear Christ moaning as he

bleeds from his wounds and is stretched upon the cross.

My reading of the "o" and "i" refrain as an attempt to vocalize Christ's moans as

he endures his Passion – while also reflecting how the pipe might have contrasted with

the rhythmic beating of a tabor in medieval music – represents a departure from the

majority of past efforts to explain the function of the "with a o and an i" refrain in

medieval verse.  Briefly, seventeen Middle English poems have been identified that

contain an "o and i" refrain or a close derivative thereof ("o and v," "a and i," "i and e,"

"e and o," and "u and i").[82]  While the vowels featured in the refrain might change, the "o

and i" poems contain many of the same poetic features, most particularly the six-line

alliterative stanza rhyming aaaabb.[83]  Of these seventeen poems, fifteen concern religious

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[82] D. C. Cox and Carter Revard, "A New ME O-and-I Lyric and its Provenance," *Medium Ævum* 54.1 (1985): 33-46, at 45.

[83] Although some poems containing this refrain have been classified as rough heptameters, the verse of "Throw hys hond" seems to more closely resemble alliterative long-line verse.  Richard H. Osberg argues that this poetic form was employed by the adherents of Richard Rolle and that "their legacy is an alliterative line, usually hexameter or heptameter, in which major metrical stress is seconded by alliterative stress, even when the regularity of the line no longer necessitates such alliterative underscoring" (345).  See Richard H. Osberg, "Alliterative Lyrics in 'Tottel's Miscellany.'".

subjects while two have been defined as secular "love-songs."[84]  Several interpretations

of this refrain have been offered, none of which has been embraced whole-heartedly by

the scholarly community.[85]  Karl Hammerle first proposed that this refrain signified a

shortened form of the common Middle English exclamation of "Ho!" and "Hi!"[86]  R. L.

Greene suggests that "with an o and an i" was a short-hand way of saying "very quickly

and surely," referencing a passage from Dante's *Inferno* in which Dante highlights the

"quickness with which a scribe writes an 'O' or an 'I', each a letter of the greatest

simplicity made with a single stroke of the pen in less time than is required for any of the

other letters."[87]  Richard Osberg argues that "for much of the medieval English public,

the long O followed by the long I might well have meant 'be silent.'"[88]  And Joseph

Grennan claims that "the 'V' and 'I' of the refrain [of 'While þou hast gode"] are not

idiophones at all, but grammatological play, standing for the words *venite* and *ite*."[89]

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[84] Cox and Revard, 45.

[85] As recently as 1996, James M. Dean asserts that the "refrain (*bb*) beginning "With an O and an I," a formula (exploited in other poems) . . . has not been convincingly explained" (33).  In *Medieval English Political Writings* (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 1996).

[86] Karl Hammerle, "With an O and an J, II," *Anglia* 54 (1930): 292-6, at 293.

[87] R. L. Greene, "A Middle English Love Poem of the 'O-and-I' Refrain-Phrase," *Medium Ævum* 30.3 (1961): 170-5, at 174

[88] Richard H. Osberg, "A Note on the Middle English 'O' & 'I' Refrain," *Modern Philology* 77.4 (May, 1980): 392-6, at 395.

[89] Joseph E. Grennen, "The 'O and I' Refrain in Middle English Poems: A Grammatology of Judgment Day," *Neophilologus* 71 (1987): 614-25, at 619.  This claim seems the most tenuous of those made to explain the reasoning behind this refrain, particularly for two reasons: no evidence is provided that *venite* or *ite* were ever abbreviated as "v" or as "i" in any other textual situation (so why would it signify those words in this instance) and Grennan shrugs off the fact that the Vulgate reads *venite* and *discedite* (not *ite*). Because his argument is based upon the Vulgate text, it seems a rather serious complication to his argument

While several of these interpretations acknowledge the potential exclamatory nature of this refrain, they nonetheless attempt to assign a definite, textually-based definition to it that might be applicable to all seventeen occurrences of this refrain.

