

To my father and mother

TO ONE SHUT IN FROM ONE SHUT OUT: ANCHORITIC RULES IN
ENGLAND FROM THE ELEVENTH TO THE FOURTEENTH CENTURY

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ABSTRACT

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Anchoritic treatises, or rules for anchorites, have been accepted as one of the main sources for the analysis of the solitary life in the anchorhold since the beginning of modern anchoritic studies. However, it is certain that scholarship on the solitary life has been more inclined to focus on the anchoresses' cells as social phenomena rather than as a personal experience and therefore focused on the place of hermits and anchoresses in the Catholic Church, their functions in medieval society and the systems founded to support them financially. This thesis analyses anchoritic guides written in England from eleventh to fourteenth centuries to observe the changes in the attitudes of the authors towards their primary audiences and by this way concerns itself with the life in the anchorhold and the possible changes in the meaning and basic elements of the solitary religious pursuit for both the authors and the primary audience of the anchoritic rules. By a close analysis of the images, motifs and some highly important themes of the texts such as enclosure and virginity the thesis aims to find out the shifts in the discourses of the authors and comments on the possible reasons for these changes. The thesis in the end reaches the conclusion that the regulations for the life of an anchoress were shaped around the general tendencies and contemplative trends of the period, as well as the personal inclinations of the advisors. Therefore it rejects the idea that the anchoritic life was a static, standard one, showing no sign of change and reform over the centuries.

Keywords: Anchoresses, English Anchoritic Rules, Female Religious, Enclosure, Virginity.

ÖZET

DIŞARDAKİNDEN İÇERDEKİNE: İNGİLTERE’DE ONBİRİNCİ YÜZYILDAN
ONDÖRDÜNCÜ YÜZYILA MÜNZEVİLER İÇİN YAZILMIŞ EL KİTAPLARI

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Münzevi kadınlar için yazılmış el kitapları münzevi hayatı incelemek için en önemli kaynaklardan biri olarak kabul görmüştür. Fakat münzevilik üzerine yapılan çalışmalar münzevi hücrelerindeki hayata kişisel bir deneyimden çok sosyal bir fenomen olarak yaklaşmış ve bu sebeple de münzevilerin Hıristiyan toplumundaki ve Katolik Kilisesindeki yeri, ortaçağ toplumlarındaki fonksiyonları ve münzevileri finansal olarak desteklemek için yapılandırılmış olan sistemler üzerine odaklanmıştır. Bu tez İngiltere’de on birinci yüzyıldan on dördüncü yüzyıla kadar münzevi kadınlar için hazırlanmış el kitaplarını yazarların okurlarına karşı tavırlarını ve bu tavırlardaki değişimleri gözlemlemek için incelemektedir ve hücre içindeki yaşamın kendisini ve münzevi dini hayatın bu metinlerin yazarları ve okurları için değişen anlamını ve temel kavramlarını tartışmaktadır. Bu tezin amacı metinlerdeki imgeleri, motifleri, kapanma ve bekâret gibi birkaç çok önemli temayı inceleyerek yazarların bu konulara yaklaşımlarındaki farklılıkları ve değişimleri bulmak ve bu değişimlerin olası sebeplerini üzerine yorumlarda bulunmaktır. Sonuçta bu tez münzevi hayatın kurallarının içinde bulunulan çağın genel dini eğilimleri ve yazarların kişisel tutumları etrafında şekillendiğini savunmakta ve bu sebeple de münzevi hayatın durağan, standart ve değişime kapalı bir hayat olduğu iddiasını reddetmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Münzevi Kadınlar, Münzevi El Kitapları, Dindar Kadınlar, Kapanma, Bekaret

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CHAPTER I

Introduction: The Solitary Life and the Anchoritic Rules

Women and men worked together for Christianity from the time of Christ onwards, despite the Christian authorities' denial of women's role within the religious sphere. However it is certain that even after the prohibitions of St. Paul there were many theologians who looked to women for help in actively fighting heresy and spreading the faith.¹ Those men encouraged women in their spiritual devotion, scriptural and theological studies and most outstandingly in their choice of a religious life. The most noticeable form of such an encouragement was composing a guide or rule for the virginal life. The numbers of the rules composed for women and their wide circulation from the very early times of Christianity onwards indicates that religious life had always appealed to women as well as men.

The anchoritic or solitary life was a kind of religious profession that appealed especially to women basically. The Latin *anachorita*; from which derives the OE *ancre*, the Modern English *anchorite*, is derived from the Greek verb *ἀναχωρεῖν* meaning literally to go away. The explanation is that an anchorite was one who had left the society to lead a solitary life. In the Later Middle Ages anchorites were mainly females who lived in total isolation and enclosure. Therefore the term anchorite tended to become identified with *recluse* (*inclusa* in Latin) that is a woman subject to enclosure.² Rotha Mary Clay was one of the first scholars to make a distinction between two classes of solitaires: 'There were indeed two distinct classes of solitaires: the *anchorite*, enclosed within four walls and the *hermit* who went out

1 Joan M. Ferrante. *To the Glory of her Sex: Women's Roles in the Composition of Medieval Texts*. (Bloomington, 1997), 40

2 Alexandra Barratt. 'Anchoritic Aspects of *Ancrene Wisse*.' *Medium Aevum* 49 (1980), 33

of his cell and mingled with his fellow men'.³ Francis Darwin imitates her in the first part of his book, *The English Medieval Recluse*, where he analyses some misconceptions about these terms.⁴

A desert solitary could also be an *eremites*, a noun that was based on the Latin word *eremas*, meaning desert.⁵ It is clear that although they stem from the same historical roots the words *anchorite* and *hermit* acquired different meanings in time. Actually, in early Christian writings the two words had been synonymous. Fourth-century prototypes of anchorites, for example, belonged to an age where hermit and anchorite were one in meaning.⁶ St. Benedict also in his rule does not make a distinction between anchorites and hermits while commenting on the kinds of the lives of monks in his first chapter.⁷ During the Middle Ages the word 'hermit' continued to be used in the general meaning of the two words, but in time the word 'anchorite' became more and more restricted in use. To be a hermit still encompassed all kinds of solitary life, whereas to be an anchorite came to be understood as leading a stable enclosed life with very limited access to the outside world. An anchorite came to be defined as *inclusus/inclusa* or *reclusus/reclusa*, terms basically pointing to the enclosed life. Anchoritism evolved into a spatially and physically restricted vocation, whereas the hermit could always be freer in space,

3Rotha Mary Clay. *The Hermits and Anchorites of England* (London, 1913), xvi.

4 Francis D. S. Darwin. *The English Medieval Recluse*. (London, 1974), 6.

5 Liz Herbert McAvoy and Mari Hughes-Edwards. 'Introduction: Intersections of Time and Space in Gender and Enclosure' in *Anchorites, Wombs and Tombs* edited by Liz Herbert McAvoy and Mary Hughes-Edwards, (Cardiff, 2005), 13.

6 Ann K. Warren. *Anchorites and their Patrons in Medieval England* (Berkeley, 1985), 8.

7 Benedict rule reads: The second kind is that of Anchorites, or Hermits, that is, of those who, no longer in the first fervour of their conversion, but taught by long monastic practice and the help of many brethren, have already learned to fight against the devil; and going forth from the rank of their brethren well trained for single combat in the desert, they are able, with the help of God, to cope single-handed without the help of others, against the vices of the flesh and evil thoughts; '*Deinde secundum genus est anachoritarum, id est eremitarum, horum qui non conversationis fervore novicio, sed monasterii probatione diuturna, qui didicerunt contra diabolum multorum solacio iam docti pugnare, et bene exstructi fraterna ex acie ad singularem pugnam eremi, securi iam sine consolatione alterius, sola manu vel brachio contra vitia carnis vel cogitationum, Deo auxiliante, pugnare sufficiunt.*' see <<http://www.kansasmonks.org/RuleOfStBenedict.html#ch1>> July, 2007.

although he was equally solitary ideologically. Therefore the anchoritic life as opposed to the eremitic one came to be identified with notions of a stable and enclosed social environment throughout the Middle Ages.⁸

The roots of the anchoritic life lay in the very early days of the Christian Church when the Christian religion was under the threat of suppression and persecutions. It is in the accounts of these early times that we see the lives of early saints such as Anthony and Mary the Egyptian. Those saints were either fleeing away from the dangers of persecution, or freeing themselves from all social connections to find safety and peace in the deserts of northern Africa. On the other hand, a second contrasting motive is ascribed to some of the subsequent desert hermits and monks — a reaction to the acceptance by the Roman Empire of Christianity, which made life dangerously too easy. Indeed, this escape to the desert was both physical and mental. From that time onwards, throughout the Middle Ages, isolation, separation and the individual fight against all kinds of spiritual and bodily temptations became an important theme for Christian ascetics. The heroic experiences of the martyrs and the lives of the Desert Fathers and Mothers⁹ were told in an admiring tone and became basic examples for urban imitators of the desert ascetics. As Liz Herbert McAvoy and Mari Hughes-Edwards explained:

⁸ McAvoy and Hugh-Edwards, 'Gender and Enclosure', 14.

⁹ For more information on the female ascetics of the Egyptian desert whom are called the 'desert mothers' by Margot H. King see his 'The Desert Mothers: A Survey of the Feminine Anchoritic Tradition in Western Europe' and Laura Swan. *The Forgotten Desert Mothers: Sayings, Lives, and Stories of Early Christian Women*. (Mahwah, NJ, 2000). According to King, 'If Paul and Antony and their Egyptian imitators are called *patres*, why not apply its feminine equivalent, *matres*, to Sara, Syncletica and their followers? I then found that just as Antony was called *abba* [father], so too was Sara called *amma* (mother) and, with Syncletica, is one of the few women whose sayings are included in *The Sayings of the Fathers*. ... There are many lives of these women. In the fourth century we find Alexandra who shut herself up in a tomb and was visited by Melania the Elder; Mary the Egyptian; the sisters Nymphodora, Menodora and Metrodona, recluses in a tumulus at Pythiis; Photina who took possession of Martinian's rock for six years after the abrupt departure of that terrified man; and, of course, Sara and Syncletica, to name only a few. From the middle of the fifth century to the middle of the sixth, we find, among others, Anastasia, Apollonaria, Athanasia, Euphrosyne, Hilaria, Theodora, Matrona, Eugenia, Marina, Eusebia Hospitia, Pelagia, as well as Marana and Cyra who lived in chains in a small half-roofed enclosure for forty-two years and who were visited by Theodoret, Bishop of Cyprus.' see <<http://www.hermitary.com/articles/mothers.html>> July, 2007

Ultimately ... hermit and martyr began to conjoin discursively, metamorphosing eventually into the admixture which we have come to recognize as the anchorite of later European — and particularly English — tradition. Initially then the discourse of the desert found itself transferred from its hot north African origins and superimposed upon any number of other locations, including bleak and isolated islands, wild impenetrable forests, perilous boggy marshlands and the dismal fens of northern Europe, coming finally to rest geographically within the developing urban centres which were springing up throughout England and the rest of the Europe during the later middle ages.¹⁰

Therefore it can be said that anchoritism never separated itself from its desert origins and continued to be associated with the multiple, complex and constantly shifting meanings of the desert existence.

Anchoritism was a particularly English phenomenon and a predominantly female one.¹¹ Certainly, the more active, self-supporting life of a hermit who fulfilled some social duties from preaching to repairing roads and bridges was seen as inappropriate for women.¹² Therefore while men chose to become hermits women had to be content with the enclosed life of an anchoress. There were a few anchorites on the continent but it is certain that the impact of the movement on English territory was greater. The development of the anchoritic movement in medieval England, especially after the twelfth century, is generally attributed to the increase in religious fervour and popular interest in piety that took place all over Europe. Starting with the monastic reforms on the continent, the popularity of a stricter ascetic lifestyle came to England in a short time. However, the specific lifestyle of anchoritism, rather than many other forms seen on the continent, appealed to the English to a great extent as a result of general atmosphere of religious life in England. According to Sharon Elkins, this specific interest in the enclosed lifestyle can be explained by some very

10 McAvoy and Hugh-Edwards, 'Gender and Enclosure', 12

11 Warren, *Anchorites and their Patrons.*, 5.

12 *Ibid.*, 81 n. 70.

specific social conditions of England. She claims that the popularity of the anchoritic life in England should be understood as a reaction to the imposition of the Norman rule and spirituality on the English tradition. 'Because several of the hermits and hermitesses had Anglo-Saxon names, they may reflect re-appropriation of the Anglo-Saxon and Celtic eremitic heritage in the face of imported Norman ideas of monastic spirituality.'¹³ It is certain that Elkins's explanation is an over-generalized one. Firstly, it is not possible to see the influence of Celtic heritage all over the country. Besides, although it is certain that Norman rule did not improve women's position in religion, one should not idealize the religious position of women in the Anglo-Saxon society either.

It is certain that in the century after the Norman Conquest England experienced great social and cultural changes. With the imposition of Norman rule over the old Anglo-Saxon tradition dramatic changes occurred in language, domestic life, law and religion and these changes did not affect women positively.¹⁴ Women previously enjoying substantial legal rights were stripped of these rights to a great extent under the Norman rule. The legal and social status of unmarried women deteriorated and widowhood came to be a real problem under the feudal land system. For widows, the threat of forced remarriage became an acute problem. Therefore it may well be argued that religious life offered an escape from all these domestic responsibilities and hardships together with a way of retaining control of property. English women did not have many choices in terms of religious vocation, though. The poor condition of the post-Conquest nunneries was obvious. According to the Domesday accounts, there were only eight Anglo-Saxon nunneries after the Norman

¹³ Elkins Sharon. *Holy Women of Twelfth Century England*. (London, 1988), 15.

¹⁴ Christine E. Fell. *Women in the Anglo-Saxon England and the Impact of 1066*. (Bloomington, 1984), 30-39.

Conquest and all were in a great disorder.¹⁵ English nunneries, similar to the ones on the continent, had been centres of learning for women that had chosen the religious pursuit, but after the Conquest nunneries were filled with noble women who were forced to shut themselves up in the nunneries in order to flee from the brutalities of war and conquest. For noble women without land, but with some money, nunneries came to be a way of retaining a noble lifestyle. Of course, nunneries were never an option for the lower classes.

Religious women on the Continent would have many choices even under these conditions. New forms of Christian piety were developing all around Europe and women had a great chance of finding a place for themselves in one of the officially sanctioned groups. Fontevrault for example, founded around 1100 and predominantly for women, was unique in its attitude of welcoming society's outcasts. Robert Abrissel explained his aim in founding Fontevrault as a way of finding housing where women 'could without scandal live and speak scrupulously with men' in community.¹⁶ A short time after its foundation Fontevrault came to be known as a women's religious order, although it began as a double monastery. One of the most important orders of the twelfth century, the Order of the Paraclete was founded by a woman, Heloise. After being evicted from their monastery at Argenteuil, Heloise and the community of whom she was prioress turned to Abelard for help and under his direction founded Paraclete, a monastery for women. Composing a rule for the foundation, again under guidance of Abelard, Heloise became the first abbess of Paraclete; the first autonomous monastery for women which was neither a branch of a male order nor had a formal connection with any monastery.¹⁷ Apart from these,

¹⁵ see Sally Thompson. *Women Religious: the Founding of English Nunneries after the Norman Conquest*. (Oxford, 1996)

¹⁶ Patricia Ranft. *Women and the Religious Life in Pre-modern Europe*. (New York, 1998), 46.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 47.

there were many small non-sanctioned or heretical groups where women could find a place for themselves. England, on the other hand, was a place of orthodoxy and tradition, very far away from the scope of all these new groups. The religious reform of the eleventh century simply ignored women and therefore their needs were not answered in the monastic sphere. Therefore, the anchorhold may well have seemed preferable for religious women in England, when compared to other options.

As a result of this popularity of the anchoritic life among English women, anchoritic guidance literature developed substantially in England throughout the Middle Ages. Thirteen rules were written for recluses six of which were directly addressed to female religious. *Liber Confortatorius* is the earliest known work of spiritual instruction for an anchorite to have been written in England.¹⁸ It was written by a Benedictine monk, Goscelin of St. Bertin in the form of an extended letter to Eve, one of the members of Wilton Abbey who had left the nunnery for a stricter life in contemplation. The unique manuscript of Goscelin's work is Sloane MS. 3103 certainly a late twelfth-century copy produced on the continent.¹⁹ Aelred's influential rule composed for his sister is the second extant anchoritic rule written in England. Aelred of Rievaulx, a Cistercian monk and theologian wrote *De Institutione Inclusarum* around 1160s to explain the rules and rewards of the religious life to his sister, who was probably older and more experienced than him in terms of religious life. *Ancrene Wisse*, the famous anonymous Middle English rule written for three young recluse sisters was one of the most influential and widely read anchoritic rules of England. Originally written in a Midlands dialect of Middle English, the AB language as Tolkien termed, *Ancrene Wisse* was translated into French and Latin and

18 Stephanie Hollis. *Writing the Wilton Women. Goscelin's Legend of St. Edith and Liber Confortatorius*. (Brepols, 2004), 3

19 C. H. Talbot, 'The "De Institutis Inclusarum" of Aelred of Rievaulx.' In *Analecta Sacri Ordinis Cisterciensis* 7 (1951), 24

survives in more than seventeen complete manuscripts. Due to both its extent and influence upon the following religious writings and also due to its mysteriously unknown well educated author, *Ancrene Wisse* has always been one of the most extensively analysed and commented rule of English anchoresses. Two fourteenth century anchoritic rules, Richard Rolle's the *Form of Living* and Walter Hilton's *The Scale of Perfection* are both written by mystics and addressed to specific female religious. The *Form of Living* was composed for a certain Margaret about whom very little is known. Hilton's *The Scale of Perfection* gives even less information on its primary audience. The text was addressed to a 'Ghostly sister' who was a recluse in England. Rolle's and Hilton's texts were read and copied widely in their time and became one of the basic sources on female religious life also for modern scholarship.

Anchoritic treatises, or rules for anchorites, have been accepted as one of the main sources for the analysis of the solitary life in the anchorhold since the beginning of modern anchoritic studies. Ann Warren around the eighties, and much earlier, Rotha Mary Clay, in their detailed research on the anchoritic life and its supporters, used rules written for anchoresses as a gateway to the anchoresses' lives and their relations with the outside world, though also using other documents such as church records, charters, wills and personal letters. However, these basic writings on the solitary life were more inclined to focus on the anchoresses' cells as social phenomena rather than as a personal experience. Clay mainly analyzed the place of hermits and anchoresses in the Catholic Church and their functions in medieval society, while Warren examined the general position of the anchoresses in medieval England and the systems founded to support them financially. Although they have filled great blanks in the history of the anchoritic life, these works are basically limited in their scope. In her definition of an anchoress as a woman 'shut up in a

strait prison, whether in church, chapel, convent or castle', Clay is certainly stricter and narrower than Warren, who explained the word anchoress as a 'solitary recluse dedicated to God' and a 'daily reminder of the proper focus of Christian existence', who was also a 'martyr, viator, penitent, ascetic, mystic, miles Christi' at the same time.²⁰ However, both definitions, though useful in identifying some roles often played by anchoresses, are restricted, as they exclude some more nuanced roles of the anchoresses and meanings of their enclosed condition. Besides, these definitions are expressions of the anchoritic life as a one-dimensional, standard one. According to Warren, the solitary life is a model one, a lifestyle chosen freely by the solitary. However it is certain that both the choice and the lifestyle in the cell were manipulated, influenced and ruled, not only in specific times and places by individuals, but also in a more general perspective within a more general context.