An immediate objection to these claims regarding the significance of this refrain is the near-universal tendency to ignore the varieties of vowels that fall within the "O-and-I" refrain category. Any attempt to argue that the "O-and-I" refrain represents an abbreviation of either a Middle English or Latin phrase is undermined by the fact that poems of this type make use of all the vowels of the alphabet ("o and v," "a and i," i and e," e and o," and "u and i") in a number of different combinations. I would suggest, then, that it is more pertinent to consider why *vowels*, in any combination, are inserted into this phrase rather than to argue that a specific combination might illuminate a meaning that can be applied to all the others. These exclamations seem intended to be voiced – and perhaps performed – as the poem was read, and by including a refrain beginning with a set of long vowels, the poem seems to encourage the reader / singer to linger over these sounds. The alternation of the vowels within this group of songs opens the possibility that there is, in fact, no single answer to how the phrase "o and i" – or any of its derivatives – might have been interpreted. Perhaps this refrain simply created a space intended for vocal experimentation, where the phrase could, dependent on the context, signify a call for attention, an exhortation to hurry, or, as I have suggested in "Throw hys hond," a representation of the moans and cries of someone who is in pain.

that the Vulgate does not contain the words that he claims are being abbreviated in the "o-and-i" poem he analyzes ("While þou hast gode").

Only one effort has been made to explore how the vowels of this refrain might have been vocally significant.[90]   Tauno Mustanoja suggests that the popularity of the "O-and-I" refrain might be tied to the linguistic properties of its vowels, stating that the vowel sounds of "i" and "o" are particularly distinct from each other since "*i*, a front vowel with the highest pitch of all vowels is far remote from the back vowel *a* and even more remote from *o*."[91]  The distinction between how these sounds are pronounced causes the refrain "with an O and an I" to be founded upon a pairing of difference, of opposing phonetic properties.  But most pertinent in the case of "Throw hys hond" is Mustanoja's specification that the vowel variation of this refrain "is often used to imply a mere contrast – more or less emphatically -, [and] is frequently emotional in character and is thus a convenient means of expressing a wide range of human emotions, such as sorrow, compassion, contempt, indignation, surprise, irony, and so on."[92]  Rather than

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[90] While several critics acknowledge the possibility that these poems could have been derived from popular songs or dances, these brief discussions of oral origins are often brushed aside in search of a more textually-based analogue for this phrase.  There are two exceptions to this trend.  Cox and Revard suggest that "O-and-I" poems were, indeed, intended to have been sung, asserting that they were "probably or certainly made for singing" and could have been "made to be sung to the same tune [as] . . . religious or didactic lyrics or identical form" (35).  While the prevalence of both religious and secular lyrics containing variations of the "O-and-I" refrain seems to suggest that there could have been a standard melody (or set of melodies) used by singers of these poems, Mustanoja offers a more specific examination of why a phrase such as "with an o and an i" would have been employed within such a variety of lyrics.  Asserting that the "refrain-element *with an O and an I* is . . . to be associated with the general medieval practice of building refrains entirely or partly on a repetition or variation of vowels," Mustanoja links this practice similar refrains in "Latin and vernacular poems all over Europe" and states that it "has its origin in the dance" (163, 166).  While this refrain, then, might have had textual origins in some cases, there seems an equally likely possibility that it could have gained popularity for its associations with popular dance and carol forms and for the vocal properties of this phrase when it was spoken or sung aloud.  See Tauno F. Mustanoja, "Middle English 'With an O and an I,'" *Neuphlologische Mittellungen* 56 (1955): 161-73.

[91] Mustanoja, 168.  He continues that "the distance between *i* and (open) *o* is the greatest possible in the English vowel system" (168).

[92] Ibid., 169.

attempting to locate a single meaning for the "O-and-I" refrain, the suggestion that the

refrain could be employed emotively would seem to explain the apparent adaptability of

this phrase to a variety of poetic contexts.  This explanation, while it has been criticized

by later scholars as being too vague, precisely identifies the potential power of this

refrain – its capacity to give voice to a variety of emotional states in a range of vernacular

and Latin lyrics.[93]

"Throw hys hond," as I have argued, appears to incorporate the sounds of Christ's

moans through the "O-and-I" refrain as a counterpoint to the rhythmic drumbeat of the

alliterative verse.  The refrain seems to act as an emotive outlet in the stanza, enabling the

reader / singer to linger over and lament Christ's suffering.  And this phrase at times

appears to function in a mimetic fashion by directly giving voice to the sounds Christ

made while he suffered.  The hint of mimesis does not emerge in each instance in which

the refrain occurs in the "Throw hys hond," but it does materialize in many suggestive

moments, such as when Christ is stretched and nailed upon the cross, when his joints

were all broken as the cross was raised, and when Christ dies on the cross – with the "o-

and-i" seeming to take on the impression of a sigh as he breaths his last breath.[94]

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[93] Joseph Grennen, for example, demands whether these vowels "signify precisely as elements in an alphabet" or "are they merely phonemic sports – at worst idiophonic nonsense syllables, at best interjections or vague articulations of visceral feeling of the sort found in sailors' chanties" (614)? Grennan's phrasing of this question strongly suggests his impression that "articulations of visceral feeling" are too simplistic and non-textlic to garner much sustained interest.

[94] See, for example, the following lines: "With an o. and a. j. þat wound blede als bylyue" (2); "With an o. and an j. þai drewen hym on lenght" (8); "With an o. and a. j. full ryght out þai went" (14, i.e., completely extended were his limbs); "With a. o. and an. j. þat crose þai tho3ht to rayse" (20); "With a. o. and a. j. to crasschyd [hys joints] war a soundyr" (26); and "With an o. and an j. þan dyed our lord þat stound" (62).

But Christ is not the only one whose pain is vocalized in this poem.  Mary also

seems to sigh out her emotional distress through this formulaic refrain, particularly when,

upon seeing her son on the cross, "Mary mad a mowrnyng mone. and tyll hyr chyld vp

gradd / Sonne sche Sayd. my myrth is gone. my sorowes ben full sadd / With an o and.

an. j. full sadd sitte now my sorow."[95]  Mary explicitly speaks in this stanza, and the "o-

and-i" refrain seems to be a part of her speech, a vocalized expression of her distress that

resembles a type of moan.  John also voices this refrain in a moment of anguish when he

sees Mary lying on the ground before the cross; he thinks that she might have died from

her sorrow and "sayd dusfullyke. / 3if þou be ded allas allas þan am j. all be swyke. /

With an o. and an. j. be swyk j am he sayde."[96]  Again the refrain appears to be explicitly

incorporated into John's speech, emphasizing its association with vocal outburst and

lamentation.  Throughout the poem, then, the refrain becomes a space where vocal

lamentations, groans, and wails can be articulated.  The voices of Jesus, Mary and John

seem almost to cry out from the page, as if encouraging the reader to give voice to their

suffering and share in their distress by reading or singing these passages aloud.  And the

communal presentation of their lamentation and suffering provides an intriguing

counterpoint to the triad of voices that combine to create the homophonic texture of "Be

it known to all" in the Fayrfax manuscript.  Both works illustrate how voices could weave

together – both out loud and on the manuscript page – to communicate the pain of

Christ's Passion and suggest that the pain expressed through these vocalizations could be

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[95] "Throw hys hond," lines 42-4.

[96] Ibid., lines 36-8.

shared amongst the singers, readers, and audience members during the performance of these texts.