Issues such as the gendered nature of the anchoritic life in England are left untouched in Warren's book, despite her detailed analysis on the distribution of anchorites by counties from the twelfth to the sixteenth century.²¹ She simply passes over the issue by stating that 'English anchoritism was a vocation that already was biased towards women in the twelfth century. It became sharply female in orientation in the thirteenth century, and then gradually reversed this trend in the succeeding years.'²² Warren did very little to analyze the interrelated concepts such as gender, power and enclosure in relation to this anchoritic bias towards women in the thirteenth century. Instead, she comments in line with traditional assumptions on the diverse meanings of enclosure for male and female anchorites. She writes that a woman might have wanted to become an anchoress to free herself from marriage and

20 Clay, *The Hermits and Anchorites.*, 73; Warren, *Anchorites and Their Patrons.*, 7.

21 See Appendix I in Warren, *Anchorites and Their Patrons.*, 292-3 where Warren lists anchorite distribution by counties in Medieval England.

22 *Ibid.*, 20.

its hardships, to avoid the dangers of childbirth or to have a place of her own, because she had no place in the nunnery. For men, she argues that a ‘man might have become an anchorite because of the competitions of communal or secular life, because he was poor or because of a desire to have more free time.’²³ Therefore, according to Warren, women were passive recipients of the religious life as the best alternative to the married one, whereas men became anchorites as a result of a deliberate choice. Following Bynum, it is possible to say that ‘medieval men had greater ability than women to determine the shape of their lives’.²⁴ However, to apply this idea to general explanations for the decision to become a religious would not be correct. It is clear that Warren depends on the general binary opposition of male-active-dominant and female-passive-recessive in her explanation of the reasons for the choice of the solitary life and in doing so she omits more complex interactions between men and women and between the solitary and the world.²⁵

Such interactions have been dealt with in many recent influential scholarly works. Alexandra Barratt and Elizabeth Robertson have examined medical and gynaecological teachings in the middle ages to see the influence of developments or shifts in these fields on anchoritic literature, understanding and discourse, as well as the self-perception of the enclosed women.²⁶ Bella Millett, Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, Anne Savage and Nicholas Watson have been making valuable studies on the

23 *Ibid.*, 123.

24 Caroline Walker Bynum. “‘And Woman His Humanity’: Female Imagery in the Religious Writing of the Later Middle Ages.” in *Gender and Religion: on the Complexity of Symbols*, edited by Caroline Walker Bynum, Paula Richman and Stevan Harrell. (Boston, 1986), 278.

25 For further discussion, see McAvoy and Hughes-Edwards, ‘Intersections of Time and Space.’, 10.

26 Elizabeth Robertson. ‘An Anchorhold of Her Own: Female Anchoritic Literature in Thirteenth-Century England’ in *Equally in God’s Image: Women in the Middle Ages* edited by Julia Bolton Holloway, Joan Bechtold and Constance S. Wright, 170-183 (New York, 1990); ‘Medieval Medical Views of Women and Female Spirituality.’ in *Feminist Approaches to the Body in the Middle Ages*. edited by Linda Lomperis and Sarah Stanberry, 142-167 (Pennsylvania, 1993); ‘The Rule of the Body: the Feminine Spirituality of the *Ancrene Wisse*.’ in *Seeking the Woman in Late Medieval and Renaissance Texts: Essays in Feminist Contextual Criticism*. Edited by Sheila Fisher and Janet Halley, 109-134 (Tennessee, 1989). Alexandra Barratt. ‘Context: Some Reflections on Wombs and Tombs and Inclusive Language’ in *Anchorites, Wombs and Tombs* edited Liz Herbert McAvoy and Mari Hughes-Edwards, 27-40 (Cardiff, 2005).

gendered nature of the inclination towards anchoritism and the response to it.²⁷ Their writings have shown that a closer look at the material culture, literary developments, linguistic changes and religious practices indicates a reliance on gender identity in terms of shifting expressions and meanings. In this respect it is clear that anchoritic texts — treatises, rules and didactic epistles — are highly revealing and important sources for any study of the inside of the anchorhold.

This thesis aims to analyse five extant English anchoritic rules, Goscelin's *Liber Confortatorius*; Aelred's *De Institutione Inclusarum*; the *Ancrene Wisse*; Richard Rolle's *Form of Living* and Walter Hilton's *The Scale of Perfection*, to pursue the changes in the general attitudes of the advisors towards advisee and shifts in discourse of the authors in issues of crucial importance for anchoritic life such as enclosure and virginity and it is certain that such an analysis of the basic themes and motifs of the anchoritic rules written for women in England from eleventh to fourteenth centuries demonstrates that the solitary lives of the anchoress were not immune from the influence of the outside world and the changing religious atmosphere of the society. The current thesis will largely limit itself to examining and identifying the significant changes within the guides, leaving the wider question of the outside influences for further research.

27 Jocelyn Wogan-Browne. 'Inner and Outer: Conceptualizing the Body in *Ancrene Wisse* and Aelred's *De Institutione Inclusarum*' in *Medieval English Religious and Ethical Literature: Essays in Honour of G. H. Russell* edited by Gregory Kratzmann and James Simpson, 192-208 (Cambridge, 1986); Catherine Innes-Parker. 'Fragmentation and Reconstruction: Images of the Female Body in *Ancrene Wisse* and *Katherine Group*' *Comitatus*, 26 (1995):27-52; Nicholas Watson 'The Methods and Objectives of thirteenth-century Anchoritic Devotion' in *The Medieval Mystical Tradition in England* ed. Marion Glasscoe, 132-153 (Woodbridge, 1987).

CHAPTER II

The Advisor-Advisee Relationship: Medieval English Anchorites and their Guides

Until very recently, scholarship on the anchoritic life has been inclined to represent the medieval anchoritic lifestyle as a strange, dark and mysterious one and anchoresses as eccentric solitaries who lived on the margins of the world in both time and space. The anchoress was seen as a woman ‘dead to this world’, entombed in her cell for the purpose of contemplating God. However, a close consideration of the anchoritic treatises shows that anchoresses were neither so immune to the world outside the anchorhold nor literally ‘solitary’ in the meaning of leading a life on their own as they wished. The life in the anchorhold was strictly regulated and controlled from the outside world by authorities: the Catholic Church and within that, the anchoresses’ spiritual advisors. The regulations for the life of an anchoress were shaped around the general tendencies and contemplative trends of the period, as well as by the personal inclinations of the advisors. Therefore it is hard to claim that the anchoritic life was a static, standard one, showing no sign of change and reform over the centuries. Indeed there were as many ascetical lifestyles as anchoritic spiritual advisors.²⁸

Warren makes a list of the ‘extant English works’ written for anchorites as an appendix to her book.²⁹ Beginning with *The Liber Confortatorius*, written by Goscelin and ending with Walter Hilton’s *The Scale of Perfection*, the number of

28 McAvoy and Hughes-Edwards, ‘Intersections of Time and Space.’, 7.

29 Warren, *Anchorites and Their Patrons.*, 294.

guides and their numerous copies, adaptations and translations indicate that there was a considerable desire on the part of English recluses for a rule. In Warren's list there are thirteen guides — some books and some letters — six of which are written for female recluses, all at the request of the recipients: the eleventh-century *Liber Confortatorius*; two letters written by St. Anselm circa 1103-1107; the famous *De Institutione Inclusarum* (circa 1162) of Aelred of Rievaulx written for his recluse sister; the *Ancrene Wisse* (1220-5), perhaps the most widely analysed and explained rule for anchoresses; Richard Rolle's *Form of Living* (circa 1348) and Walter Hilton's huge *The Scale of Perfection* (1380-96).³⁰

These six guidance writings all written for English anchoresses at their request are very crucial sources for the new approaches that are mentioned previously. As all of these six sources were written by male religious to female recluses, a comparative analysis of them in terms of literary/linguistic developments and the discourse of religious writing will reveal the shifts in the male attitude toward female recluses and their lives from the eleventh to the late fourteenth century, and towards authority over them. The texts are also valuable in respect of prominent themes, such as enclosure, virginity, chastity and lust. The authors' attitudes and discourse in explaining and analyzing these themes may indicate the influence of the changes in the religion of the outer world on the secluded, lonely world of medieval English anchoresses in their cells. And such an approach will certainly add much to the idea proposed at the beginning of this chapter, that is, that the anchoritic life was never literally secluded nor standardized; anchoresses were not 'dead' to the world totally, as social and intellectual changes occurring in the world affected their lives.

³⁰ Anselm's letters will not be included in the scope of this thesis, because they are composed as answers to some specific questions asked by the recipient rather than a complete rule for life.

Before going on, it is better to say something about the general qualities of the sources that are listed above. The fame of this genre of male-authored devotional literature for women, written as advice letters, treatises or direct guidebooks, seems to have been the result of the popularity of the anchoritic life among women in England. However, advice literature for those intent on a religious life was not new. Starting from the very early periods of Christianity onwards, male and female ascetics demanded some kind of guide according to which they could shape their lives. The long tradition of guidance written by men for ascetic women started with the writings of many influential theologians and authors such as Tertullian, Cyprian and St. Jerome. Tertullian's *De Cultu Feminarum*, Cyprian's *De Habitu Virginum*, Jerome's letters to Paula, Eustochium and others, St. Ambrose's *De Virginibus ad Marcellinam* and Augustine's Letter 211 are early examples of this genre. The writings of John Cassian, Gregory the Great, Aldhelm, Anselm and many others deal with the issue of leading a true religious life, taking some specific men or women or the generality of the religious of the Christian world as audience. St. Jerome's Letter 22 to Eustochium is one of the most influential works that was invariably taken as a model by authors intending to write some advice for any religious person. Therefore it is not surprising that this genre has its own conventions and discourse.

Anchoritic literature in England formed a part of this huge tradition in offering an ideal religious life to its readers. 'Whether a brief letter or a two hundred page *libellus* all of this literature directs itself to the proper ordering of the life of the anchorite', states Warren.³¹ These works offer explicit pastoral instructions on daily household routines, give some suggestions and support for the metaphorical battle with temptations and some guide for meditations and a mystical life. The material in

31 Warren, *Anchorites and Their Patrons.*, 104.

the books is generally organized as an ‘inner and outer rule’. However, the shorter works tend to choose one or two aspects of the anchoritic life and talk about them in detail instead of taking the anchoritic experience, its rewards, hardships and outcomes as a whole.

Another point that should be made about the English rules for anchoresses — which can generally be applied to advice literature or the epistolary genre as a whole — is that even when addressed to a single individual and someone personally known to the author, the texts were also produced for a wide circulation. *Ancrene Wisse*, written for three young recluse sisters, *De Institutione Inclusarum*, addressed to Aelred’s sister, *Form of Living*, written for Rolle’s female disciple Margaret de Kirkeby, and Hilton’s *The Scale of Perfection* addressed to an unnamed ‘ghostly sister in Jesus Christ’, were all very widely read, influential books of their own ages. *Ancrene Wisse* was translated into Latin and French and was modified many times for different audiences. As far as we know it has in total seventeen versions, nine in English, four in Latin and four in French.³² Aelred’s Latin text survives in six complete manuscript copies.³³ This highly influential text also has many adaptations and translations. Such important, widely read texts as *De Arrha Animae*, and *De Deligendo Deo*, written by Alcher of Clairvaux, contain considerable borrowings from Aelred’s work.³⁴ There are two extant translations of the text into English which indicate the widening of the text’s audience around the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.³⁵ Similarly, Richard Rolle made his comments on the anchoritic life known to a great number of lay and religious readers through his text. Although

32 Yoko Wada. ‘What is *Ancrene Wisse*?’ in *A Companion to Ancrene Wisse* edited by Yoko Wada. (Cambridge, 2003), 2.

33 John Ayto and Alexandra Barratt. *Aelred of Rievaulx’s De Institutione Inclusarum: Two English Versions*. (London, 1984), xxxii.

34 Talbot, ‘The *De Institutis Inclusarum*.’, 169.

35 *Ibid.*, 171.

the *Form of Living*, or the *Form of Perfect Living* as Horstmann entitled it after the title given in the Vernon manuscript,³⁶ was addressed to one female recluse, Margaret de Kirkby, it is certain that it was one of Rolle's most widely read works throughout the fifteenth century. Rolle's works survive in more than four hundred English and at least seventy continental manuscripts almost all copied in the period 1390-1500.³⁷ The last extant English guide book for female recluses is certainly the one that reached the widest audience. Hilton's *The Scale of Perfection*, written for a female recluse, was translated into Latin by the Carmelite Thomas Fyselawe, probably before 1400³⁸ and was printed in 1494 on the command of Margaret Tudor.³⁹ Thus, it is clear that despite the authors' primary aim of answering the needs of individual recluses, these treatises did reach a wider audience and therefore made their authors' voice heard by a great number. In most cases, this may even have been the authors' intention. This fact undoubtedly increases the importance of these works.

Among the extant English guide literature, only Goscelin's *Liber Confortatorius* seems to be somehow solitary as a text. Goscelin's work can be differentiated from all the other texts listed above in two respects. Firstly it was not written on the request of the addressee, but as a result of the author's decision to console and encourage his beloved friend Eve upon learning her secret departure from her nunnery at Wilton for Angers. Secondly, in contrast to the other authors' relaxed and seemingly positive attitude towards the wide circulation of their texts, it seems that Goscelin was really worried that this private letter would become

36 C. Horstmann. *Yorkshire Writers: Richard Rolle and His Followers*. (Cambridge, 1976), VI.

37 Nicholas Watson. *Richard Rolle and the Invention of Authority*. (Cambridge, 1991), 31.

38 Helen Gardner, 'Walter Hilton and the Mystical Tradition in England' *Essays and Studies*. Vol. 22 (1936), 120.

39 Marion Glasscoe. *English Medieval Mystics: Games of Faith*. (London, 1993), 116.

publicized. It is certain that the author was well aware of the possibility that the text will be read by others on the way to Angers. He wrote,

If by chance this pilgrim letter, which I give to the fickle winds but commend to God, falls into the hand of the others, I entreat that it should be returned to whom alone it stands destined, and let no one snatch away in advance what is not made for them. It is a private document of two people, sealed with Christ as intermediary touching first on the duty owed by virginal simplicity and pure affection.⁴⁰

His next sentence explains the reason for this fear of his text being revealed to others. ‘May hissing calumny, the wicked eye, the artful finger, the impure gossip-monger and cackler be far from our pure whispering.’ The author is certainly afraid of causing a scandal as the tone of the letter is deeply emotional and intimate, but this is the only occasion where he admits of a consciousness that someone may think that carnal love and desires tainted their spiritual friendship.⁴¹ Considering the single extant mid twelfth-century manuscript of the text and the absence of references to this work in the others works of the period, as well as the lack of any adaptations or translations, it seems that Goscelin’s text remained loyal to its solitary audience and was transferred to other hands only after the death of Eve.

Although the advice tradition is a long one, it is clear that the issue of ‘spiritual friendship’ was problematic for the writers and the recipients of each text in its own unique way. *Liber Confortatorius*, with its personal and sincere tone, functions as a love letter but certainly not in the conventional sense.⁴² Goscelin, well aware that someone might read the text, first tries to explain the conditions of his

40 Hollis., *Writing the Wilton Women.*, 101; ‘*Si forte in alienas manus aberrauerit hec peregrine epistola inceris uentis dimissa, sed Deo commendata, precamus ut ei reddatur cui soli constat destinata, nec preripiat quisquam non sibi parata. Archanum duorum est Christo medio signatum, virginee simplicitatis et candide dilectionis prelibans officium.*’, C. H. Talbot, ‘The *Liber Confortatorius* of Goscelin of Saint Bertin’ *Analecta Monastica: textes et etudes sur la vie des moines au Moyen Age. Troisme serie.* 3 (1955), 27.

41 Rebecca Hayward. ‘Representations of the Anchoritic Life in Goscelin of St. Bertin’s *Liber Confortatorius*.’ In *Anchorites, Wombs and Tombs Intersections of Gender and Enclosure in the Middle Ages.* edited by Liz Herbert McAvoy and Mari Hughes-Edwards. (Cardiff, 2005), 54.

42 *Ibid.*, 55.

relationship with Eve and then laments her secret departure, the occasion that forced him to compose the letter.

Permit me now for mutual comfort and memory to go over again the unbroken history of our affection and strengthen our perpetual love.... You remember, soul sweetest to me, how at first I provoked your childhood, confident that I would easily correct such a pious soul.⁴³

After reminding Eve of her day of 'marriage with God' and taking the religious habit, his advice to her in her youth to 'make only one petition of the Lord', namely to be wounded with his love, and of their happy days at Wilton Abbey, he goes on:

While the soul was held as a captive of the Lord, while it was eager to go to you through all difficulties with a gift that was especially desirable for you, you departed beyond calling back. ... Indeed you concealed all your counsels from such a special soul as if from an enemy and when it was never imagining such pain you stuck it with your precipitous and unannounced flight...⁴⁴

Here it is clear that the relationship between the author and the addressee is a problematic one. First of all, in all his concern to explain the nature of their relationship, Goscelin seems to be writing not only for Eve and the other unintended readers of the text, but also for himself. Throughout the text from time to time he turns to this issue of the intimate relationship between him and his reader and apparently tries to comfort himself on the purity of their affection.

Actually the tone of Goscelin's *Liber Confortatorius* and the nature of the relationship between Eve and Goscelin have been one of the most severely debated issues related to this text. Many scholars of the field have offered their explanations for Goscelin's highly sincere tone and quite unusual heartfelt admiration of Eve. First

43 Hollis., *Writing the Wilton Women.*, 102; '*Liceat me nunc in mutuum refrigerium ac memoriam perhennem nostre dilectionis recapitulare ordinem ac perpetuam confirmare caritatem; ... Meministi, anima mi dulcissima, ut prima tuam irritauerim infantiam, securus me facile correcturum tam piam animam.*', Talbot, 'The *Liber Confortatorius.*', 28.

44 *Ibid.*, 105; '*Dum tenetur captiua Domini, dum totis angustiis te adire properat cum munere tibi specialius optabili, tu irreuocabilis discessisti. ... Immo omnia consilis tua tam unice anime quasi hosti obserasti, nec unquam cogitantem tantos dolores precipitata et ignorata fuga percussisti, ...*' Talbot, 'The *Liber Confortatorius.*', 29.

and foremost among scholars who have written on *Liber Confortatorius*, Andre Wilmart, argued that even if there is some excess in the expression it would be very wrong to find a scandal there.⁴⁵ It is certain that Wilmart finds the tone a bit excessive, but he does not suggest the possible reasons for it. The first editor of the Latin text of *Liber Confortatorius*, C. H. Talbot, however, seems to have been rather unworried about the tone. He characterises Eve as a determined young girl who ‘took into her head to leave the convent and seek a life of solitude abroad’ and explains Goscelin’s reaction to her departure by describing him as a more mature adult who was worried for the young girl and therefore took up the duty of offering encouragement and consolation.⁴⁶ Talbot does not even raise the possibility of a sexual element in their relationship. Frank Barlow was the first scholar to question the relationship between Eve and Goscelin. He claimed that there are signs of emotional troubles on both sides; Eve’s secret departure and Goscelin’s passionate words in the text suggest a friendship which was probably innocent, yet dangerous.⁴⁷ Thomas Hamilton on the other hand in his PhD thesis rejects Barlow’s sceptical attitude and reassures that their connection is a warm personal relationship free from any hint of scandal and which reflected just Goscelin’s appreciation of Eve’s spiritual and intellectual capabilities.⁴⁸

Scholars were concerned with whether the relationship should be seen as a dangerous one or not, until Patrick McGuire, Irene van Rossum and Mark Williams introduced some new aspects to the issue. Among these later scholars Williams is the one who certainly made the greatest contribution to the debate by explaining that

45 Andre Wilmart. ‘Eve et Goscelin I’ *Revue Benedictine* 46 (1934).

46 Talbot, ‘The *Liber Confortatorius*.’, 22-3

47 Rebecca Hayward. ‘Spiritual Friendship and Gender Difference in the *Liber Confortatorius*.’ in *Writing the Wilton women: Goscelin's Legend of Edith and Liber Confortatorius* edited by Stephanie Hollis, W.R. Barnes, Rebecca Hayward, Kathleen Loncar and Michael Wright. (Turnhout, 2004), 342.