In late-medieval and early-modern England, at a time when private, silent reading was ever increasing, written documents and literary works nonetheless still participate in the realm of spoken discourse. While a text's material form might provide a visual and tangible witness to an event or of a story, its written words still resonated with the "utterances of the absent" – utterances that hovered tantalizingly between spoken and written language. The *Short Charter* and "Throw hys hond" play with this tension between the spoken and the written word, one translating a document into a musical composition and the other transforming the musicality of the sounds of Christ's Passion into one of the most aurally vivid and musically-suggestive lyrics of the late-medieval period that I have encountered. When Christ's body is related into a book in Middle English poems and prose works, this transformation does not just render him a silent, reified object. The book of Christ's body would often have been read from, sung from, spoken aloud, and shared amongst communities of readers. And in these oral readings, both lectors (or singers) and audience members would have gained a chance to participate in the vocal atmosphere of the crucifixion, not only visualizing the written text of Christ's wounds but also hearing his moans and groans of pain. The sounds of these texts for medieval audiences are not easy to resurrect, but the musical witness to the *Short Charter* and "Throw hys hond" offer a glimpse at the vocal power that resided within books, documents, and other bodies of parchment.

Figures:



Figure 1: British Library, Additional MS 5465, f. 118v (c. 1500)

Figure 2: British Library, Additional MS 5465, f. 119r (c. 1500)

Figure 3: Modern transcription of "Be it known to all," showing the first half of the carol's burden. Ed. by John Stevens, *Musica Britannica: A National Collection of Music, Volume 36: Early Tudor Songs and Carols* (London: Stainer and Bell, Ltd, 1975), 146.

Figure 4: Modern transcription of "Be it known to all," showing the second half of the carol's burden. Ed. by John Stevens, *Musica Britannica*, 147.

The *Short Charter of Christ*, as presented in British Library, Additional MS 5465:[97]

Burden:
Be hit knowyn to all that byn here
and to all that here afftir to me shalbe leffe and dere
That Jhesus of nazareth
for thi loue man haue suffired deth
Vppon the crosse w*ith* woundis smert
In hed in fete in handis in hart
an for I wolde haue thyne herytage agayne
Therfor I suffyrd all this payne.

Verse 1:
A man I haue gevyn and made a graunt
to the end and thou wilt be repentaunt
heuyn bliss thyn eritage w*ith*oute endyng
as long as I am lord and kyng
not covetyng mor for all my smert
but a louyng and a contrite hart
and that þ*ou* be In charite
loue þ*i* neyboure as I loue the
I loue the this þ*at* I axe of the
that am the cheffe lord of the fee

Burden:
Be hit knowyn to all that byn here
and to all that here afftir to me shalbe leffe and dere
That Jhesus of nazareth
for thi loue man haue suffired deth
Vppon the crosse w*ith* woundis smert
In hed in fete in handis in hart
an for I wolde haue thyne herytage agayne
Therfor I suffyrd all this payne.

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[97] This text has been edited by Mary Spalding, *The Middle English Charters of Christ* (Bryn Mawr, 1914), 14.  Spalding does not, however, include the repetition of the burden in her edition or indicate that this witness was put to music.

Verse 2:
If any man will say here agayne
that I suffird not for the this payne
Yet man that þou sholdest not be lorne
In the awter I am offerd my fader beforne
witness the day turnyd to ny3th
witness the sonne that lost his ly3th
wittness the vale that ten did ryve
witness the bodies þat rose from deth to lyve

Burden:
Be hit knowyn to all that byn here
and to all that here afftir to me shalbe leffe and dere
That Jhesus of nazareth
for thi loue man haue suffired deth
Vppon the crosse with woundis smert
In hed in fete in handis in hart
an for I wolde haue thyne herytage agayne
Therfor I suffyrd all this payne.

Verse 3:
wittness the erthe that did quake
wittness stonys that all to brake
witness mari wittness seynt John
and othir wittness many one
In to witness of which thyng
my nowne seale ther to I hyng
and man for the more sykyrnesse
The wounde in myn harte þe seale it is
I gevyn vpon the mownt of caluary
the grete daye of mannys mercy.