48 *Ibid.*, 343.

Liber Confortatorius can be read as an example of what Stephen Jaeger termed ‘ennobling love’, in his book entitled *Ennobling Love: In Search of a Lost Sensibility*.⁴⁹ Stephen Jaeger claims that ‘ennobling love’ lives mainly in the public sphere, as a means of aristocratic self-expression by means of which virtue seen in the beloved could also be claimed for the lover. According to Jaeger, such kind of love did not only exist in aristocratic circles, but also in the monastic and educational spheres. Williams suggests that Goscelin’s relationship with Eve can be situated in such a context. Goscelin is located in an environment that could give rise to the culture of spiritual friendships based on personal emotion, and Williams remarks that the tensions between traditional monasticism, which was always suspicious of this kind of relationship to some extent, and ennobling love, derived from Cicero and Carolingian writers.⁵⁰ Therefore according to Williams, Goscelin posits his relationship with Eve in the group of differing *amicitiæ* and *caritates* available to a monastic writer of the eleventh century. Goscelin’s text then is balanced between the monastic tradition of spiritual friendship and the ‘Ovidian culture of the eleventh and twelfth centuries, where erotic desire found new forms of expression in both chaste and openly sexual relationships.’⁵¹

It should also be stated that Goscelin’s work also has a confessional quality, a quality which considerably affects the author-reader relationship in the text. Taking St. Augustine’s *Confessions* as a model, Goscelin uses his text as a consolation both for his reader and for himself. From the very first sentences onwards he claims that the ‘torments of the separation’ are owing to his crimes.⁵² And he goes on:

How, I ask, will I console your solitude by exhortation, being myself more in need of consolation, or even inconsolable? ... But I have

49 Stephan Jaeger. *Ennobling Love: In Search of a Lost Sensibility*. (Philadelphia, 1999).

50 Hayward, ‘Spiritual Friendship and Gender Difference’, 345-6.

51 *Ibid.*, 353.

52 Hollis, *Writing the Wilton Women.*, 101.

matter to comfort in you that I do not have in myself. You are in the harbour; I am tossing about. You are settled at home; I am shipwrecked. You have built a nest on a rock; I am dashed against the sands.⁵³

As Barbara Newman puts it, the text is ‘in many ways more about the advisor than the advisee’.⁵⁴ Goscelin, throughout the text, is trying to shape his spiritual formation, by identifying himself with the addressee, and this confessional tone of the text shifts considerably the dynamics of advisor-advisee relationship. Jerome’s letter, which Goscelin uses as a model, and later writings of the same genre; such as Aelred’s *De Institutione Inclusarum* and *Ancrene Wisse*, are unidirectional, written at the request of the addressees and with the possibility of later correspondence between the author and the audience. However, as Otter puts it, Goscelin’s text is ‘not so much mutual as it is reflexive’. Eve does not ask for or give a reply to her advisor’s writings. Goscelin, on the other hand, as both the author and, in a sense, the recipient of the text, plays both roles throughout the text.

It is clear that Goscelin when writing to Eve takes St. Jerome’s letter to Eustochium as an exemplar. St. Jerome, writing to a family friend, uses many different terms to describe his relationship with his addressee such as *filia*, *domina*, *conserva* and *germana*, but certainly Goscelin’s relation to Eve is more complicated. He tends to use the term ‘daughter’ when he is talking about their past relationship at Wilton, but in separation describes their position as that of a lady and her servant. In this respect Eve and Goscelin’s relationship is somewhat unusual. When he is recalling their early relationships he mentions their correspondence and sharing books:

53 *Ibid.*, 110; ‘*Quomodo tandem tuam solitudinem consolabor exhortando, ipse egentior consolationis uel etiam inconsolabilis... Sed habeo materiam solaminis in te, quam non habeo in me. Tu in portu es, ego fluctuo. Tu domi resides, ego naufragir. Tu nidificasti in petra, ego arrenis illidor.*’, Talbot, ‘The Liber Confortatorius.’, 34.

54 Goscelin of St. Bertin : the book of encouragement and consolation/ translated from the Latin with introduction, notes, and interpretive essay by Monika Otter. (Cambridge, 2004), 151.

I won you over with talk, but you conquered me with kindnesses. You gave me that books that I wished for; you praised my Bertin with the greatest eagerness; you hastened to perform all the duties of love. ... Frequent sheets and pages from me brought Christ to you, nor did I lack chaste letters from you.⁵⁵

Goscelin also explicitly expressed his sorrow for having to stay away from Eve when she was living in Wilton:

But as I have noted above, impatience knows no bounds and does not sustain longing. O how often I thought Eagytha blessed, who as she loved you more closely, so by shared place and sex cherished you to herself in presence.⁵⁶

Moreover, the general tendency to portray the female as passive-receptive and the male as active-dominant is twisted in Goscelin's text; Eve is portrayed as a warrior for the Lord and Goscelin as her unwarlike encourager:

Thus consoling and exhorting I desire, sweetest one, to arm you for strength, although I myself am without arms and worthless, without any strength. For although the unwarlike singer or trumpeter does not fight, yet he brings much to those who do.⁵⁷

Here Eve is the one that plays the active role in departing from Wilton to be the warrior of the Lord and Goscelin is the passive one, the one even not consulted before departure, lamenting his loss but unable to do anything other than to try to console her. But still, considering the writing and reading relationship between the author and the reader, it is obvious that the traditional roles of the parties persist underneath the roles mentioned above.

Aelred's *De Institutione Inclusarum* has the same tension in its own way.

Aelred and his sister provide one of several instances in English devotional writings

55 Hollis, 102-4; '*Ego te alloquiis, tu me uicisti, beneficiis. Libros optatos dedisti, Bertinum nostrum affectuosissime extulisti, omnia caritatis officia excurristi. ... Afferebant tibi Christum frequentes membrane et scedule nostre, nec tue uacabant castissime littere.*', Talbot, 'The Liber Confortatorius.', 28-9.

56 *Ibid.*, 12; '*Sed ut memorauit supra, impatientia nescit modum, et desiderium non sustinet. O quotiens Egidam tuam beatam pensabam, que te ut arctius diligebat, ita er loci et sexus unitate presentialiter sibi confouebat!*', Talbot, 'The Liber Confortatorius.', 45.

57 *Ibid.*, 112; '*Consolando itaque et exhortando cupio te, dulcissima, ad uirtutem amare, cum ipse inermis et uacuis sine omni uirtute. Nam imbellis cantor uel tubicen, quanquam non pugnet, multum tamen pugnantibus confert.*', Talbot, 'The Liber Confortatorius.', 36.

of a close relationship between an important man and a devout woman. Although it is certain that the text was primarily composed for Aelred's sister who was probably older than him,⁵⁸ Aelred apparently wrote with the idea of a wider readership in mind:

You, my sister, have never needed, thank God, to be reminded of these things. Yet I decided to include them since it was not for yourself alone that you wished me to write this rule, but also for the young girls who, on your advice, are eager to embrace a life like yours.⁵⁹

The warm tone used by Aelred throughout the text reveals his close friendship with his sister, addressed as *soror* and *virgo*.⁶⁰ The text seems to be quite personal; Aelred notes his sister's literacy, her habitual small appetite and her formal chastising of him for his former faults.

From your very childhood until now, when age is taking its toll of your body, you have scarcely taken enough food to keep yourself alive.⁶¹

...

Up to this point, sister, we have run the same course, we were alike in everything: the same father begot us, the same womb bore us and gave us birth.... Call to mind, if you will, my disgraceful behaviour on account of which you mourned for me and upbraided me often when we were young and after we had grown up.⁶²

These details reveal the intimate relationship between the author and the reader that is most probably rooted in the experiences of a childhood passed together.⁶³ Besides

58 Aelred of Rievaulx, *Treatises: The pastoral prayer / introduction by the late David Knowles*. (Michigan, 1981), 43 n. 2.

59 *Ibid.*, 52; '*Hec tibi soror gracias deo dicenda non fuerant, sed quia non solum propter te sed etiam propter adolescentiores que similem uitam tuo consilio arripere gestiunt, hanc tibi formulam scribi uoluisti, hec inserenda putauit.*', Talbot, 'The "De Institutis Inclusarum"', 182.

60 Talbot, 'The "De Institutis Inclusarum"', 189, 193.

61 *Treatises: The pastoral prayer.*, 59; '*... ab ipsa infancia usque ad senectutem que nunc tua membra debilitat parcissimo cibo uix corpus sustentas, ...*', Talbot, 'The "De Institutis Inclusarum"', 187.

62 *Ibid.*, 93-4; '*Hucusque simul cucurrimus soror, quibus una fuit eademque condicio quos idem pater genuit, idem uenter complexus est, eadem uiscera profuderunt. ... Recole si placet illas feditates meas pro quibus me plangebam et corripiebam sepe puella puerum, femina masculum.*', Talbot, 'The "De Institutis Inclusarum"', 210.

63 Susanna Greer Fein. 'Maternity in Aelred of Rievaulx's Letter to his Sister' in *Medieval Mothering* edited by John Carmi Parsons and Bonnie Wheeler. (New York, 1996), 142.

it would not be inaccurate to say that from time to time it is possible to feel the confessional quality of Goscelin's text in *De Institutione Inclusarum*. Aelred, especially at the third chapter, turns back to his past experiences and mourns for his faults:

Recall now, as I said, my corruption at the time when a cloud of passion exhaled from the murky depths of my fleshly desires and youthful folly without anyone being at hand to rescue me. The excitements of wicked men prevailed over me. They gave me the passion of self-indulgence to drink in the sweet cup of love.⁶⁴

Very much like Goscelin, Aelred tells his audience that he is not worthy of the role of comforter, or in position to comfort and console her, as he himself once was also in pain and failure.

But now let my life serve to bring out all that God has done for your soul. For he separated you from me, as light from darkness, keeping you for himself, leaving me to myself. My God, where did I go off to, where did I fly to, where did I abscond to? Indeed cast forth from your face like Cain I dwelt in the land of Nod, a wanderer and a fugitive, and whoever came across me killed me.... So you exult in these riches which God's grace has preserved for you, while I have the utmost difficulty in repairing what has been broken, recovering what has been lost, mending what has been torn.⁶⁵

Despite his intimate tone while writing to his sister, Aelred discourages relationships between men and women and even between women. He explains that 'since it is impossible to impose a complete ban upon all converse with men' he will

64 *Treatises and Pastoral Prayer.*, 94; '*...recole nunc ut dixi corrupciones meas cum exhalaretur nebula libidinis ex limosa concupiscensia carnis et scatebra pubertatis, nec esset qui eriperet et saluum faceret. Verba enim iniquorum preualuerunt super me, qui in suavi poculo amoris propinabant michi uenenum luxurie, conuenientesque in unum affectionis suauitas et cupiditatis impuritas rapiebant imbellicem adhuc etatem meam per abrupta uiciorum atque mersabant gurgite flagiciorum.*', Talbot, 'The "*De Institutis Inclusarum*"', 210.

65 *Ibid.*, 93-5; '*Iam nunc in me soror aduerte, quanta fecerit deus anime tue. Divicit enim inter te et me quasi inter lucem et tenebras, te sibi conseruans, me michi relinquens. Deus meus quo abii, quo fugi, quo euasi? Eiectus quippe a facie tua sicut Cain, habitauit in Terra Naid, uagus et profugus, et quiquumque inuenit me occidit me. ... Tu ergo in hiis quas tibi diuina gracia seruauit, exultas diuiciis: michi maximus labor incumbit ut fracta redintegrem, amissa recuperem, scissa resarciam.*', Talbot, 'The "*De Institutis Inclusarum*"', 210-11.

make a list of people with whom ‘the recluse may justifiably speak’.⁶⁶ According to Aelred, the recluse may speak to the priest who should preferably be ‘an elderly man of mature character and good reputation’, ‘infrequently and solely for the purpose of confession and spiritual direction’.⁶⁷ His mistrust towards religious as well as secular men is clear:

If someone well-known and held in high esteem — an abbot perhaps or a prior- should wish to speak to you, he should only do so in the presence of a third person. I do not want you to receive any one person too frequently nor to make such a frequent visitor the recipient of your confidences.⁶⁸

The recluse is advised to accept even well-known religious in the presence of a third party obviously to guarantee her reputation. Besides, ‘all conversation with young men or with people of doubtful character’ should be avoided. Aelred’s mistrust towards females is also striking. He frequently refers to female speech as ‘gossip’ or ‘venom’ and warns the recluse specifically against female visitors, even against religious ones:

I do not want anyone to approach her who might undermine her modesty, a little old woman, perhaps, mixed in with the poor, who brings her pious token from some priest or monk, whispering flattering words in her ear and who, as she kisses her hand on receiving an alms, injects her with venom. Moreover the recluse must guard against assuming the obligations of hospitality, even toward her sisters in religion, for along with the good there will come many of the worst type. These will install themselves at her window, and after a pious word or two by way of introduction, will settle down to talk of worldly affairs, interspersed with romance.⁶⁹

66 *Ibid.*, 51

67 *Ibid.*, 51

68 *Ibid.*, 52; ‘*Si aliqua magni nominis uel bone estimacionis persona abbas scilicet aut prior cum inclusa loqui uoluerit, aliquo presente loquatur. Nullam certe personam te frequencius uisitare uellem, nec cum aliqua te crebrius uisitante familiare te uellem habere secretum.*’, Talbot, ‘The “*De Institutis Includarum*”’, 182.

69 *Ibid.*, 48; ‘*Nolo ut insidiatrix pudicie uetula mixta pauperibus accedat propius, deferat ab aliquo monachorum uel clericorum eulogia, non blanda uerba in aure susurret, ne pro accepta elemosina osculans manum, uenenum insibilet. Cauendum preterea est, ut nec ob suscepcionem religiosarum feminarum quodlibet hospitalitatis onus inclusa suscipiat. Nam inter bonas plerumque etiam pessime ueniunt, que ante incluse fenestram discumbentes premissis ualde paucis de religione sermonibus as secularia deuoluuntur.*’, Talbot, ‘The “*De Institutis Includarum*”’, 179.

Here it is possible to offer two explanations for this particular suspicion of females as intruders that may bring the ‘venom’ of worldly affairs into anchoress’s cell. Firstly it may well be argued that Aelred, aware of the fact that a recluse might be more relaxed in her relations with women than men, felt obliged to remind her that females may also be harmful to her chastity and peace in her cell. Secondly, and more appropriately I guess, it can be said that this specific mistrust of women and Aelred’s continuous warnings against female visitors are indicators of his general ideas about women. It should not be forgotten that Aelred was a devout Cistercian and Cistercians were never neutral on the subject of women.⁷⁰ Actually, their hostility is visible through both the actions of the Order in general and in the writings of important Cistercian men. In this respect it is possible to claim that Aelred had certain doubts about female nature and therefore felt it necessary to remind his reader the danger that may come from women.

Although we do not know the precise nature of the relationship between the author and audience in *Ancrene Wisse*, it also contains a tension concerning the relationship between men and enclosed women. The author of *Ancrene Wisse* lends a personal tone to the work by sprinkling the direct address ‘my dear sisters’ throughout, occasionally dropping into the singular. This direct address seems suggestive of a homiletic style derived from vernacular preaching.⁷¹ However, compared to the tones of *Liber Confortatorius* and *De Institutione Inclusarum*, *Ancrene Wisse* is obviously closer to the latter, which the anonymous writer uses as a model for himself. The attitudes of the writers of *De Institutione Inclusarum* and *Ancrene Wisse* are not identical though. Compared to the cautious attitude of Aelred it is certain that the author of *Ancrene Wisse* is stricter in his approach. There is no

70 Fein, ‘Maternity in Aelred.’, 140.

71 *Ancrene Wisse* edited by Robert Hasenfratz, Introduction. For all quotes from Middle English edition see, <<http://www.lib.rochester.edu/camelot/teams/hasenfratz.htm>> July, 2007.

familial connection between the author and the three girl recluses, but the author knows much about their present living conditions, their lifestyles before they were enclosed and their families. He wrote;

You, my dear sisters, are the anchoresses whom I know who have the least need of comfort for these temptations, except only for sickness. For I know of no anchoress who may have with more comfort and more honour all that she might need than you three have, our Lord be thanked. For you do not worry about food or about clothing, either for you or for your maidens. ... There is much talk of you, what noble women you are, sought after for your goodness and generosity, and sisters of one father and one mother - in the blossom of your youth [you] forsook all the world's joys and became anchoresses.⁷²

The anonymous author of *Ancrene Wisse* is certainly against women's taking counsel from another male even if they are professed religious men. His great mistrust in men in general and in religious men in particular is striking.

Our Lord has said 'for may come to you clothed in lambs' fleece who are raging wolves. Do not put much trust on people of the world; trust religious even less; and do not wish too much of their acquaintance.'⁷³

The reason for this 'highly protective' and commanding attitude of Aelred and the anonymous author of *Ancrene Wisse* towards their female religious addressees may be explained in two ways. Firstly, it is clear that both authors regarded man-woman relationships of any kind as a spiritual hazard. The line between sexual and non-sexual relations is very thin and therefore it is really easy to progress from chaste affection into uncontrollable desire. The author of *Ancrene Wisse* wrote:

Do not speak to any man often or long without a witness who can hear the conversation; even for your confessions, let there be a third person present, at any rate in the same house, or in some place from which he

72 *Ibid.*; 'Ye, mine leove sustren, beoth theo ancren thet ich i-knowe thet habbeth lest neode to vrovre ayeane theos temptaciuns, bute one of sicnesse. Vor mid more eise ne mid more men[s]ke not ich none ancre thet habbe al thet hire neode is, there ye threo habbeth, ure Loverd beo hit i-thoncked. Vor ye ne thencheth nowiht of mete, ne to ou ne to ouwer meidenes... Muche word is of ou, hu gentile wummen ye beoth, for godleic ant for vreolice i-yirned of monie, and sustren of one veder ant of one moder - ine blostme of ower yuwethe vorheten alle wor[l]des blissen, ant bicomene ancren.'

73 *The Ancrene Riwe: (the Corpus Ms., Ancrene Wisse) / translated by M.B. Salu; with an introduction by Gerard Sitwell; and a preface by J.R.R. Tolkien.* (Exeter, 1990), 29; '“Ah witeth ow ant beoth warre,” he seith, ure Laverd, “for monie cumeth to ow i-schrud mid lombes fleos, ant beoth wedde wulves.” Wortliche leveth lut, religiuse yet leas, ne wilni ye nawt to muchel hare cuththunge.'

can see you. I do not say this from any distrust of you, my dear sisters, nor of any others like you, but because the truth is often disbelieved and the innocent are calumniated for lack of a witness, as Joseph was by the wanton woman in Genesis.⁷⁴

Anchoresses are even warned against those who came for official visitations:

If the bishop comes to see you go to him at once; but if he asks to see your face then humbly beg that in this matter you may behave to him as you have done and do to everyone else. If he insists, see to it that it is for a very short time; drop your veil very soon and drawback.⁷⁵

Aelred's attitude towards this kind of relations is similar. Afraid of any kind of scandal or unintended gossip he strictly limits persons whom anchoresses may accept as visitors and even when anchoresses accept someone they are suggested to keep their silence:

So the recluse should always have her face veiled when speaking with a man; she should avoid looking at him and only to listen to him with fearful reserve.⁷⁶

The relationship between the spiritual advisor and the anchoresses is seen as a unique one and one that is basically on paper, therefore any kind of spiritual friendship between the anchoress and an outsider is seen hazardous lest it dirty the spirit of the anchoress.

The second explanation for this protective attitude of the writers can be that, for many medieval writers, even for the ones who were women's spiritual advisors,

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 30; 'Withuten witenesse of wummon other of wepmon the ow mahe i-heren, ne speoke ye with na mon ofte ne longe, ant tah hit beo of schrift. Allegate i the ilke hus, other ther he mahe i-seon toward ow, sitte the thridde, bute yef the ilke thridde other stude trukie. This nis nawt for ow, leove sustren, i-seid, ne for othre swucche; nawt-for-thi, the treowe is ofte mistrowet, ant te saclese bilohen, as Josep i Genesy of the gale leafdi, for wone of witenesse.'

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 27-8; 'Yef bisch[o]p kimeth to seon ow, hihith sone towart him, ah sweteliche bisecheth him, yef he bit to seon ow, thet ye moten ther-onont halden ow towart him as ye habbeth i-don ant doth to alle othre. Yef he wule allegate habben a sihthe, lokith thet hit beo ful scheort - the veil anan adun, ant draheth ow bihinden.'

⁷⁶ *Treatises and Pastoral Prayer.*, 52; 'Et ideo inclusa etiam facie uelata loqui debet cum uiro et eius cauere conspectum, cui cum timo/re solum debet prestare auditum.' Talbot, 'The "De Institutis Inclusionarum"', 182.

women were primarily responsible for male sexual temptation.⁷⁷ *Ancrene Wisse* author deals with this issue at length and states:

For this reason it was commanded in God's name in the Old Law that a pit should always be covered; and if an animal fell into an uncovered pit, the man who uncovered had to pay the penalty. These are very terrible words for the woman who shows herself to men's sight. It is she who is represented by the man who uncovers the pit. The pit is her fair face, and her white neck, and her light eye, and her hand if she holds it out before his eyes... 'Animal' here means the animal man who gives no thought to God and who does not use his reason as a man ought to do, but goes on to fall into the pit of which I am speaking, if he finds it uncovered. But the judgment on the woman who uncovers the pit is very stern...⁷⁸

Therefore it is clear that the author is against any kind of male-female relationship, not only because of any possibility of sexual relationship between the parties, but also because of the fear that one of the parties may cause the other one to sin and thus indirectly may contaminate his or her spiritual purity.

The tone of the authors of these last two works, namely *De Institutione Inclusarum* and *Ancrene Wisse*, sounds certainly more authoritarian than the tone in *Liber Confortatorius*. Goscelin, although he is a lot older than Eve, seems friendly in his advice and generally praises Eve's intellectual and spiritual capacities while informing her on any matter. Goscelin, obviously admiring the intellectual capacity of the recluse, tells her to sharpen her intellect:

And thus I pray, beseech and implore this: that you take possession of the holy banquet of sacred volumes with avidity and praiseworthy gluttony, and hunger for it as for the bread of life and thirst for the fountain of life, to sharpen your little intellect, to draw it on with

77 Anne Clark Bartlett. 'A Reasonable Affection: Gender and Spiritual Friendship in Middle English Devotional Literature' in *Vox Mystica: Essays on Medieval Mysticism*. edited by Anne Clark Bartlett, Thomas H. Bestul, Janet Gobel and William E. Pollard, 131-145. (Cambridge, 1995), 136.

78 *The Ancrene Riwe*, 25; 'For-thi wes i-haten on Godes laye thet put were i-wriyen eaver, ant yef ani were unwriyen ant beast feolle ther-in, he the unwreah the put hit schulde yelden. This is a swithe dredful word to wummon thet schaweth hire to wepmones echne. Heo is bitacned bi theo thet unwrith the put - the put is hire feire neb, hire hwite swire, hire lichte echnen, hond, yef ha halt forth in his echye-sihthe.... Best is the beastlich mon thet ne thenchet naut on God, ne ne noteth naut his wit as mon ach to donne, ach secheth for to fallen in this put thet ich spec of, yef he hit open fint. Ach the dom is ful strong to theo the the put unlideth.'

nectar, to fill your lamp with oil and to kindle it more and more with heavenly love. ... I should wish that the window of this cell of yours is large to admit such an extensive library itself to be with you, or that you can read it through the window if it is brought up to it from outside.⁷⁹

Moreover, as Gopa Roy claims, Goscelin's high regard of Eve is also indicated in his treatment and significant omissions of some common stories and themes. First of all, he does not, as might well be expected, play on the word 'Eve' in order to bring his reader into any particular relationship with the sinful Eve. Very early in the Book I, after the salutation, at a point where one would expect to see the introduction of a misogynist viewpoint on the first Eve, Goscelin nullifies such ideas and disassociates the recluse Eve from the sinful one by a description of her profession, 'She is Eve the ward of Christ, left to God alone...' and after a few sentences he explicitly connects her to Mary, 'May the one who took up Mary take her up as he gathers and enfolds all the souls...'. Van Rossum claims that when Goscelin discusses the Fall and Redemption, he uses the Adam and Christ pair, instead of the more usual Eve and Mary one.⁸⁰ Moreover, even when Goscelin refers to the first Eve as the women who disobeyed God, he stresses that the blame was not hers alone. In Book III he writes: 'That snake, the seducer of the old Eve, whispers with a flattering voice', reminding the contemporary recluse, Eve, of the temptations to which she may also be subjected. Yet, on the other hand, shifts the focus of blame somewhat from the old Eve.⁸¹ In comparison to the attitudes of influential writers of the advice genre, such as Tertullian and Goscelin's obvious model Jerome, who did not hesitate in Letter 22

79 Hollis., *Writing the Wilton Women.*, 163; 'Itaque hoc oro, obsecro, et imploro, ut sacrorum uoluminum mensam sanctam auiditate et laudabili ingluuie peruadas, hanc ut uite panem ut uite fontem esurias et sitias, que ingeniolum tuum exacuatur, nectare trahat, lampadem tuam oleo impinguet, atque ad supernam caritatem magis magisque inflammet. ... Ipsa quoque ut possit admittere bibliotecam tam capacem, in longum esse uelim huius celle fenestram, aut per fenestram te legere posse a foris appositam.', Talbot, 'The Liber Confortatorius.', 80.

80 Rebecca Hayward and Stephanie Hollis. 'The Female Reader in the *Liber Confortatorius.*' in *Writing the Wilton women: Goscelin's Legend of Edith and Liber Confortatorius* edited by Stephanie Hollis, W.R. Barnes, Rebecca Hayward, Kathleen Loncar and Michael Wright. (Turnhout, 2004), 388.

81 *Ibid.*, 390.

to state that ‘Death came through Eve, life through Mary’, it is certain that Goscelin does not wish to refer to the idea that Eve bears the sin of the Fall and that therefore all women, as children of Eve, bear the same extra guilt. Secondly, in his account of the story of a certain virgin threatened with a brothel, contrary to Ambrose’s and many others’ narration of the story, he places an unusual emphasis on the part of the young man who exchanged his clothes with the virgin in order to save the virgin who was ready to lose her virginity and life if this was God’s will. According to Roy, on a more personal level the relationship between Eve and Goscelin affects his reading and narration of the story and therefore Goscelin makes an addition on the eternal companionship the virgin and her young saviour may seek in heaven which does not exist in Ambrose’s narration.⁸²

This difference in tone employed by the authors is partly related to the aforementioned confessional and reflexive quality of Goscelin’s work. Besides, it is clear that Eve had a better education than Aelred’s sister or the anchoresses to whom *Ancrene Wisse* was dedicated. The wide scope of Eve’s education at Wilton is seen through the variety of examples Goscelin gives throughout the text from sources such as Horace’s and Seneca’s writings and various Christian texts and through the reading list he offers. This knowledge of and respect for Eve’s intellectual abilities might have been one of the factors that caused Goscelin’s gender-free, non-authoritarian and friendly tone.

It is clear that Goscelin’s text has very little of the rhetoric towards female readers suggested by St. Jerome and idealised by Aelred and the author of *Ancrene Wisse*. In Aelred’s *De Institutione Inclusarum*, the emphasis is not on what to read

82 Gopa Roy. “‘Sharpen Your Mind with the Whetstone of Books’: The Female Recluse as Reader in Goscelin’s *Liber Confortatorius*, Aelred of Rievaulx’s *De Institutione Inclusarum* and the *Ancrene Wisse*.” in *Women, the Book and the Godly: Selected Proceedings of the St. Hilda’s Conference*, edited by Lesley Smith and Jane H. M. Taylor, 113-122. (Cambridge, 1995), 116.

but on what reading should lead one to. Aelred focuses not on the span of the reading but on its depth; on a movement from reading the texts to meditation on them, and towards contemplation. Roy carefully noticed that the author does not use *lege* (read), but *cogite* (ponder) and *revolve* (reflect upon) and therefore defines the anchoress's reading as meditative and reflective.⁸³ He believes that this reading that is closer to prayer will be beneficial to her spiritual improvement:

... if your wily enemy encroaches on your sleep and disturbs your conscience with evil thoughts of one sort or another; if reminds you of pleasures... Think of Agnes, who reckoned gold, silver, expensive clothes, precious stones and all the pomp of worldly glory as so much dung.⁸⁴

Here Aelred assumes that the story is read and shows her how to use her knowledge of the text when she needs it.

The author of *Ancrene Wisse* similarly reminds recluses of reading the Holy Scriptures and meditating, 'even if they don't understand it'. It seems that the author of *Ancrene Wisse* is more inclined to warn women against idle talk and preaching rather than encouraging them to read more to widen their intellect:

Do not preach to any man, nor let any man ask you for advice or give you advice; give your advice only to women. St. Paul forbade women to preach. ... Do not chastise any man nor blame him for any fault except that of over-familiarity with you. ... An anchoress is only expected to look after herself and her servants. Let each keep to her own work and not take on herself that of others. Many people, intending good, do great evil, for, as I have already said, sin is often concealed under an appearance of good. Through giving such rebukes, an anchoress has sometimes brought about, between herself and her priest, either a harmful love or a great enmity.⁸⁵

83 *Ibid.*, 118

84 *Treatises and Pastoral Prayer.*, 65; '*Si uigilanti subito, aut/ex quiete soporis, aut arte temtatoris calor corporis fuerit excitatus, et in sompnum callidus hostis inuexerit, diuersisque cogitacionibus quietem pudicie infestauerit, proposuerit delicias, ... Cogita Agnem beatissimam, a qua aurum, argentum, uestes preciosissime, lapides preciosi, et tota secularis glorie pompa, quasi quedam stercora sunt reputata.*', Talbot, 'The "De Institutis Inclusarum"', 191.

85 *The Ancrene Riwe*, 31; '*Ne preachi ye to na mon, ne mon ne easki ow cunsail ne ne telle ow. Readeth wummen ane. Seint Pawel forbeot wummen to preachin. ... Na wepmon ne chastie ye, ne edwiten him his untheaw, bute he beo the over-cuthre.... Ancre naveth for-te loken bute hire ant hire meidnes. Halde euch hire ahne meoster, ant nawt ne reawi othres. Moni weneth to do wel the deth al*

As it is seen, the reason for anchoresses' remaining silent and not showing her intellectual capacity is again in part the fear of an impure action. Besides, reading is clearly not given prominence in *Ancrene Wisse*. As Robertson claims, fragments on the information about books and reading suggests that the anchoresses had neither the time nor the training to be studious.⁸⁶ It is certain that reading was not for the purpose of scholarship; indeed in *De Institutione Inclusarum* and *Ancrene Wisse* women were explicitly discouraged from being teachers and having scholarly pursuits, in fear of a danger to the chastity of the anchoress. In both texts women are encouraged to read the Bible, but obviously for the purpose of meditation. According to Robertson, it is unlikely that the anchoress

would have engaged in the kind of active study of the Bible that monks might have; nor would she have been likely to have been reading the wide variety of theological, philosophical and literary material read by monks or even by the earlier recluses such as Eve of Wilton, praised for her knowledge of patristic and classical works.⁸⁷

Therefore it can be argued that, as a result of the lack of personal ties and a relationship based on mutual respect, such as the one seen in the case of Goscelin and Eve, the attitudes of the authors of *De Institutione Inclusarum* and *Ancrene Wisse* became apparently more authoritarian and oppressive.

However, the change in attitude towards the addressees in these texts may also be explained by some general shifts in the guidance discourse, rather than personal circumstances. Goscelin wrote about sixty years earlier than Aelred and therefore his relaxed attitude towards her relations with other men or women and most apparently his non-authoritarian tone are qualities he borrowed from the

to wundre, for as ich seide ear, under semblant of god is ofte i-hulet sunne. Thurh swuch chastiement haveth sum ancre arearet bitweonen hire ant hire preost othe a falsinde luvē othe a muche weorre.

⁸⁶ Elizabeth Robertson. 'Savoring "Scientia": the Medieval Anchoress Reads *Ancrene Wisse*.' in *A companion to Ancrene Wisse*. edited by Yoko Wada. (Suffolk, 2003), 126.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 128.

previous generation.⁸⁸ Gopa Roy explains that the guide books written in the thirteenth century were characterised by less flexibility and the firmer establishment of male authority on female religious experience compared to the eleventh-century ones.⁸⁹ Actually it is possible to carry this argument further by stating that male dominance over all kinds of female religious experiences started to be felt with more pressure after the twelfth century. Therefore it is possible to claim that the attitudes and discourses of the authors of this late period were shaped in accordance with the general tendencies of their age to a great extent.

The foundation of the Cistercians and the writings of the influential theologians from this Order had a certain impact on the attitude towards female religious. From the very beginning onwards the negative attitude of the Order towards female religious was clear. Bernard of Clairvaux set an example for his numerous followers when he argued in his *Sermones in Cantica* that 'it is easier to raise the dead than to be alone with a woman and not to have sex.'⁹⁰ There was a strong reaction in many Orders against the large numbers of women who wished to be a part of them, which mainly aroused such kind of fears of scandal and gossip. It was thought that women inevitably contributed to indiscipline, and women were believed to be receptive to all kinds of religious prophecy and to be unrestrained in their relationships with their leaders or patrons.⁹¹ The events such as the scandalous relationship between Heloise and Abelard and the pregnancy of a nun in the double Gilbertine monastery of Watton certainly added much to this hostile attitude towards male-female relationships, even those under the control of the Church. Two strongly anti-female views of the thirteenth century, the Aristotelian — woman as a defective

88 Goscelin of St. Bertin: *the book of encouragement and consolation*, 152.

89 Roy, "'Sharpen Your Mind with the Whetstone of Books'.", 122.

90 Bartlett, 'A Reasonable Affection.', 135.

91 Brenda M Bolton. 'Mulieres Sanctae' In *Women in Medieval Society* edited by Brenda M. Bolton and Susan Mosher Stuard. (Philadelphia, 1993), 143.

male — and the moralist — women as a threat to the salvation of men — undoubtedly added much to this hostile attitude of religious towards females.⁹² In short, ‘as the Church became increasingly institutionalised, so it was less able to tolerate any disruptive force in its midst.’⁹³

Although making generalizations is generally to be avoided, the contrast between the general attitudes of the eleventh century towards religious issues and those of the thirteenth is striking. Many historians such as Cantor, Southern and Duby describe the eleventh and twelfth centuries as a period of confident activity, and of intellectual expansion and the thirteenth century as more rigid, repressive and even hysterical. The great shift in the representation of and attitude towards women in the records of the period can be explained as one of the faces of this general intellectual constriction. Southern notes that there was a great confidence among twelfth-century thinkers in their ability to absorb and build on all that the past could offer and contrasts this with the later attempts to suppress Aristotelian ideas and teachings.⁹⁴ The thirteenth century was certainly less tolerant towards outsiders. When men praised orthodoxy over everything, they started to see all identifiable groups from within or outside as potential dangers. Therefore women and Jews were marginalised to a great extent.

When we come to the late Middle Ages, in writers such as Richard Rolle and Walter Hilton we see further dimensions of the relationship between male advisor and devout female. Neither of these fourteenth-century texts gives much information on the addressees. We know that, like all the others except *Liber Confortatorius*, the *Form of Living* and the *Scale of Perfection* were written on the request of their

92 Joan M. Ferrante. *Woman as Image in Medieval Literature from the twelfth century to Dante*. (New York, 1975), 3.

93 Bolton, ‘Mulieres Sanctae’, 143.

94 Ferrante, *Women as Image*, 11.

readers whom the authors knew personally. Rolle, writing to Margaret de Kirkeby and Hilton to his anonymous ‘ghostly sister in Jesus’, both had difficulties in legitimizing or justifying their guidance to women.⁹⁵ It is impossible to find much about Hilton’s ‘ghostly sister’ in the *Scale of Perfection*. Still, it is certain that the treatise was not written to an imaginary character invented by the author, but for a real person prepared to hear the advice of her master. The only thing we know about the anonymous woman is that she was leading an enclosed solitary life. The nature of the relationship between Rolle and his addressee is also unknown. It is almost certain that the work was composed in the last year of Rolle’s life upon Margaret’s becoming a recluse.⁹⁶ If R. M. Clay is right in her argument, Margaret de Kirkeby is actually Margaret La Boteler, from the la Boteler family of Skerbrole about nine miles from Hampole.⁹⁷

Rolle’s and Hilton’s writings can be clearly differentiated from those of Goscelin, Aelred and the author of *Ancrene Wisse*. Firstly, although it would be unwise to argue with certainty, Warren’s general division of anchoritic guides into the high medieval penitential model and the late medieval contemplative one seems to be an important and useful point. Warren wrote:

Anchorites in the eleventh twelfth and thirteenth centuries were described as ascetics in their own literature, and it was only with the flowering of mysticism in the fourteenth century that this focus changed. Soon a similar change can be noted in a strikingly different group of sources. The shift of emphasis in the literary tradition — the expectation that the anchorite will be contemplative as well as a penitential ascetic is paralleled in the Episcopal registers and the royal rolls of the fifteenth century.⁹⁸

95 H. E. Allen. *Writings Ascribed to Richard Rolle Hermit of Hampole and Materials for his Biography*. (New York, 1927), 82; *Walter Hilton the Ladder of Perfection* translated by Leo Sherly-Price (New York, 1988), xvii.

96 Allen, *Writings Ascribed to Richard Rolle*., 83.

97 Clay, *The Hermits and Anchorites*., 143.

98 Warren, *Anchorites and Their Patrons*., 115.

It is clear that high medieval guides deal extensively with asceticism as a way leading to contemplation. Late medieval texts on the other hand prefer to focus on the process and rewards of that contemplation. Yet as Hughes-Edward argues 'it is by no means clear that medievals understood penitence and contemplation to be as mutually exclusive as Warren constructs them'.⁹⁹ It is true that the contemplative material in the later texts is clearly more developed and analysed, but the threefold contemplative system is also seen in the previous texts such as *De Institutione Inclusarum* or *Ancrene Wisse*. Aelred describes the contemplative experience in terms of an ascent:

How often he came to your side to bring you loving consolation when you were dried up by fear, how often he infused himself into your inmost being when you were on fire with love, how often he shed upon you the light of spiritual understanding when you were singing psalms or reading, how often he carried you away with a certain unspeakable longing for himself when you were at prayer, how often he lifted you up your mind from the things of earth and introduced it into the delights of heaven and joys of Paradise.¹⁰⁰

The author of *Ancrene Wisse* also has similar comments:

True anchoresses are called birds because they leave the earth, that is the love of all worldly things, and, because the longing of their hearts towards heavenly things, fly upward towards heaven; and although they fly high in a noble and holy life; they hold their heads low, in gentle humility... A bird, however, sometimes comes down to the ground to look for food, because of the needs of the body.¹⁰¹

99 Mari Hughes-Edwards. "“Wrapt as if to the third heaven”: Gender and Contemplation in Late Medieval Anchoritic Guidance Writing’ in *Anchorites, Wombs and Tombs Intersections of Gender and Enclosure in the Middle Ages*. edited by Liz Herbert McAvoy and Mari Hughes-Edwards. (Cardiff, 2005), 132.