Burden:
Be hit knowyn to all that byn here
and to all that here afftir to me shalbe leffe and dere
That Jhesus of nazareth
for thi loue man haue suffired deth
Vppon the crosse with woundis smert
In hed in fete in handis in hart
an for I wolde haue thyne herytage agayne
Therfor I suffyrd all this payne.

Conclusion

I have sought to explore how the materiality of books and other textual objects might have influenced – through their physical makeup, visual characteristics, script and layout, and aural potential – how late-medieval lay audiences read and used devotional literature. The metaphor relating Christ's body to a book gives us the opportunity to understand more clearly how the object of the text could have played an important role in affective meditational practices. Although I have focused for much of this study on works that explicitly link the object of the text with Christ's body, the uses of and approaches to manuscripts implied by this metaphor could have been employed to some extent by readers of non-devotional texts as well. Rather than demanding that readers interact with the manuscript book or documentary object in drastically new ways, it seems more probable that authors who incorporated the Christ-as-book metaphor into their devotional works were encouraging audiences to engage with the object of the text via culturally established modes of textual interaction rather than asking that they approach their written work in a drastically new manner.

Ralph Hanna emphasizes that "the real issue for manuscript studies to confront is the historical peculiarity of [the manuscript as a] form of literary dispersal, its strong resistance to modern notions of books and how they work, and the effect such a mode of production has upon the production and conception of literature."[1] This dissertation has attempted to demonstrate some of the "historical peculiarity" of the usage of books

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[1] Ralph Hanna, "Analytical Survey 4: Middle English Manuscripts and the Study of Literature," *New Medieval Literatures* 4 (2001): 243-264, at 248.

amongst late-medieval lay readers of devotional texts.  The manuscript book functioned

as a *locus* for active and varied acts of interpretation as readers approached them as

textual and material, but also visual and aural, objects.  Passages including depictions of

Christ as a book indicate that readers might have been, at times, called upon to attend to

the relationship between reading and composition, the visual impact of the undecorated

manuscript page, the devotional benefits of reading discontinuously in search of the most

affectively stirring passages, and the embodied aurality of written texts.  And Christ's

body would have, conversely, become more approachable for devout readers.  The pain

Christ felt during his crucifixion could be internalized in the reader's heart as they read

and remembered texts, and his presence could have been perceived in virtually every

written text that a reader might have come across if they interpreted its letterforms as

symbolic representations of Christ's wounded body.

As the Faryfax witness to the *Short Charter* illustrates, interest in texts describing

Christ's body in textual terms extended into the early sixteenth century, continuing after

the rise of the printing press (and the transition from parchment to paper) and for a short

time after Protestantism began taking hold in the 1530s.  The *Short Charter of Christ*

exists in several additional sixteenth-century witnesses, although these could have been

copied by readers more interested in this text as an unusual, medieval curiosity rather

than as a work that might have been enthusiastically read by devout early modern

audiences.  All the surviving witnesses to the *Short Charter* that post-date the one found

in the Fayrfax manuscript (c. 1500) are written out as if they were actual charters,

suggesting that later readers found the legal trope of the text to be its most interesting component. The *Symbols of the Passion* was printed in 1523 by Richard Fakes, under the title of "A Gloryous Medytacyon of Jhesus Crystes Passyon," and although this text does not specifically relate Christ's body to a book, its printing nonetheless demonstrates the continued devotional interest in the *arma Christi* right up until the traditional Catholic practices of worship were wiped away during the reign of Edward VI (1547-1553).[2]

The printing of the *Symbols* in the 1520s is in line with Eamon Duffy's assertion that up until the 1530s "the vigour, richness, and creativity of late medieval religion was undiminished, and continued to hold the imagination and elicit the loyalty of the majority of the population."[3] And indeed, new poems were still being written that invoked the medieval Christ-as-charter literary tradition during the early sixteenth century. In "The Conuercyon of Swerers" (1509), for example, Stephen Hawes composes a poem that is similar to the tale recounted in *Handlyng Synne* that describes how swearing oaths can physically wound Christ. After invoking "my good mayster Lydgate," Hawes sets out to relate "A lytell treatyse wofull to bewayle / The cruell swerers which do god assayle / On euery syde his swete body to tere / With terryble othes as often as they swere."[4] Unlike his medieval antecedents, however, Hawes explicitly juxtaposes this verbal wounding of

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[2] See Eamon Duffy for an overview of "the dramatic religious changes" that occurred between 1547 and 1553. Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England c. 1400-c. 1580* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992), esp. 448-77.