100 *Treatises and Pastoral Prayer*, 96; ‘*Quociens pre timore arefcenti pius consolator astabat, quociens estuanti pre amore ipse se tuis uisceribus infundebat, quociens psallentem uel legentem spiritalium sensuum lumine illustrabat, quociens orantem/ in quoddam ineffabile desiderium sui rapiebat, quociens mentem tuam a terrenis subtractam ad celestes delicias et paradysicas amenitates transportabat.*’, Talbot, ‘The “*De Institutis Inclusarum*”’, 212.

101 *The Ancrene Riwe*, 58-9; ‘*Treowe ancras beoth briddes i-cleopede, for ha leaveth the eorthe-thet is, the lufe of alle wortliche thinges - ant thurh yimunge of heorte to heovenliche thinges fleoth uppart toward heovene. Ant tah ha fleon hehe with heh lif ant hali, haldeth thah the heaved lah thurh milde eadmodnesse,... Brid, tah, other-hwile for-te sechen his mete, for the flesches neode, lihteth to ther eorthe.*’

Moreover both authors define the whole experience of contemplation as one of flying and remind their readers that even anchoresses are obliged to answer some bodily necessities. In another instance, the author of *Ancrene Wisse* even describes the moment of fusion with the divine:

After the kiss of peace in the Mass, when the priest communicates, forget the world, ... and with burning love embrace your Beloved who has come down from heaven to your heart's bower, and hold Him fast until he has granted you all that you ask.¹⁰²

Obviously, the high medieval recluse was as ravished by love as her late medieval counterpart.

This fact does not eliminate Warren's comments and ideas on the issue though. Keeping in mind that high medieval texts also had some contemplative qualities, we may follow Warren's argument that there is an outburst of the contemplative idea in fourteenth-century anchoritic rules and that this outburst certainly affected the advisor-advisee relationships in the texts. Warren connects the shift of emphasis from asceticism to contemplation to the popular piety movements of the fourteenth century.¹⁰³ It is clear that the tone of the anchoritic texts and therefore the world in the anchorholds had changed substantially by the fourteenth century.

With the general shift of the basic theme of the works from the sinful nature of the human body and soul to the joys of contemplation, the attitude of male authors towards females also changed. When the matter was the sinfulness of human beings, men had at least one opportunity to accuse women of more guilt, basing their arguments on the Genesis narration of the Fall. Ignoring this sinful nature and focusing on the joys of religious life and its rewards, on the other hand, freed women

¹⁰² *The Ancrene Riwe*, 14; 'Efter the measse-cos, hwen the preost sacreth - ther foryeoteth al the world, ther beoth al ut of bodi, ther i sperclinde luv bicluppeth ower leofmon, the into ower breostes bur is i-liht of heovene, ant haldeth him hete-veste athat he habbe i-yettet ow al thet ye eaver easkith.'
¹⁰³ Warren, *Anchorites and Their Patrons.*, 122.

from this extra guilt to some extent and therefore set a more equal basis for the sexes. In complete contrast to the repeated warnings and severe punishments against male-female relationships in the previous texts, fourteenth-century texts insist that spiritual friendship between the sexes is a rational and virtuous alliance, not a shortcut to moral disorder, as they represent female and male religious as parallel partners in intellect, zeal, and worth before God, and as equal sharers in religious profession.

As Bartlett argues, these fourteenth-century works shift their emphasis from sex and gender to religious vocation by adopting a ‘discourse of familiarity’.¹⁰⁴ This discourse is certainly modelled on the long tradition of the Latin epistles of spiritual friendship which circulated primarily between male author and communities rather than specific addressees. Bartlett explains that she uses the word ‘familiarity’ in such a way as to encompass both the Latin meaning of *familia* and more flexible senses of ‘proximity’ and ‘intimacy’. According to Bartlett this discourse, which she terms ‘discourse of familiarity’, challenges the traditional medieval hierarchy of God, man, and woman and offers an attractive alternative to the misogynistic piety of the earlier English devotional literature. Such a friendship assumes that both members of the male-female relationship must be considered spiritually equal and therefore in a position to teach and learn from the other at the same time. Bartlett adds that, devotional texts that employ this discourse also adopt some other qualities of the Latin epistle genre, such as ‘the author’s humble address to the reader and his protestations of unworthiness; his characterisations of female audiences as ‘ghostly sisters’, the development of the discourse of gender equality and occasionally explicit refutations of misogynistic commonplaces.¹⁰⁵

104 Bartlett, ‘A Reasonable Affection.’, 137

105 *Ibid.*, 137.

Considering Rolle's work it is clear that his text has some of the basic qualities of this 'discourse of familiarity' that Bartlett explains. His modest tone is clear throughout the text:

But now may thou ask me, and say: 'Thou spekes sa mykel of lufe, tel me, what is lufe?' ... Thir er hard questyons to lere til a febyll man and a fleschly, als I am. Bot never-the-latter tharfore I sal nocht lette that I ne sall schew mt wytt, and als me thynk that it may be; for I hope in the helpe of Jhesu, that es wel of lufe and pees and swetnes.¹⁰⁶

Although it is hard to claim that Rolle explicitly attacks misogynist arguments, he certainly addresses his audience with a non-authoritarian tone and his general discourse is not gendered at all. First of all, his text is free from any arguments based on the unworthiness or sinfulness of female body. It seems that the only thing that matters for Rolle is the quality and quantity of love towards Jesus. Instead of the twelfth and thirteenth-century texts' obsessive attitude towards female chastity and purity, Rolle sees humility and charity and love as virtues *par excellence* for both and male and female contemplatives.

Lufe es a byrnand yernyng in God, with a wonderfull delyte and sykernes. God es light and byrnyng. Light clarifies oure skyll; byrnynh kyndels oure covayties, that we desyre nocht bot hym. Lufe es a lyf, copuland togedyr the lufand and the lufed. For mekenes makes us swete to God; purete joynes us tyll God; lufe makes us ane with God.¹⁰⁷

Moreover, as Rolle does not comment on the issue of virginity/chastity at length, we do not see any remarks on sinful nature of women, on the perception of female body as a possible danger to the male soul and body. And as a result of this relaxed attitude towards the female body, he does not talk about enclosure or the woman's relationships with other men and women. Even when he says something on the issue, he does not seem as authoritarian and controlling as the authors of *De Institutione*

106 Richard Rolle. 'The Form of Living.' in *English Mystics of the Middle Ages* edited by Barry Windeatt. (Cambridge, 1994), 58.

107 *Ibid.*, 58.

Inclusarum or *Ancrene Wisse*. In this respect his text is also free from all the misogynistic ideas that can be observed in the anchoritic literature of the previous centuries.

Walter Hilton's text has many similarities with that of Rolle. Humility and love are praised above all other virtues of the soul and the body:

Prepare yourself, therefore, to be clothed with His likeness -that is, in humility and charity which are His livery- and then He will admit you to His friendship and show you His secrets. ... there is no virtue that you can acquire or work that you can do that will make you like our Lord without humility and charity, for these two are God's especial livery.¹⁰⁸

He is so humble and sincere in tone throughout the text that he continually states that those ideas mentioned are just his opinions and should not be taken too seriously. He wrote:

My answer to this is that, rightly understood, what they say is true, and is not contrary to what I have said. For in English the Name of Jesus means nothing other than *health* or *healer*.¹⁰⁹

He is so intimate in tone that he relates his own experiences as examples to his reader:

Indeed, my own life I like this; I feel myself so wretched, so weak, so worldly, and so far from the full experience of what I have been saying that I can do nothing but beg for mercy and long for state of perfection, trusting that of our Lord of His grace will bring me to it in the Joy of heaven. Do the same, and do better if God gives you grace.¹¹⁰

108 Walter Hilton, *The Ladder of Perfection; translated by Leo Sherley-Price with an introduction by Clifton Wolters*. (London, 1988), 62-3; '*Forthi schape thee for to be araied in his likenes, that is in mekenesse and charité, whiche is his lyveré, and thanne wole he hoomli knowe thee and schewe to thee his privytee. There is no vertu ne werk that thou mai doo mai make thee like to oure Lord, withouten mekenesse and charitee; for these aren special Goddis lyveré.*', for Middle English quotes from *The Ladder of Perfection* see Walter Hilton, *The Scale of Perfection* edited by Thomas H. Bestul <<http://tigger.uic.edu/~tbestul/scaleI.htm>> July, 2007.

109 *Ibid.*, 53; '*As unto this y mai seie as me thenketh, that there seiyngge, yif it be wel undirstonde, is sooth, ne hit is not contrarie to that that y have seid. For this name Jhesu is not ellis for to seie upon Ynglisch but heelere or hele.*'

110 *Ibid.*, 17; '*For soothli that is my liff. I feele me so wrecchid, and so freel, and so fleischli, and so fer fro the trewe feelyngge fro that that I speke and have spoke, that y ne can not ellis but crie merci, and desire after as y may with hope that oure Lord wol bryngge me therto of his grace in the blisse of hevene. Do thou soo, and betir, after that God yeveth thee grace.*'

It should be stated that this sharing of personal experiences with the reader also reveals the fact that the author does not differentiate himself and his experiences as a male from those of his female reader. Therefore such instances throughout the text disclose the author's gender-neutral ideas on the contemplative life. Another important point of Hilton's text that reveals the author's discourse is the general address to the reader. Hilton's work opens with these words:

Dear sister in Jesus Christ, I beg you to be content and remain steadfast in the vocation through which God has called you to His service. Strive by the grace of Jesus Christ and with all the powers of your soul to live a life of true holiness, befitting the calling that you have embraced.¹¹¹

Remembering Bartlett's comment that Middle English treatises that develop a discourse of familiarity commonly address their readers amiably as 'ghostly sisters' or 'religious sisters', it is certain that Hilton, very much like Rolle, uses the discourse of familiarity in writing to his female advisee.¹¹² Considering Rolle's rather indifferent attitude towards the issue of male-female relationships, Hilton seems to be quite confident about it. Although he does not mention spiritual friendship between male and female religious, his comment on the issue of spiritual counselling by anchoresses to lay folk is revealing about it:

So when someone wishes to speak to you, whoever it may be, and you have no idea who and what he is, or why he comes, always be ready and willing to find out what he wants. Do not be aloof, or keep him waiting a long time. Think how ready and glad you would be if an angel came from heaven to speak to you. Be equally ready and willing to speak to your fellow-Christian when he visits you, for until you have asked him, you do not know who he is, why he comes, or what he may want of you or you of him. And although you may be at prayer and reluctant to abandon it, thinking that it is not proper to leave God in order to speak to man, I do not think you would be right in this instance, for if you are wise, you will not leave God by so doing. You

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 1; 'Goostli suster in Jhesu Crist, y praye thee that in the callynge whiche oure Lord hath callyd thee to his servyse, thu holde thee paied and stond stedefastli thereinne, travailynge bisili with alle thyne myghtes of thy soule bi grace of Jhesu Crist to fullefill in sothfastnesse of gode lyvynge the staat whiche that thou hast take thee too in likenessse and in semynge'.

¹¹² Bartlett., 'A Reasonable Affection.', 139.

will find Him, possess Him, and see Him as fully in your fellow-man as in prayer, but in a different way.¹¹³

Compared to the attitudes of the earlier writers on this issue the great shift in the approach of the fourteenth-century authors towards anchoresses' relations to the surrounding world becomes more obvious. It is clear that late medieval English anchoritic literature rejects the ideal of sexual segregation and promotes spiritual friendship and further socialization between the cloistered woman and the outside world.

From the anchoresses who were strictly enclosed in their cell, lest they cause any kind of sin, to the ones that are encouraged to give their counsel to whoever asks and advised to be happy upon the coming of a guest as if an angel comes to speak to them, English anchorites had travelled a long distance. What was the reason for this change? It is possible to offer two explanations for this transformation. Firstly, as mentioned above, the general shift in the themes of the texts has an undeniable influence on the attitudes of the authors towards women. The mystical, optimistic tone in the fourteenth century texts rather than the penitential one of the previous centuries freed authors from the concerns of the earlier writers on issues such as the nature and origin of the sin and its repentance and therefore they were free from the concerns on the especially sinful and weak nature of females. In this respect the mystical authors of the fourteenth century could approach females on equal terms more easily. Secondly, as Ferrante explains while commenting on the differences

113 Hilton, *The Ladder of Perfection.*, 101; 'And therefore whoso wole speke with thee, what that he be, or in what degree that he be, and thou knowe not what he is, ne whi that he cometh, be soone redi with a good wille for to wite what his wille is. Be not daungerous, ne suffre him stonde longe for to abide thee, but loke hou redi and hou glaad thou wolde be yif an angel of hevene wolde come and speke with thee. Soo redi and so buxum be thou in wille for to speke with thyn even Cristene whanne he cometh to thee. For thou wost not what he is, ne what he wolde, ne what nede he hath to thee, ne thou of hym, til thou have assaied hym. And though thou be in preiere or in devocioun, that thee thenketh looth for to breeke of, for thee thenketh thou schuldest not leve God for mannys speche, me thenketh it is not so in this caas; for yif thou be wise, thou schal not leve God, but thou schal fynde hym and have hym and see him in thyn evene Cristene as wel as in praiere.'

between the approaches of Aquinas and Bonaventure to women, it is not religion that determines the positive or negative attitude towards women, but the nature of the religious impulse.¹¹⁴ The difference between the philosopher-moralist Aquinas and his contemporaries and the mystic Bonaventure and his followers should be explained by the variation of religious urge in these men. Similarly, Aelred and the author of *Ancrene Wisse* were certainly more anti-female in their approach to women as a result of their moralistic attitudes that urged them to see women as a threat to male salvation. The mystical writers on the other hand were more inclined to see women as the equals of men, as it was not the bodily and spiritual purity, but the love of Christ that determined ones worth before God.

Goscelin's *Liber Comfortatorius*, Aelred's *De Institutione Inclusarum*, *Ancrene Wisse*, Rolle's *Form of Living* and Hilton's *Scale of Perfection* are major English anchoritic guides written for specific women with whom the authors had previous relationships. These writings certainly carried the relationships further and added new dimensions to them. The attitudes of the authors of anchoritic literature towards their addressees were definitely influenced by the changing religious atmosphere of their ages. It is impossible to comment on the scope of the influence of these developments on the texts, or on the actual lives of the anchoresses. However, analysing these general tendencies of the advisor-advisee relationship certainly makes it easier to examine and explain the discourse of each author on certain themes such as enclosure, chastity and virginity, which are frequently referred to in the anchoritic literature.

114 Ferrante, *Woman as Image*, 108.

CHAPTER III

The Anchorhold: the Idea of Enclosure and the Theme of Wilderness in Anchoritic Guide Texts

Research on hermits and anchorites and their lifestyles was dominated by theologians and church historians until the 1950s. These scholars, who approached the issue from a point of view specific to their own disciplines, analyzed the sources accordingly. When people from other disciplines, such as cultural studies, literature and history, read those early writings, they saw that female religious were depicted as deeply religious persons who had chosen a life of abstinence and self-discipline for the sake of becoming the brides of Christ and in this way reaching heavenly rewards. Those women, isolated from the outside world with the door of their cell blocked and their small windows covered with black curtains, prayed for their souls in the peace and quietness their secluded cells offered.¹¹⁵

More recent research, however, done by secular historians and historical anthropologists, has adopted a different approach and has tried to see the historical realities that surrounded religious men and women of the middle ages. This more recent research at first focused on the daily realities of the anchoritic life, such as regulations on eating habits, prayers, reading and working hours, the daily routine of the secluded life and the places in which the religious lived. Since then, the emphasis of studies has shifted again, from the outer realities of the anchoritic life to the reasons and consequences of the decision to become a solitary and to the supporters

115 Aneke B Mulder-Baker. 'Foreword' in *Anchorites, Wombs and Tombs Intersections of Gender and Enclosure in the Middle Ages*. edited by Liz Herbert McAvoy and Mari Hughes-Edwards, 1-5. (Cardiff, 2005), 3.

and advisers of recluses. These studies have therefore started to examine more closely the source material for anchoritism in order to see the deeper metaphorical senses of those writings, revealing much about the minds of both the authors and readers of these texts. Many historians from different sub-disciplines, such as women and gender studies and cultural history, have tried to examine the importance of the immensely rich, complex and constantly shifting motives and images seen in the texts to understand their meaning for the men and women of the middle ages.¹¹⁶ These studies have also shown that changes in the usage of certain motifs, new and divergent meanings attributed to some images, or even shifts in the emphasis of some multi-dimensional metaphors, may reveal some general tendencies concerning the spirituality of the period, as well as concerning the minds of the writers of these texts, as the texts were written to promote specific agendas.¹¹⁷

A general reading of the English anchoritic texts written for female recluses suggests that these guidance writings presented an anchoritic ideal that was solitary, secluded and highly individualized. Spiritual advisors in general acknowledged the potential sociability of the recluse, but they do not encourage it. Indeed, some

116 Catherine Innes-Parker. 'Fragmentation and reconstruction: images of the female body in *Ancrene Wisse* and the Katherine Group.' *Comitatus: A Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 26 (1995): 27-52 and 'The Lady and The King: *Ancrene Wisse*'s Parable of Royal Wooing Re-Examined.' *English Studies* 6 (1994): 509-522; Caroline Walker Bynum. "'And Woman His Humanity': Female Imagery in the Religious writing of the Later middle Ages." in *Gender and Religion: on the Complexity of Symbols*, edited by Caroline Walker Bynum, Paula Richman and Stevan Harrell, 257-288. (Boston, 1986); Penelope D. Johnson. 'Mulier et Monialis: The Medieval Nun's Self Image.' *Thought* 64 (Sept., 1989): 242-253; Ann Astell. 'Feminine Figurae in the Writings of Richard Rolle: A Register of Growth.' *Mystics Quarterly* 15 (1989): 117-24; Dyas Dee. "'Wilderness is Anlich Lif of Ancre Wununge": The Wilderness and Medieval Anchoritic Spirituality.' in *Approaching Medieval English Anchoritic and Mystical Texts* edited by Dyas Dee, Valerie Edden and Roger Ellis, 19-34. (Cambridge, 2005); Alexandra Barratt. 'Context: Some Reflections on Wombs and Tombs and Inclusive Language' In *Anchorites, Wombs and Tombs Intersections of Gender and Enclosure in the Middle Ages*. edited by Liz Herbert McAvoy and Mari Hughes-Edwards, 27-40. (Cardiff, 2005); Kristen McQueen. "'Crepe into that blessed side": Enclosure Imagery in Aelred of Rievaulx's *De Institutione Inclusarum*.' in *Anchorites, Wombs and Tombs Intersections of Gender and Enclosure in the Middle Ages*. edited by Liz Herbert McAvoy and Mari Hughes-Edwards, 95-102. (Cardiff, 2005).

117 Dyas Dee. "'Wilderness is Anlich Lif of Ancre Wununge": The Wilderness and Medieval Anchoritic Spirituality.' in *Approaching Medieval English Anchoritic and Mystical Texts* edited by Dyas Dee, Valerie Edden and Roger Ellis. (Cambridge, 2005), 25.

actively discourage any social relationship and promote total seclusion, as shown in the previous chapter. Thus, one of the most important ideas seen in the English anchoritic texts is the enclosure idea and the multi-dimensional desert motif that accompanies it which will be explained below. All of the five guidebooks written for women in medieval England in one way or another deal with the issue of the solitary, enclosed life of the recluses in their cells, with changing emphasis on the matter of enclosure and its meanings for the enclosed and the excluded. Therefore, it is possible to see the influence of some general tendencies in the period's traditions of asceticism, contemplation and mysticism traditions as reflected in the ideas of the authors of these texts.