[3] Duffy, 479.

[4] Stephen Hawes, "The Conuercyon of Swerers," ed. by Florence W. Gluck and Alice B. Morgan, in *Stephen Hawes: The Minor Poems*, EETS o.s. 271 (London: Oxford University Press, 1974), lines 22 and 39-42.

Christ with an image relating Christ's body to a charter. In the third-to-last stanza of the

"Conuercyon," Christ laments:

> With my blody woundes I dyde your chartre seale
> Why do you tere it / why do ye breke it so
> Syth it to you is the eternall heale
> And the releace of euerlastyng wo
> Beholde this lettre with the prynte also
> Of myn owne seale by perfyte portrayture
> Prynte it in mynde and ye shall helthe recure.[5]

Swearing both injures Christ's body *and* the charter made from it. By ending his poem

with this metaphor, Hawes offers the depiction of Christ, who uses his wounds to save

mankind, as a contrast to those who swear oaths and thereby use their words

destructively. The language describing Christ's charter has also been updated to reflect

the increasing predominance of print culture. Readers are instructed to behold the charter

and "Prynte it in mynde" rather than the fourteenth- and fifteenth-century exhortations

that the reader engrave or imprint depictions of the crucified Christ.[6] While there might,

as a result, be less of an emphasis on remembrance as act of inscription, the general

sentiment remains the same.

Although this text looks back to medieval literary and devotional conventions, it

proved one of Hawes' most popular works amongst early sixteenth-century audiences.

Four editions of the "Conuercyon" survive from between 1509 and the 1550s, and A. S.

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[5] Hawes, "The Conuercyon," lines 346-52.

[6] See, for example, Lydgate's request that readers "Enprenteth" an image of Christ in their "Inward sight" or that they "Grave this trivmphe depe in your memorie." John Lydgate, "The Dolerous Pyte of Crystes Passioun," in *The Minor Poems of John Lydgate, Part 1*, ed. Henry Noble MacCracken, EETS o.s. 107 (London: Oxford University Press, 1911), lines 10 and 43.

G. Edwards points out that "thus it shares with the *Pastime of Pleasure* the distinction of being the most frequently reprinted of Hawes's poems."[7] Early-sixteenth-century audiences seem to have continued, then, to have found texts figuring Christ's body as a textual object to be at the very least interesting and at the most devotionally inspiring. And less-complete echoes of this metaphor resounded into the following centuries as well, as can be seen, for instance, in the poetry of George Herbert (1593-1633). In "Good Friday" (1633), Herbert writes "Since bloud is fittest, Lord, to write / Thy sorrows in, and bloudie fight; / My heart hath store, write there, where in / One box doth lie both ink and sinne."[8] Herbert beseeches Christ to write in his heart the sorrows he experienced during his Passion, but it is with Herbert's blood – and not Christ's – that they are written.

I would like to end with a brief discussion of an image from a late-fifteenth-century Book of Hours from the Continent (Bruges, c. 1490). I have not discussed the Continental history of the metaphor relating Christ's body to a book, since tracing out this tradition falls outside the scope of this study. But it should be noted that this metaphor does exist in the literature of the Continent (although the metaphor relating Christ to a charter appears to have been a uniquely insular adaptation of the Christ-as-book tradition).[9] The manuscript known as Madrid, Biblioteca nacional, MS vitr. 25-5

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[7] A. S. G. Edwards, *Stephen Hawes* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1983), 70. See also A. S. G. Edwards, "Stephen Hawes (1475?-before 1529)," in *Sixteenth-Century British Nondramatic Writers: First Series*, Dictionary of Literary Biography, 132 (Detroit, MI: Gale Research Inc., 1993), 166-71.