Warren claims that English medieval anchorites 'even when enclosed alongside parish churches were regarded as having escaped into the wilderness.'¹¹⁸ Lives of the anchorites and anchoresses were seen as a symbol of the desert ideal throughout the Middle Ages. Therefore the wilderness-anchorhold equation and the internal and external expressions of various meanings attributed to the desert in the biblical and patristic sources are seen in the anchoritic literature, with different emphases and explanations in each. The theme of the wilderness is a rich and constantly shifting Judaeo-Christian idea according to Dyas Dee.¹¹⁹ The Bible, the Church and the Desert Fathers and Mothers all had their own understandings of the desert as a physical and mental place, says Dee, and it is certain that all these different interpretations had an impact on the medieval anchoritic connotations of the wilderness theology. The variations in the interpretations of the desert and wilderness were produced by a 'three way interaction between the biblical motif of wilderness, the models provided by the Desert Fathers and Mothers and the contemporary

¹¹⁸ Warren, *Anchorites and their Patrons.*, 5.

¹¹⁹ Dee, 'The Wilderness and Medieval Anchoritic Spirituality', 20.

spiritual context from which medieval anchorites and their instructors came' explains Dee.

What were the basic dimensions of the wilderness motif that the authors of the anchoritic guides came across in the Bible and the lives of the Fathers and to what extent did these interpretations affect their writing? The words 'desert' and 'wilderness' are used interchangeably in the Bible as they both convey the meaning of Hebrew *midbar* and the Greek *éremos*.¹²⁰ These two words are used in many different connotations throughout the Bible. First of all, the wilderness is this world where human beings are doomed to wander as a consequence of the disobedience of Adam and Eve and their banishment from the Garden of Eden, where they had been able to enjoy the delight of being close to God. All wilderness experience therefore in one way or another was related to the idea of alienation, deprivation and a struggle for survival.¹²¹ Another connotation of the word wilderness in the Bible is that the wilderness was an open battlefield where the religious could fight against all kinds of temptations of the devil. The understanding of the wilderness as a particular arena of battle against the dark and hostile forces of the devil is also seen in the accounts of the Desert Fathers.

On the other hand the wilderness ironically also represents hope and repentance. While God had expelled humankind from the Garden of Eden, he did not abandon them totally. Despite all its terrors as a battlefield, the wilderness was also the place where Christians could have a chance to see or come closer to God. It was there that God had spoken to Moses and Elijah; it was the place where John the Baptist preached repentance and where Jesus Christ was transfigured so as to talk to his people as the Father. Moreover, the wilderness functioned as a place of refuge

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 20.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 21.

and wooing. Hagar, Moses, David, Elijah and all the early saints fled to the wilderness as refugees. God woos his people there in the wilderness: Jeremiah 2:2 speaks of God asking his people to remember how they were like a loving bride following God through the desert.¹²²

The wilderness has similar connotations in the writings on the Desert Fathers and Mothers, together with some new adaptations of the biblical meanings to new situations. In these accounts the wilderness came to be represented a place of retreat more than anything else. Desert Fathers who wished to retreat from the materialism of the world, from the institutionalization and compromising attitude of the Church and from the distractions and temptations of the society in which they were living retreated to the wilderness. In the lives of the Desert Fathers and Mothers, these men and women are represented as heroes of their age, motivated by the desire for perfection and progress in the fight against the devil. In this respect it is clear that another important connotation of the wilderness in the writings on the Desert Fathers and Mothers was the battlefield, where temptations, doubt and sin were to be overcome. Since moving into the desert did not automatically mean a life immune from worldly desires, the problem of maintaining physical, mental and spiritual detachment from the world was represented as a metaphorical battle between the religious and the devil which took place in the wilderness.

In the Church Fathers' writings, the wilderness also acquired a purely symbolic meaning. St. Jerome, for example, talked about the wilderness as a state of mind rather than a physical place. Jerome, speaking of a young girl whose lifestyle resembled those of medieval anchoresses in many respects, wrote; 'shut up in her narrow cell she roamed through paradise ... she sought her delight in solitude and

¹²² *Ibid.*, 24.

found for herself a monkish hermitage in the centre of busy Rome'.¹²³ In Jerome's times it was possible to carry the wilderness with all its complex connotations into the narrow cell of the recluse. Together with these, the wilderness also carried its positive meanings to the middle ages through the writings of the Fathers. It was a place of perils and temptations, but at the same time it was a place of beauty where the soul trying to find God might even enjoy the happiness of heaven:

O desert, bright with the flowers of Christ! ... O wilderness, gladdened with God's especial presence! Does the boundless solitude of the desert terrify you? In the spirit you may always walk in paradise.¹²⁴

Medieval English anchoritic guide texts reflect the influence of this rich, complex and multi-dimensional tradition. The variety of the emphases on the desert, the wilderness and the anchorhold are revealing and the texts develop these images in a close connection with the enclosure idea. It is certain that each text had its own concern and agenda and therefore the authors chose the points they would emphasize accordingly. The question of enclosure is first of all the most important point of distinction between the authors and the recipients of these texts. Goscelin starts his text with an expression of this distinction:

To one shut in from one shut out; to one solitary from the world from one solitary in the world, who prays that Christ and love may know him; to a singular soul.¹²⁵

This contradictory statement beautifully captures the ironical tone of Goscelin's letter. Throughout the letter we see this witty play on words 'inside' and 'outside', which Goscelin used to express his sorrow because of his separation from Eve and his desire to identify himself with the recluse. After this first address to Eve,

123 *Ibid.*, 28.

124 *Ibid.*, 29.

125 Hollis., *Writing the Wilton Women.*, 99; '*Incluse exclusus, solitare a mundo solitaries in mundo, quem Christus et caritas nouerit, unice anime scribit.*' Talbot, '*The Liber Confortatorius.*', 26.

Goscelin's first description of Eve's present situation also refers to the idea of enclosure and its close connection with the theme of exile.

She is Eve, the ward of Christ, left to God alone as a recluse in her dwelling. She has become an owl in the house, far from her homeland seeking the true homeland. Indeed she flees from the tumult of the world to the lord of peace and in flight from the pains of mortality she strives for the eternal joy that is God.¹²⁶

Firstly, the exact literal meaning of these words should be considered. Eve, as she departed from her own country for a strict religious life, was a real, if voluntary, exile. It is clear that Goscelin's first reference is to Eve's being out of England, her homeland. However, the next sentence, 'she flees from the tumult of the world', reveals Goscelin's belief that Eve's pursuit was equal to those of the Desert Fathers who fled from the world to 'eternal joy'. At this point Goscelin connects Eve's religious lifestyle to those of the Desert Fathers and therefore her departure from Wilton to the Fathers' flight to the desert. The strong image of the place of exile, or the desert in the case of the Fathers, as a place of refuge, is present. This first expression of Goscelin's ideas on Eve's condition is very important as it both reflects the initial image of the recluse in Goscelin's mind and the initial self-image of Eve presented to herself by her spiritual advisor.

Goscelin goes on to deal further with these enclosure/ex-closure and exile themes and expresses his ideas on Eve's departure in reference to his own condition.

That mother soul, which with her womb panting brought you to birth, which on your account feared her longed-for homeland as an exile, which dwelt in exile as in a homeland, which endured or did such great things in the hope of being brought together, laments now that it could have been deserted by you with as much cruelty as insolence, which it did not believe it was possible that your love could do.¹²⁷

126 *Ibid.*, 99; '*Eua ea est Christi papilla, Deo soli relicta solitaria in tecto, nicticorax in domicillo facta, procul a patria ueram patriam querens, immo de mundi turbine ad Dominum pacis refugiens, ac de doloribus mortalitatis eternum gaudium quod Deus est appetens.*' Talbot, 'The Liber Confortatorius.', 26.

127 *Ibid.*, 104-5; '*Illa mater anima que te anhelis uisceribus peperit, que desideratam patriam pro te ut exilium timuit, exilium ut patriam coluit, que tanta spe mutue representationis pertulit uel fecit,*

Here Goscelin refers to himself as ‘the mother soul’ that brought Eve to birth and tries to express his own paradoxical situation in England. Actually he himself is in exile in England, but he feared his ‘longed-for homeland as an exile’¹²⁸ and therefore he dwells in exile, that is, in England, as ‘in a homeland’. And now the place he felt to be his homeland is deserted with Eve’s departure. This negative tone on departure, exile and enclosure is felt throughout the first book where Goscelin ‘expresses complaints and consolations’. It can be said that this sorrowful and negative representation of the exile and enclosure is due to Goscelin’s intention of expressing his personal feelings after Eve’s flight to France. This explicit tension is felt throughout the first chapter, in the middle of which Goscelin turns back to this point and criticizes Eve’s decision explicitly:

This truly I always wanted, and to this end I gave birth to you and loved you, that you should pass into the bowels of Christ, and become wholly a sacrifice to Christ. But I desired this elsewhere than where you are and by another path, namely that you might live holily and be a useful vessel in the house of the Lord, a dove in the cloister, not a solitary turtledove, or, if you preferred, you might become a turtledove in your homeland.¹²⁹

It is certain that Goscelin’s plans for Eve had nothing to do with the life of an anchorite, but that of a nun. Obviously he would prefer her to stay in the cloister in her homeland rather than shutting herself up in the anchorhold in France. Maybe this is why Eve departed secretly, knowing that Goscelin would not support her in this decision.

queritur nunc quod a te tam dure quam insulte deseri potuit, quod tuam caritatem posse impossibile creditit. Talbot, ‘The Liber Comfortatorius.’, 29.

128 In the text he says ‘her longed-for homeland’, ‘her’ referring to the mother soul that brought Eve to birth, that is Goscelin.

129 *Ibid.*, 112; ‘*Confiteor eneruem beniuolentiam, et mollem diligentiam meam. Hoc equidem semper optaui, et as hoc peperit te ac dilexi, ut in Christi transires uiscera, ac tota Christi fieres uictima; sed hoc alibi quam hic et alia cupiebam uia, ut scilicet sancte uiueres et utile uas esses in domo Domini, cenobialis columba, non turtur solitaria, aut, si malle, turtur fieres in patria.*’ Talbot, ‘The Liber Comfortatorius.’, 36.

However, from this point onwards Goscelin's focus shifts considerably and he starts to express some very traditional views on the anchoritic life and the wilderness theme in a traditional manner. Starting with the subtitle 'The Salvation of Wandering Saints', the text turns to the conventional expression of the persistent ideas on the connection of the anchoritic life style with the desert one. Similar in tone to that of his supreme model Jerome, Goscelin starts by giving information on the lives of the Desert Fathers and Mothers from this point onwards. However it is certain that Jerome's primarily educative purpose is coupled with the aim of encouraging Eve to locate herself within the anchoritic tradition, emphasizing the general connotation of the wilderness image, the earth as a wilderness where we are doomed to wonder. Goscelin wrote:

Augustine also, the clearest window of the scriptures, says: "All who belong to the heavenly city are travellers in this world."... Abraham, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, the children of Israel, also Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel and other prophets, also the apostles and the very large crowd of doctors of the church, all were borne away either in wandering or in captivity... You also among all wanderers and poor people of the Lord, have left your land, not only in the spirit of poverty and in renunciation of worldly desires, but also by physical distance, so that you may commend yourself to the ear of the lord the more nearly as you are the more distant in exile.¹³⁰

By equating her experience with those of the prophets, apostles and Fathers he makes Eve feel that she is a part of an imagined anchoritic community. Moreover, as he is eager to provide Eve with a female role model, he adds Jerome's account of anchoritic history in the form of the story of Mary of Egypt.¹³¹ In his account of Mary's story, the author stresses her repentance by physical endurance and gives the

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 113; 'Dicit et clarissima scriptorum fenestra Augustinus: 'Omnis qui as supernam pertinet ciuitatem peregrinis est mundi' ... Abraham, Isaac, Iacob, Ioseph, Moyses, filii Israel, item Ieremias, Ezechiel, Daniel aliique prophete, grinatione uel captiuitate translati sunt, ... Tu quoque inter omnes peregrinos et pauperes Domini, non solum in spiritu paupertatis et abrenuntiatione terrene uoluptatis, sed etiam regionum longinquitate de terra tua existi, ut tanto propinquius quanto exulatus te commendare possis in aurem Domini.' Talbot, 'The Liber Confortatorius.', 37-8.
¹³¹ Hayward, 'Representations of the Anchoritic Life', 57.

message that Eve may also follow the example of Mary and see her own life as an anchorite in the context of the endeavours of other anchorites.

In the first and second books of *Liber Confortatorius* we see that the connotations of the desert/wilderness image are commonly employed. Telling a piece of David's story, Goscelin sets out the contrast between the spaciousness of the desert and the narrowness of the anchorhold:

He has set in a spacious place her [*the soul of David*] whom he has saved from the dangers of worldly desires and from those that go down into the pit, one for whom hell has begun to close and heaven has begun to open, so that having entered upon the narrow way you may run with an exalted heart the path of commandments of the Lord...¹³²

The peace that David's soul had found in the spaciousness of the desert is offered to the recluse in her 'narrow way' which can lead her to salvation. Here the desert and the anchorhold are seen as places of refuge, places which save their inhabitants from the dangers of the outside world and hell. The interconnectedness between the enclosed life and the exile theme is emphasized also by a comparison of the anchoritic life with worldly, secular circumstances and likened to a migration rather than a wandering:

How many people for worldly gain transfer their families and offspring to distant lands, from France to Galatia and Spain, from England to Apulia and to Greece; they stake their souls for things destined to perish, and do we refuse to see that we are migrating to eternal bliss? ... Therefore Prosper says: 'I do not fear exile; the world is one home to all'.¹³³

Departing from the general depiction of the world as the wilderness humanity wanders in, Goscelin at this point refers to the world as a home for all and therefore

132 Hollis., *Writing the Wilton Women.*, 108; '*In loco spatioso statuit, quam a necessitatibus secularium desideriorum et a descendentibus in lacum saluauit, cui infernus claudi er celum cepit aperiri, ut arctam uiam ingressa dilatato corde curras uiam mandatorum Domini, ...*', Talbot, 'The *Liber Confortatorius.*', 32.

133 *Ibid.*, 117; '*Quam multi ob terrane lucra in longinquos fines cognationes mutant et genituram, de Gallia in Galatiam et in Hispaniam, de Anglia in Apuliam, in Greciam, pro perituris rebus ponentes animam suam, et nos dissimulamus migrare ad beatitudinem sempiternam? ... Hinc Prosper: "Non timeo exilium, mundus domus omnibus una est"*', Talbot, 'The *Liber Confortatorius.*', 41.

explains human life as a great migration to eternal bliss. And in this usage the wilderness acquires the positive connotation as the path that leads people to God and becomes a place of repentance and hope.

The second book of *Liber Confortatorius* opens with a war metaphor that lasts till the end of this second part. Here the anchorhold, the metaphysical desert of the anchoress, becomes a battlefield where ‘single combats’ against the temptations of the devil are fought.

Therefore having come into this place, you have *advanced* to a single combat, to wrench away your crown from the hands of the enemy with divine zeal. On one side rewards have been set for the victors; on the other punishments for the conquered. God has placed all in the middle of a field. We must conquer or die.¹³⁴

Despite his negative remarks in the first part of the book, by his expression of Eve’s new situation as advancement, Goscelin demonstrates that he values the solitary life over the communal one. Moreover, telling the story he has heard from a friend concerning the deed of a robber who at the last minute slaughtered his executor, Goscelin comments:

So audacity prospers; so strength spreads itself from a narrow place. So you strengthened by faith in place of audacity, will drive far away the swarms of your enemies. See yourself as a calf shut up with the dogs of the devil.¹³⁵

Thus Eve may turn the narrowness of the cell and the limited opportunities of the life of an anchorite into an advantage. This representation of the traditional wilderness-battlefield equation is seen frequently throughout Goscelin’s text.

Having set this historical background and placing her life within the great ascetical tradition, Goscelin turns his focus to the actual physical conditions of Eve’s

134 *Ibid.*, 127; ‘*Huc ergo ingressa processisti as singulare certamen, ut diuino zelo coronam tuam extorqueas de manu inimici. Hinc uictoribus premia, inde supplicia uictis reposita sunt. Medio Deus posuit omnia campo. Aut uincendum est aut moriendum.*’, Talbot, ‘The *Liber Confortatorius*.’, 49.
135 *Ibid.*, 27; ‘*So prosperatur audacia, sic ortitudo dilatatur ab angustia. Sic tu fide roborata pro audacia, procul exturbabis hostium examina.*’, Talbot, ‘The *Liber Confortatorius*.’, 49.

life and tries to draw spiritual exhortations from them. He starts with the idea of being enclosed:

... if any time forgetful of the homeland you are seeking, you should become weary with solitude, captivity and the cell, you, I say, raise a column of faith for yourself, a tent of hope, and as if in a tabernacle so decorated in all the colours, take pleasure in the law of Lord, exercising and meditating on it day and night, with the manifold beauty of the examples of the saints.¹³⁶

Goscelin is well aware of the fact that despite the great reward in the end, the idea of being enclosed — ‘captivity and the cell’ — may become acute problems for the anchoress. Therefore he tries to comfort her by reminding her of the joys of the heaven waiting for her, and offers continual mediation as a remedy. It was not only the space but also the time that bothered anchoresses. Recluses, especially young ones, never knew when they would reach freedom and the joys of heaven. Therefore consoling Eve on this issue was another aim of the author. He explains such thoughts as temptations of the devil:

You are a girl; you are in your first youth; in the very flower of life you have suddenly perished. Will you remain here from the youthful age of twenty to your fiftieth or your hundredth year, to old age and feebleness, to a long-lived and distant end, to such long days, such dark nights, to such long labours, such perpetual prison, such continual deaths of desolation?¹³⁷

And to counter these attacks of the devil, Goscelin suggests that the anchoress should think of each and every day of her life as the last one. He supports his argument with a quote from Horace: ‘Believe that every day has dawned as your last’.¹³⁸ According

136 *Ibid.*, 152; ‘... si oblitam petite patrie tedeat aliquando solitudinis, captiuitatis et clausule, erige tibi columnam fidei, tentorium spei, et quasi inde picto omni colore tabernaculo in lege Domini oblectare, eercitando et meditando in ea die ac nocte, cum sanctorum exemplorum multimodo decore.’, Talbot, ‘The Liber Comfortatorius.’, 69.

137 *Ibid.*, 152; ‘Pupa es, adolescentula es, flos ipse uite repente peristi. An hic uicenna etatula in quinquagesimum uel centesimum sedebis annu, in senectam et senium, in finem longeuum et longinquum, in tam longos dies, tam profundus noctes, in tam prolixos labores, tam iuges carceres, tam continuas desolationis mortes?’ Talbot, ‘The Liber Comfortatorius.’, 70.

138 *Ibid.*, 152.

to Rebecca Hayward, 'both this digression on the length of time and the sense of a historical tradition of anchorites put the use of Eve's own time in context'.¹³⁹

The only point where Goscelin gives some information on Eve's anchorhold is in the third book, where the author accepts the fact that the anchorhold is a small place and this may cause the anchoress to feel restrained. He likens the cell of the anchoress to Noah's ark, a poultry cage, a cave and a narrow way, yet also compares it to the empire of Octavian.

... your little home of pilgrimage and pasture, this little house eight feet long, like the sum of the ark of eight souls, secluded from the onset of the world, and hidden away from worldly seas as if in the ark itself, where you may be fattened as a sacrifice to the Lord like a fattening fowl in a cage; not in the flesh but in the soul, not with the temptations of food but with divine reading.¹⁴⁰

...

But: "How narrow my cell is!" you may say. But the court of heaven is very spacious. Why are you afraid to go to the narrow way to the boundless kingdom? ... Only compare this cave of yours with the empire of Octavian, the Augustus of the whole world. It is a ship for you to board from the vastness of that sea, an asylum from the storm of the world, a house of refuge from the hurricane of evils.¹⁴¹

The cell is described as 'a house of refuge from the hurricane of evils' certainly in reference to the desert motif. Although it is clear that the author accepts the restricted conditions of life in the cell, he tries to broaden the physical space by reminding the anchoress of the freedom the place offers her. Another point about which Goscelin tries to comfort Eve is the fear of feeling as if entombed in the cell.

What if you should think yourself entombed here, or consider this bedroom a tomb? By bearing the cross after Christ, you will rise again from the tomb. Entombment does not harm those who are going to

139 Hayward, 'Representations of the Anchoritic Life', 58.

140 Hollis., *Writing the Wilton Women.*, 154; '... tua peregrinalis et pascualis casula, hec domuscula octo pedum, ut arche summitas octo animarum a mundi impetu seclusa, et a mundano pelago uelut in ipsa archa reposita, ubi in oblationem Domini impingueris, ut altille in cauea non carne, sed anima, non epularum illecebra, sed lectione diuina.', Talbot, 'The Liber Confortatorius.', 75.

141 *Ibid.*, 159-160; 'Sed cella mea quam angusta est, dicas. At celli regia amplissima est. Per arctam uiam as interminabile ire quid formidas? ... Compara modo hanc tuam speluncam Octauiani totius orbis Augusti imperio. Nauis tibi est ab illius pelagi uastitate, asilum a mundi tempestate, domus refugii a malorum turbine.', Talbot, 'The Liber Confortatorius.', 77-8.

rise again. In such a way we have seen a vine, old and worn out by long age, reborn to give fruit.¹⁴²

After all this, what can be said on the general attitude of Goscelin towards the idea of enclosure? Firstly, it should be stated that Goscelin openly expresses his discontent on Eve's decision of becoming an anchoress. This point, considered together with Goscelin's indifference to the physical conditions of Eve's cell and regulations of her life within the anchorhold, reveals that Goscelin was not as zealous as the twelfth- and thirteenth-century writers on the issue of enclosure. It may well be argued that Goscelin's lack of interest in the physical conditions of Eve's cell is due to his lack of knowledge, as it is certain that he did not see the place Eve was living in. However, it is clear that Goscelin, in contrast to Aelred and the author of *Ancrene Wisse*, as we shall see, does not try to explain the necessity of enclosure by reference to the weakness of females. Rather, through giving historical information on enclosed lives, he tries to persuade Eve that she is a part of a long Christian tradition. He legitimizes the anchoritic life by reference to past saintly anchorites, hermits and exiles, not by referring to female weakness. Enclosure was necessary to protect the anchoress from the dangers of the outer world, but certainly not to protect the outer world from the anchoress, an idea seen in the later texts.

On the other hand, it is certain that Goscelin, as mentioned previously in relation to the author-reader relationship in the *Liber Confortatorius*, tries to identify himself with his reader. He reminds her that he himself shares her experiences of being in exile and isolation. While writing on enclosure and the anchorhold, he tries to understand Eve, the feelings of a young enclosed woman and truly tries to console

142 *Ibid.*, 162; 'Quid si te hic sepultam cogites, aut hoc cubiculum sepulcrum estimes? Ferendo crucem post Christum, de sepulcro resuges. Non nocet sepultura resurrecturis. Vidimus uitem annosam longoque ueterno effeta tali arte in fructus renasci.', Talbot, 'The *Liber Confortatorius*.', 79.

and comfort her with his advice, rather than giving dry explanations of the necessity of enclosure because of the weak nature of female body and soul. He suggests remedies for feeling lonely and imprisoned, for the fear of the length of time that she would spend in the cell and the claustrophobic idea of being entombed in the anchorhold. He is always sincere in tone and never refers to the sinful nature of humans in order to represent the idea of enclosure as a punishment, a point we shall clearly see in the highly penitential tone of *Ancrene Wisse*. The influence of Goscelin's sincere and gender-neutral attitude towards Eve is obvious.

In Aelred's *De Institutione Inclusarum* the reason for the enclosed life is stated from the very beginning:

You must first understand the reasons that motivated the monks of old when they instituted and adopted this form of life. Living in a crowd means ruin for some people; for others it will mean, if not ruin, at least injury; others again, unmoved by any apprehension, simply consider living in solitude to be more fruitful.¹⁴³

In Aelred's account the desert is both a place to avoid ruin or injury and a place 'to enjoy a greater freedom in expressing'¹⁴⁴ the ardent longing for Christ. The exile theme seen in Goscelin's text, which is explained in relation to the specific conditions of the author and the reader of that text, is also present in *De Institutione Inclusarum*, though not emphasized as the previous in text; more as a formal expression of human life on earth.

Our first dwelling place was in paradise; our second is in this world and is filled with hardship; our third dwelling will be in the heaven with the angels. ... Here on earth we live in fear, in toil and in grief, cast out from God's presence, expelled from the joys of paradise and forced to fast from heavenly nourishment.¹⁴⁵

143 *Treatises: The pastoral prayer.*, 45; 'Primum igitur oportet te scire qua causa, quare ratione huiusmodi uita ab antiquis uel instituta sit uel usurpata. Sunt quidam, quibus inter multos uiuere perniciosum est. Sunt et alii quibus et si non perniciosum, est tamen dispendiosum. Sunt et nonnulli quibus nichil horum timendum est, sed secretius habitare magis estimant fructuosum.', Talbot, 'The "De Institutis Inclusarum"', 177.

144 *Ibid.*, 47.

145 *Ibid.*, 58; 'Primus locus habitacionis nostre paradysus fuit, secundus mundus iste plenus erumpnis, tercius in celo cum angelicis spiritibus. ... Hic autem sumus in timore, in labore, in dolore,

Instead of emphasizing the wilderness theme and its connotations, or setting the anchoresses experience into a broader tradition, Aelred, content with his explanation of the necessity of the secluded, enclosed life, focuses on the physical conditions of the cell. The first and foremost quality of the anchorhold is certainly the enclosed space it offered to women. And indeed it seems that Aelred's first concern is to secure this enclosed space by restricting any communication with the outside. After talking about some different types of religious pursuit, Aelred states that 'They ['the monks of the old'] judged it more prudent to be completely enclosed in a cell with the entrance walled up.'¹⁴⁶ His preference for the enclosed life is therefore asserted through the authority of earlier ascetics. Instead of offering the reasons for superiority of the enclosed life over others, Aelred contents with saying that ancient authorities judged it to be more prudent. Throughout the text there are many references to the cell of the anchorite as a place that should be protected against any kind of intruder:

A recluse must be careful to keep her mind free from anxiety and worry concerning her material needs; if it is possible she should live by the labour of her hands: this is the more perfect way. But if poor health or a delicate constitution forbids this she should, before being enclosed in her cell, find someone to provide her with what is necessary for each day. This she may humbly accept but nothing more, even for the poor or guests — her cell is not to be besieged by beggars, nor by orphans and widows crying for alms.¹⁴⁷

...

proiecti a facie aculorum dei, exclusi a gaudiis paradysi, ieiunui ab alimento celesti.' Talbot, 'The "De Institutis Includarum"', 186.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 45.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 48; '*Quapropter prouidendum est, ut mens omnium rerum temporalium cura exuatur, et exoneretur sollicitudine. Quod ut fiat, prouideat inclusa, ut si fieri potest, de labore manuum suarum uiuat: hoc enim perfectius. Si uero aut infirmitas aut teneritudo non permittit, antequam includatur, certas personas querat, a quibus singulis diebus quod uni diei sufficiat, humiliter recipiat, nec causa pauperum, uel hospitem quicquam adiciat. Non circa cellulam eius pauperes clament, non orphani plorent, non uidua lamentetur.*' Talbot, 'The "De Institutis Includarum"', 179.

Never allow children access to your cell. It is not unknown for a recluse to take up teaching and turn her cell into a school.¹⁴⁸

All these expressions indicate that the anchorhold, which was built to protect the anchoress from the dangers of the world, was itself in need of protection. It is a holy, sacred place and therefore should be jealously protected from any intruder. And both the anchoress and the anchorhold can only be protected by the prayers of the recluse:

Happy she¹⁴⁹ who turned a brothel into an oratory, while the angel who entered together with the virgin flooded the darkness with light and punished with death the man who sought to corrupt her. If then if you also pray and take up the arms of your tears against him who incites you to impurity, you may be sure that the angel who was present in the brothel will not be absent from your chaste cell.¹⁵⁰

Another important point where Aelred may be differentiated from Goscelin is his keen interest in the inside of the cell.

... walls adorned with paintings or gilt work, the oratory embellished with a variety of hangings and statues. Beware of all these things contrary to your profession. ... Your altar should be covered with white linen cloths. Their whiteness will betoken chastity and display simplicity. ... On your altar let it be enough for you to have a representation of your saviour hanging on the Cross; that will bring before your mind his passion for you to imitate. ... If you like in order to bring home to you the excellence of virginity, a picture of the Virgin Mother and one of the Virgin Disciple may stand on either side of the Cross...¹⁵¹

148 *Ibid.*, 49; ‘*Pueris et puellis, nullum ad te concedas accessum. Sunt quedam incluse que docendis puellis occupandur, et cellam suam uerunt in scolam.*’ Talbot, ‘The “*De Institutis Inclusarum*”’, 180.

149 Aelred refers to the story of St. Agnes a fourth-century virgin martyr of Rome. It is clear from the diversity in the earliest accounts that there was at the end of the fourth century no accurate and reliable narrative on the details of her martyrdom.

150 *Treatises: The pastoral prayer.*, 65; ‘*Felix que lupanar uertit in oratorium, quod cum uirgine ingrediens angelus lucem infudit tenebris, et insectatorem pudicicie morte multauit. Si igitur et tu oraueris et contra libidinis incentorem lacrimarum tuarum arma leuaueris, non certe angelus tuo casto deerit cubiculo, qui prostibulo non defuit.*’ Talbot, ‘The “*De Institutis Inclusarum*”’, 191.

151 *Ibid.*, 71-2-3; ‘*Est etiam quedam species uanitatis in affectata aliqua pulchritudine etiam intra cellulam delectari, parietes uariis picturis uel celaturis ornare, oratorium pannorum et ymagium uaritate decorate. Hec omnia, quasi professioni tue contraria caue. ... Panni linen candidi tuum illud ornent altare, qui castitatem suo candore commendent, et simplicitatem premonstrent. ... Sufficiat tibi in altario tuo saluatoris in cruce pendentis ymago, / que passionem suam tibi representet quam imiteris, ... Et si hoc placet, ad commendandam tibi uirginitatis ecellentiam uirgo mater in sua et uirgo discipulus in sua iuxta crucem cernantur ymagine, ...*’, Talbot, ‘The “*De Institutis Inclusarum*”’, 195-6.

This detailed explanation on the decoration of the anchorhold reveals the importance of the cell as a place, more than anything else.

In Aelred's text, we see explicitly the employment of the anchorhold-tomb equation that was implied in *Liber Comfortatorius*. Aelred clearly express that the anchorhold is a tomb and that the enclosed life is a spiritual death to the world. According to Aelred the anchoress chose this life:

But now, whoever you may be who have given up the world to choose this life of solitude, desiring to be hidden and unseen, to be dead as it were to this world and buried with Christ in his tomb ...¹⁵²

And again the choice of the anchoress is defined as entombment in the next chapter:

This is your portion, dearly beloved. Dead and buried to the world, you should be deaf to all that belongs to the world and unable to speak of it. You should not be distracted but absorbed, not emptied out but filled up.¹⁵³

However, it is certain that the most striking image seen in Aelred's text is his equation of the cell to the female body, specifically to the body of the anchoress. According to Aelred, the anchoritic life reflects the miracle that took place in the Virgin's womb.¹⁵⁴ The life of solitude led people to fruitfulness: 'simply consider living in solitude to be more fruitful'.¹⁵⁵ Here the cell becomes a metaphor for the womb. As the fruit that is growing in the cell, the recluse should guard the physical centre of contemplation, as mentioned above, at the same time as she guards the womb of her body. Explicit references to the feminine imagery of the cell, and thus the enclosure theme, Aelred uses, actually reach their peak with the coming century as we shall see in *Ancrene Wisse*. These two images used for the anchorhold, the

152 *Ibid.*, 62; '*Sed iam nunc audiat et intelligat uerba mea quecumque abrenunciatis mundo uitam hanc solitariam elegerit et abscondi desiderans non uideri, et quasi mortua seculo in spelunca Christo consepeliri*' Talbot, 'The "*De Institutis Inclusarum*"', 188.

153 *Ibid.*, 75; '*Hec pars tua carissima que seculo mortua atque sepulta, surda debes esse ad omnia que seculi sunt audiendum, et ad loquendum muta, nec debes distendi sed extendi, impleri non exhauriri.*' Talbot, 'The "*De Institutis Inclusarum*"', 198.

154 Fein, 'Maternity in Aelred', 144.

155 *Treatises: The pastoral prayer.*, 65.

tomb and the womb¹⁵⁶ represent an equation of the negative and positive views of anchorhold. The image of tomb conveys the negative side of the enclosure, while the image of womb, which protects and nurtures the infant, foregrounds a more optimistic view.

Aelred's comments on the theme of enclosure throughout the text are weak and dry when compared to those of Goscelin. He does not empathize with his sister. Therefore we do not see advice similar to that of Goscelin. Aelred is concerned with explaining the exact regulation of the enclosed life rather than giving remedies against the fears or weariness it may cause. He does not try to console and comfort his sister except once, where he comments that evil thoughts occupy the mind as a result of idleness. He adds: idleness 'kindles and inflames illicit desires that breeds distaste for quiet and disgust for the cell'.¹⁵⁷ And even at this point he is not offering a sincere remedy for these feelings, but just passes on, advising 'Never then let the evil spirit find you idle'.¹⁵⁸

There may be two explanations for the difference in attitudes of Aelred and Goscelin. Firstly, it is certain that Goscelin writes to a young, recently enclosed woman. Therefore it may be claimed that as Eve was an inexperienced anchoress, Goscelin tries to console her against the new situations that may be troubling. On the other hand we know that Aelred's sister was not a young woman, probably older than him, and it is certain that she had been a recluse for a while before Aelred wrote her a rule. Looking at the opening statement of the text, 'For many years now, you have

156 For further analysis see Kristen McQuinn. "'Crepe into that blessed side": Enclosure Imagery in Aelred of Rievaulx's *De Institutione Inclusarum*.' in *Anchorites, Wombs and Tombs Intersections of Gender and Enclosure in the Middle Ages*. edited by Liz Herbert McAvoy and Mari Hughes-Edwards. (Cardiff, 2005).

157 *Treatises: The pastoral prayer.*, 55.

158 *Ibid.*, 55.

been asking me for a rule...’,¹⁵⁹ it is not hard to see the reason for Aelred’s sincere, but professional tone in writing to his older sister, who might have been more experienced in dealing with the hardships of the solitary life than himself. On the other hand, one should also consider that the relationship between Goscelin and Eve, one that is based on mutual respect and a close relationship, which allows Goscelin to identify himself with the recluse and helps him in understanding the possible problems she might encounter, does not exist between Aelred and his sister. Although Aelred reveals his sincere thoughts on the highness of the virtues of his sister, he never identifies himself with her and never tries to understand her personal conditions. Rather he differentiates himself from his sister, firstly as a male and then as someone who is not enclosed. We do not see the strongly gendered, and from time to time anti-female tone of *Ancrene Wisse* in Aelred’s rule, but he is certainly not as close to his reader as Goscelin.

Ancrene Wisse, as one of the longest English anchoritic rules written for female recluses, is also the one that contains the most detailed discussion of the wilderness theme, the meaning of anchorhold and the idea of enclosure. The author of *Ancrene Wisse* approaches the issue of enclosure and the solitary life systematically. From the very beginning, in the introduction, he explains that there are two kinds of religious profession.

To each kind belongs its own part, as you will see. There are some good religious who live in the world, particularly the prelates and true preachers. ... The second part of what he [St. James] says applies particularly to your own practice of religion, as I have said before, for you, beyond those other religious keep yourselves clean and unspotted from the world.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 43.

¹⁶⁰ *The Ancrene Riwe*, 4; ‘*To either limpeth his dale, as ye mahen i-heren: gode religiuse beoth i the world summe, nomeliche prelaz ant treowe preachurs,... The leatere dale of his sahe limpeth to ower religiun, as ich ear seide, the witeth ow from the worlt, over othre religiuse, cleane ant unwemmet.*’

It is clear that the primary aim of the solitary life, according to the author of *Ancrene Wisse*, is to keep the religious immune from the world's evils. In this respect it is certain that enclosure is an indispensable part of the anchoritic life. After stating this general division and explaining the reason for solitary life, the author states:

Let no one trust the anchoress who allows a man to look in and let him see her. Of all the things which you have written down for you in your rule concerning exterior matters, that point this injunction to be truly enclosed, I would have observed above all the rest.¹⁶¹

This statement clarifies the importance given to enclosure in *Ancrene Wisse*, and the eagerness of the author to cut all kinds of connections with the outside of the anchorhold strengthened this idea of strict enclosure. The anchoresses are advised not to talk to anyone or see them, even if they were high ranking religious men, to preserve the intactness of the cell by guarding their sense well and restricting themselves from every corner:

... remain in your room and do not feed your kids outside, but keep your hearing, your speaking, and your sight within, and close fast the gates of your mouth and eyes and ears. In vain are those enclosed by a wall who open these gates except to the messenger of god and the food of the soul.¹⁶²

Here we see that the anchorhold is likened to the body of the anchoress. The body of anchoress is described like a building's 'gates' of which, mouth and eyes and ears should be closed fast. By staying inside the anchorhold in all circumstances and keeping her gates closed, the anchoresses preserve not only their 'unspotted purity' but also the quietness and peace of the cell. The author of *Ancrene Wisse* employs this image of the anchorhold as the recluses' bodies and plays freely with the words

161 *Ibid.*, 27; 'Ne leve na-mon ancre the let in monnes ehe to schawin hire-seolven. Over al thet ye habbeth i-writen in ower riwle of thinges withuten, this point - this article of wel to beo bitunde - ich wulle beo best i-halden.'

162 *Ibid.*, 45; 'Hald te i thi chambre. Ne fed tu nawt withuten thine gate tichnes, ah hald withinnen thin hercunge, thi speche, ant ti sihthe, ant tun feaste hare yeten - muth ant ehe ant eare. For nawt ha beoth bilokene in-with wah other wal the thes yeten openith, bute ayein Godes sonde, ant liveneth of sawle.'

that define the anchorhold's structure and the anchoress's body, such as windows/eyes, gate/mouth.

If a man so holy,¹⁶³ so wise and so watchful allowed his heart to escape, others may well fear that theirs may escape too. And where did it break away from the holy king David, God's prophet? Where? God knows at the window of his eye; through a sight that he saw... Windows should therefore be kept closed, those at the back as well as those in the front. God will guard those who guard their windows.¹⁶⁴

Therefore anchoresses are suggested to keep the windows of their body, and of their cell tightly closed, that is closed to all distractions of the outer world. The reward for this strictly enclosed life is also stated explicitly. Jesus, the bridegroom says that 'I am not a bold lover. I will embrace my lover only in a retired place'. Thus the author adds:

If she [bride of Christ] is not often alone, let her not wonder if he avoids her; and so alone that she puts every pressure and disturbance of the world away from her heart, for it is God's chamber.¹⁶⁵

The heart of the anchoress, equated with the cell, should be kept free of distractions to receive Jesus, the shy lover of the recluse.