[8] George Herbert, "Good Friday," in *The Temple: Sacred Poems and Private Ejaculations* (Cambridge: Thom. Buck and Roger Daniel, 1633), lines 21-4.

[9] Andrew Breeze states that, while there are numerous English witnesses to the text, "Latin versions are rare, and the devotion seems unknown on the Continent," but "the Middle English texts did influence

offers a fitting conclusion to this dissertation since it so explicitly demonstrates how a

text could possess overlapping material, visual, and aural elements that could either be

read in isolation or combined together as readers engaged with the text.  On folio 14r

occurs an image that depicts a small block of text surrounded by scenes from Christ's

Passion [Figure 1].[10]  The most immediately striking element of this image is where the

text is written; a section of skin has been drawn onto the page as if it were stretched taut,

held firm by ties that extend to the image's frame, and the words of a Latin prayer have

been written onto the surface of this stretched skin.  Three scenes from Christ's Passion

surround this fragment of parchment, and the artist has used the ties that hold the skin

taut to mark the divisions between the scenes that are presented.  Crowds of people

Welsh and Irish literature" (111).  The "English-ness" of this poem, as indicated by the manuscript record, suggests that late-medieval English devotional culture found some fascination with the metaphor of Christ's body as a charter that similar audiences on the Continent did not find.  See Andrew Breeze, "The Charter of Christ in Medieval English, Welsh, and Irish," *Celtica* 19 (1987): 111-20.

[10] See Laura Kendrick, *Animating the Letter: The Figurative Embodiment of Writing from Late Antiquity to the Renaissance* (Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press, 1999).  Laura Kendrick considers this image in her study, *Animating the Letter*, that explores how the "pictorial representations" of writing in early medieval manuscripts encouraged "the illusion (an effect of image magic) of the signifying subject's continuing presence in (or, later, near) the inscribed text" (207).  Kendrick suggests that by composing letters out of knots, bodies, and beasts, early medieval scribes encouraged their texts to "be seen as a living trace, moving, changing, *being*" (207).  The animating life in these letters, Kendrick suggests, was imagined as being either divine or authorial (often divinely inspired), as, for example, the intricate knots in the Book of Kells was suggestive of the "complexity and totality of the Scripture's meaning," allowing them to reveal "the presence of divinity incarnate in this writing, of the Spirit in the letter" (109).  Kendrick's analysis of early medieval manuscripts and the close associations between writing and the divine within them is fascinating and remarkably astute.  And yet, Kendrick suggests that the sense of divine or authorial presence in written texts diminishes so that by the late-fifteenth century and early-sixteenth centuries the letters are represented as "dead," devoid of the life found in the realistic illustrations accompanying them (209).  Pointing to MS vitr. 25-5 to prove her point, Kendrick suggests that the layout of the image may have been an attempt by the illuminator to show that "the ideal text would be totally transparent, a window onto the represented, a signifier that could present the signified undistorted" and perhaps implying "a new mythology that would empower writing by idealizing its transparency, its capacity to represent accurately" (213).  While Kendrick's analysis is otherwise quite persuasive, I would argue that her analysis of this page overlooks how Christ's body is materially and textually embodied in a variety of late-medieval devotional works.

populate these scenes and watch as Christ is condemned and then carries his cross to Mount Calvary.

The drawn image of the skin stretched taut by rope ties highlights the physicality of the textual object. The text is emphasized visually as having been written on parchment, skin that has been stretched. And I suggest that this parchment (both the actual parchment of the manuscript and the imagined parchment of the image) could easily have been seen as representing a part of Christ's body. With the Passion scene surrounding it, this textual block seems quite close to depictions of the book of Christ's body found in a variety of late-medieval devotional texts, such as can be found in the "Burial of Christ." This play includes a passage stating that the parchment of Christ's skin as he hangs on the cross is "stritchit owt of syse" and has been written all over so that only a small margin remains.[11] The fragmented presentation of the text – a snippet of prayer is inscribed onto an uneven section of a fragment of skin – would seem to have encouraged a reader to linger meditatively over its words and images, as if contemplating a portion of Christ's crucified body. The visual efficacy of the written text and how it could bring to mind scenes from Christ's Passion are explicitly depicted through this text / image conjunction, and the object of the text, its parchment and inscribed words, act as the focal point for additional meditations on the sufferings that Christ endured.

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[11] "The Burial of Christ," in *The Digby Plays*, ed. F. J. Furnivall, EETS o.s. 70 (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., 1896), line 274. Lines 271-3 read: "beholde & looke / How many bludy lett*er*s beyn write*n* in þis buke, / Small margente her is."

But this page also, I suggest, demonstrates the aural potential of the textual object. First, and admittedly speculatively, the scenes depicted as surrounding the text-block could have been imagined as being full of sound: the murmur of the crowd, the clap of horse hooves against the ground, and the tearful lamentations of Christ's supporters as they witnessed these events.  But, of course, readers could have also viewed these images as primarily silent representations of Christ's Passion.  The text itself, however, additionally attempts to incite the reader to speech.  Taken from Psalm 51, the Penitential Psalm also known by its incipit, "Miserere mei," this page contains the prayer, "Domine labia mea aperies et os meum annuntiabit laudem tuam" [Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise].[12]  Written upon a piece of skin set in front of the scenes of the events leading up to Christ's crucifixion, the text beseeches God to facilitate the oral prayers of those who read it, to assist in opening their mouths so that they might give voice to their praise of God.

The material, visual, and aural potential of the text are juxtaposed in this image, highlighting how, even at the end of the fifteenth century, the manuscript book remained an object that could have offered a reader a variety of methods for interacting with its textual surface.  The fragmented text, skin, and images combine to create an affectively potent reading experience in which bodies and texts, pain and inscription, and the visual and aural potential of the manuscript page are rendered explicit.  But, and perhaps most importantly, this page – despite how expertly its images have been rendered – also hints that the reader should not contemplate its textual surface as if it were a complete, finished

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[12] Psalms, 51:15.

object.  The illustrated skin on which the text is written is literally in the process of being made, in the act of becoming a completed piece of parchment.  The passage from Psalm 51 includes a call to action, encouraging the reader not to pray silently but with parted lips and an open mouth.  And the crowds portrayed in the images give the impression that the reader is one of many people looking at these events from Christ's Passion.  The reader's gaze merges with those depicted on the page, seeming to encourage the reader not just to view these events passively but to become one of crowd that witnesses the events of the Passion, beholding and seeing Christ's suffering as if he or she were actually there.  To read these images and this text, the reader must actively engage with the text's materiality and become a participant in its visual, textual, and aural presentation of the scene of Christ's Passion.  While Christ's body might transition from the flesh back into the Word at the moment of his crucifixion, this dissertation has argued that the flesh remains an important part of the word.  And by attending to literary depictions of the creation, use, and value of books and textual objects, we can better grasp how the manuscripts that have survived to this day – the flesh with which we work – were culturally-defined and culture-defining objects in late medieval England.

Figure 1: Book of Hours, Madrid, Biblioteca nacional MS Vitr. 25-5, f. 14r (c. 1490)

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MS Sloane 963
MS Sloane 3292
MS Stowe 620
MS Stowe 1055

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MS Additional E. 7
MS Ashmole 61
MS Ashmole 189
MS Bodley 789
MS Bodley 850
MS Bodley Rolls 16
MS Douce 1
MS e. Museo 42
MS e. Museo 232
MS Kent Charter 233
MS Rawlinson poetry 175
MS Wood empt. 17

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   MS Ff. 2. 38
   MS Ii. 3. 26
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   Huntington Library, MS HM 142
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