In another instance the anchorhold is equated with Jerusalem, meaning 'the sight of peace', a metaphor specific to *Ancrene Wisse*. While commenting on the allegorical meaning of one of the Biblical stories the author explains:

This word Jerusalem means 'the sight of peace' and it stands for the anchoress' house, for in it she need see nothing but what is peaceful. Let her never be Semei that is never be a recluse who is guilty before the true Solomon that is our Lord. ... And again understand this: you are in Jerusalem. You have fled to the sanctuary of the church, for there is not one of you who has not at some time been God's thief.

163 Here the author is referring to David who once lamented that his heart had escaped from him.

164 *Ibid.*, 21; 'Ore pur ceo, toutes les ouvertures de toutes voz fenestres, ausi come ci devant a la vewe de touz hommes unt este closes, ausi soient ca en apres. Et si plus fermement poient, plus fermement soient closes. Generale reule est, toutes celes qe bien les closent, Dieu bien les garde.'

165 *Ibid.*, 40; 'Ne thunche hire neaver wunder yef ha nis muchel ane, thah he hire schunie, ant swa ane thet ha putte each worldlich thrung, ant each nurth eorthlich ut of hire heorte, for heo is Godes chambre.'

Outside, as you well know people are watching for you, as they do for thieves who have taken refuge in a church.¹⁶⁶

Here a series of similes is seen in this short passage, which can be a good example of the author's ever-working allegorical thinking. Firstly, as mentioned above the anchorhold is likened to Jerusalem, where anchoresses have fled from the dangers of the world. Secondly, anchoresses themselves are defined as thieves who have taken refuge in the sanctuary of a church. The play on the images of the church, the anchorhold, the desert and on the anchoress, thief and fugitive is striking.

The author of *Ancrene Wisse* also likens the cell to a prison, an image which we do not notice in the previous texts. While writing on the simplicity of the anchoresses' lives the author states that:

It is very unreasonable to go into an anchor-house, to go voluntarily and willingly into God's prison, into a place of discomfort, looking for ease, the power to rule and the status of a lady beyond anything that she would probably have had in the world.¹⁶⁷

The representation of the anchorhold as a place where anchoresses willingly imprisoned themselves, in order to suffer the discomforts of the place for the sake of God is certainly related to the penitential tone of the text. At this point the author introduces another dimension to the idea of enclosure by stating that anchoresses are enclosed in order to suffer for both their own and other humans' sins. He writes:

Think, anchoress, what you were looking for when you left the world for your enclosure –sorrow for your own sins and those of others, the loss of all this life's pleasures in order that you might embrace your blessed...¹⁶⁸

166 *Ibid.*, 75; 'This word "Jerusalem" spealeth "sihthe of peis" ant bitacneth ancre-hus. For th'rinne ne thearf ha seon bute peis ane. Ne beo neaver Semei - thet is, the recluse swa swithe forgult toward te sothe Salomon - thet is, ure Laverd... On other half understondeth: ye beoth i Jerusalem. Ye beoth i-flohe to chirche grith. For nis ower nan thet nere sum-chearre Godes theof. Me weiteth ow - thet wite ye ful yeorne - withuten, as me deth theoves the beoth i-broke to chirche.'

167 *Ibid.*, 46-7; 'Muchel hofles hit is, cumen into ancre-hus, into Godes prisun willes ant waldes to stude of meoseise, for-te sechen eise th'rin ant meistrise ant leafdischipe, mare then ha mahte habben inoh-reathe i-haved i the worlde.'

168 *Ibid.*, 47; 'Thenc, ancre, hwet tu sohtest tha thu forsok the world i thi biclusunge. Biwepen thine ahne ant othres sunnen, ant forleosen alle the blissen of this lif, for-te cluppen blisfulliche thi blisful leofmon...'

Here, the highly penitential tone becomes clear as the author explains the reason of anchoresses' choice of solitary life as a sorrow, or at least repentance for their and other humans' sins. Besides, Barratt claims that there is 'a genuine medieval association between the enclosure and prisons'. The Latin nouns *inclusus* and *inclusa*, two of the commonest words for recluse, derive from the verb *includere*, 'to enclose'. 'This word appears in the Vulgate New Testament only twice' explains Barratt, 'on both occasions it means to incarcerate, specifically in prison'.¹⁶⁹

The tomb image seen in *De Institutione Inclusarum* is also explicitly present in *Ancrene Wisse*:

The spiritual life begun in the Holy Ghost has been brought low by the flesh. They are light looks, sometimes light words, or gain foul words, luxury, over-delicacy, grumbling, complaint and worse still, curses and the bitter, poisoned contentions of puffed-up hearts... They are a mockery, then, and contrary to reason in an anchoress anointed and buried — for what is her anchor-house but her grave?¹⁷⁰

The tomb image is so strong throughout the text that, according to the author, his writing in guidance for anchoresses is ironic in one sense as 'it is against nature, and monstrous that the dead should dote on those who are alive and act foolishly with them, in sin.'¹⁷¹ And while talking about the anchoresses' relationships with outsiders, he writes; 'an anchoress sometimes has her meals with her guests... but this is carrying friendship too far ... One had often heard of the dead speaking with the living, but I have never found that they ate with the living'.¹⁷² Anchoresses were willingly imprisoned slaves of God, who chose solitary life as a remedy for their own

169 Alexandra Barratt. 'Context: Some Reflections on Wombs and Tombs and Inclusive Language' in *Anchorites, Wombs and Tombs Intersections of Gender and Enclosure in the Middle Ages*. edited by Liz Herbert McAvoy and Mari Hughes-Edwards. (Cardiff, 2005), 36.

170 *The Ancrene Riwle*, 47; 'The gastelich lif bigunnen i the Hali Gast beoth bicumene al fleschliche, al fleschliche i-wurthen: lahinde, lihte i-latet, ane hwile lihte i-wordet, an-other luthere i-wordet, estfule ant sarcurne ant grucchildes, meanildes ant - yet thet wurse is - cursildes ant chidildes, bittre ant attrie with heorte tobollen.... Hoker ant hofles thing is, thet a smiret ancre ant ancre biburiet - for hwet is ancre-hus bute hire burinesse..'

171 *Ibid.*, 22.

172 *Ibid.*, 183.

and all humans' previous sins and therefore accepted being buried alive in their cells till their actual physical death. It is certain that the author of *Ancrene Wisse* draws a strongly negative image of enclosure and this negative image adds much to his obsessively serious tone on the issue of strict enclosure.

Together with this negative, penitential attitude towards enclosure, *Ancrene Wisse* is the only text written for female recluses where we hear an anti-female undertone in relation to the idea of enclosure. Apart from the fact that the author of the text sees enclosure as a solution to the problems that may arise as a result of the weak nature of the female body, he also sees female religious, or women in general, who are not enclosed, as a threat to others. While explaining the reasons for the strictly enclosed life of anchoresses, the author refers to the story of Dina, the daughter of Jacob, told in Genesis. The young woman who went out of the city walls to meet a strange woman is somehow accused of being the cause of the breaking of the great patriarchs' promises and the cause of the death of the prince and all the men of the city. According to the author:

All the evil that came about through Dina, of which I spoke above, all happened, not because the women looked lustfully upon men, but because they unclothed themselves before the eyes of men, thus being the occasion of the sin in them.¹⁷³

After telling the story of Dina the author adds his final comment,

For this reason it was commanded in God's name in the Old Law that a pit should always be covered; and if an animal fell into an uncovered pit, the man who had uncovered the pit had to pay the penalty.¹⁷⁴

The woman's body is the pit into which men fall, so it should be covered by the women themselves, and otherwise they pay the penalty for the sins. Therefore,

173 *Ibid.*, 24-5; '... al thet uvel of Dina thet ich spec of herre, al com nawt for-thi thet te wummen lokeden cangliche o wepmen, ah for heo unwriyen heom in monnes ech-siththe ant duden hwar-thurch ha machten fallen in sunne.'

174 *Ibid.*, 25; 'For-thi wes i-haten on Godes laye thet put were i-wriyen eaver, ant yef ani were unwriyen ant beast feolle ther-in, he the unwreah the put hit schulde yelden. This is a swithe dredful word to wummon thet schaweth hire to wepmones echne.'

enclosure works in two ways: it not only protects women from the outside world's corruption and helps them to preserve their 'unspotted purity'; but it also protects the outside world from the evil of women, whose even unmoving, stable body may cause lust and the slaughter of many men, as in the case of Dina.

The systematic approach of the author in explanation of the idea of enclosure becomes clearer when he, like Goscelin had done, tries to inform the anchoresses of the historical context of the solitary life. Firstly, he states that how good it is to be alone 'is made clear both in the old law and in the new'. Passing on to the desert theme from this point onwards, the author employs nearly all the connotations of the desert for the life of a recluse in the order of Old and New Testament stories. He explains that God revealed his 'hidden counsels and the hidden things of heaven' to His dearest friends not 'when they are among a crowd' of people 'but when they were alone', referring to the desert. Therefore, the anchorhold was a place where one might encounter God. After telling of Isaac's flight to the wilderness, he comments that we see the same idea in the lives of Moses and Elias, who also fled to the desert because the place was 'clear and plain' and certainly far from the troubled and fearful life among crowds. The desert, equated to the cell of the recluse, offers a quiet atmosphere and peace of mind as it is free from the problems of life in society. Therefore the cell becomes a place of refuge. Apart from this, the two stories of Jeremias and St. John the Baptist are told at length.

This historical background to the solitary life is offered rather as an example to the anchoresses. To strengthen his argument the author also gives as an example the Virgin Mary and defines her life as a solitary one. He asks:

Did not Our dear Lady lead a solitary life? Did not the angel find her in place of solitude, alone? She was not outside, but was securely enclosed, for we find: The angel being come in, said unto her: Hail, Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among

women. At the time when this happened, she was indoors in a place of solitude on her own.¹⁷⁵

Furthermore Christ himself is also represented as a solitary:

But why do I look for other examples, when that of God's own solitude would be sufficient example for all? He himself went into a place of solitude, and while he was alone in the wilderness he fasted to show that true penance cannot be done in a throng of people.¹⁷⁶

And in another instance he writes, combining his point with the womb image:

And was he not himself a recluse in Mary's womb? These two things belong properly to an anchoress: narrowness of the room, and bitterness; for the womb where our Lord was a recluse is a narrow dwelling, and this word Mary, as I have often said, means bitterness'.¹⁷⁷

Here, by setting out Jesus as a role model, the author does not only justify the enclosure idea, but he also answers the possible complaints of the recluses that may arise as a result of the condition of being enclosed, by referring to Jesus' passion. He suffered throughout his life starting from the narrow womb; and it is the anchoress's duty to imitate him. Actually this representation of Mary's and Jesus's lives as the supreme models for solitaries is unique to *Ancrene Wisse*. The author, by giving these two strong examples, obviously goes beyond his aim of supplying recluses with prominent examples of solitary life from the earlier periods of Christianity. He rather emphasizes the importance of the theme of enclosure in the lives of anchoresses: the single point in his rule which he wanted to be observed above all the rest.

175 *Ibid.*, 71; 'Ure leove Leafdi, ne leadde ha anlich lif? Ne fond te engel hire in anli stude al ane? Nes ha no-wher ute, ah wes biloken feste, for swa we i-findeth: Ingressus angelus ad eam dixit. Ave Maria, gratia plene, Dominus tecum; benedicta tu in mulieribus. Thet is, "the engel wende into hire." Thenne wes heo inne in anli stude hire ane.'

176 *Ibid.*, 71-2; 'Hwet seche ich other? Of Godd ane were inoh forbisne to alle, the wende him-seolf into anli stude, ant feaste ther-as he wes ane i wildernesse for-te schawin ther-bi thet bimong monne thrung ne mei nan makien riht penitence. "Ther in anli stude him hungrede," hit seith, ancre to frowre thet is meoseise.'

177 *Ibid.*, 167; 'Ant nes he him-seolf reclus i Maries wombe? Theos twa thing limpeth to ancre: nearowthe ant bitternesse, for wombe is nearow wununge ther ure Laverd wes reclus, ant tis word "Marie," as ich ofte habbe i-seid, spealeth "bitternesse".'

Then, after providing the women with a historical background and two supreme models for the enclosed life the author ends his comments on enclosure by making a list of the eight reasons for becoming an anchorite. The very first one of these reasons is certainly security. 'If a raging lion were running about the street would not a prudent woman shut herself in at once?' The second reason for enclosure is the virginity of the anchoresses. Virgins had to stay away from society and enclose themselves, as it was impossible to preserve their 'bodily integrity' if they lived 'in the crowd of the world'. 'The third reason for flight from the world is the winning of heaven', a point which appears frequently throughout the text. 'The fourth reason is that it is proof of nobility and liberality'. The author here likens recluses to rich noble women who do not carry purses or bags. 'It is beggar-women who carry bags on their backs, the wives of citizens who carry purses; not the spouse of God, who is a lady of heaven.'¹⁷⁸ The fifth reason for the solitary life is that 'men and women of noble birth are liberal in alms giving' and anchoresses have given all they have in alms and have chosen this life to follow Christ. The sixth reason is to be alone with Jesus Christ 'for which anchoresses have fled from the world from their acquaintances and close companions'. The seventh reason is to shine more clearly in heaven and see the bright countenance of God there. The eighth reason is that, when enclosed, the religious' prayers are 'life-giving prayers', more effective and more powerful.

Comparing the rich imagery used for, and the detailed explanations given of, the enclosed, solitary life in *Ancrene Wisse* to the earlier texts, it is not hard to see the importance of strict enclosure — bodily and spiritually — for the author of the text. In contrast to Goscelin's indifferent attitude to the inside of the cell and Aelred's

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 73.

highly professional tone in description of the solitary life, the author of *Ancrene Wisse* is clearly more eager to demonstrate to his readers the importance of enclosure, together with the explanations of the reasons for it. The negative images, such as the tomb and the prison, used for the anchorhold, and the anchorhold's being closely connected to the female body, reveals both the seriousness of the author on the issue and the general attitude of his age towards the female religious life. As mentioned above, the anchoritic life was notably English, as the English did not forget the tribulations suffered by the nunneries during and after the Norman Conquest. However it is clear that, in contrast to the earlier texts, *Ancrene Wisse* does not only claim that enclosure is a necessity to protect both the bodily and spiritual purity of the anchoresses, but it is also precaution against the problems that might occur as a result of the weak, lustful and lust-inducing nature of females.

The author of *Ancrene Wisse* is generally positive about the lifestyles of the anchoresses he is addressing and praises their strict observance of the rules and regulations of the solitary life, especially when he writes that they are well known and admired anchoresses. Perhaps because of this stable, pre-existing situation, he does not address the hardships of the solitary life or suggest remedies. The anchoresses, though they were young and seemingly new in this profession, are left alone with their fears and worries. Rather than offering real remedies to the anchoresses for their concerns, as Goscelin successfully does, the author recommends only meditation on the lives of the Desert Fathers, the Virgin Mary and Jesus and asks them to compare the hardships they experience with theirs. After all, as prisoners of God who are there for penance, it is certain that suffering should be part of this lifestyle.

When we come to the late medieval texts of Rolle and Hilton, we see a difference in attitude towards the idea of enclosure and the wilderness theme. First of all, it should be stated that the most important difference of these later texts is the absence of the anchorhold from the texts as a physical place. The mystics of the fourteenth century, with their highly allegorical, contemplative and positive tone, ignore all the physicality of the place in which the anchoresses were living, and ignore their bodies, focusing instead on their minds and souls. According to Rolle, although the solitary life is chosen for suffering, the comfort of Jesus is not far away:

For that thou has forsakyn the solace and the joy of this world, and taken to the solitary lyf, for Gods luf to suffer tribulacion and anguys here, and sithen com that blys that nevermare blynes, I trowe treuly that the comfort of Jhesu Christe and the sweetness of his love, with the fire of the Haly Ghost, that purges all syn, sall be in the and with the...¹⁷⁹

Rolle never openly refers to the wilderness theme, but his comments on the solitary life and on the suitable conditions for the revelation of God remind the idea that the desert is the right place for an encounter with God:

The state that thou ert in, that es solitude, es maste abyll of all othyr til revelacion of the Haly Gaste. For when Saynt Jone was in the yle of Pathmos, than God schewed hym his pryvytees. The godenes of God it es, that he comfortes tham wondyrfully, that has na comfort of the worlde ...¹⁸⁰

Here the reference to the condition of St. John strengthens the idea that the solitary life is equated with the desert, though not explicitly.

Another interesting point about Rolle is that he himself was a hermit. Although he did not lead an enclosed life as an anchorite, it is certain that his being actively in the solitary life helps him a lot when commenting on the temptations and hardships of being a solitary. He warns his reader against the false apparitions of the devil:

179 Rolle, 'The Form of Living.', 45.

180 *Ibid.*, 45.

Also umwhile the fende tempes men and women, that er solitary by tham ane, on a qwaynt maner and a sotell. He transfigurs hym in the lyknes of an awngel if lyght, and apers till tham, and says that he deceives ane of Goddes awyngels comen to comfort tham. ... Alsswa oure enmy will nocht us to be in rest when we slepe; bot than he es aboute to begyle us in many manners.¹⁸¹

Here, by using the pronoun 'us' in place of 'the solitaires', he refers to his own solitary life and in this way consolidates his authority on the issue. The first part of the rule ends with an emphasis on the aim of the solitary life and on consolation of the Jesus:

Knawe that thi lyfe es gywen to the service of God. Than es it schame til the, bot be als gode, or better, within in thy sawle, als thou ert semand at the sight of men. Wonderfilli Jhesu wirkes in hys lovers, the whilk he reves fra the lust of flesch and the blode thorow tender lufe. He makes tham to will na erthly thing, and dose tham ryse into the solace of hym, and to forgete vanytees and fleschely lufe of the worlde, and to drede na sorrow that may fall.¹⁸²

There is no need to suggest remedies for loneliness, or in the case of the addressee, for enclosure, as Jesus would not let them suffer much and would free them from fleshly desires and earthly love. Jesus's love is a special gift offered to solitaires alone: 'Sere men in erth has sere gyftes and graces of God; bot the special gift of thas that ledes solitary lyf es for to lufe Jhesu Christe'.¹⁸³

It is certain that Rolle's account of the solitary life is a rather optimistic one. He never mentions the hardships of the restricted lifestyle of the recluses or the necessity of enclosure; nor does he refer to the anchorhold and the life within it. Rather he comments on the solitary life and its rewards, not verbally restricting the life of the anchoress to a cell, but freeing her metaphorically.

Twa lyves thar er that Cristen men lyfes. Ane es called actyve lyfe; for it es in mare bodili warke. Another, contemplatyve lyfe; for it es in mare swetenes gastely. Actife lyfe es mykel owteward, and in mare travel, and in mare peryle for the temptacions that are in the worlde.

181 *Ibid.*, 46-7.

182 *Ibid.*, 48.

183 *Ibid.*, 55.

Contemplatyfe lyfe es mykel inward; and forthi it es lastandar and sykerar, restfuller, delitabiler, luflyer, and mare medeful.¹⁸⁴

Here, besides the apparent optimistic tone of the description of the solitary life, the author's wording is remarkable. He uses the word 'inward' rather than 'enclosed', which apparently refers to a spiritual more than physical understanding of the cell. Therefore, in the end, the solitary life and the enclosure it necessitates is presented as something more in relation to mind and soul rather than body. Obviously Rolle is eager to maintain the mind and the soul of his reader with the constant support and encouragement of Jesus, rather than enclosing her body into a cell where she suffers both bodily and spiritually. The enclosed space of the anchorhold is widened through its representation as a state of mind rather than as a physical reality.

It is certain that Hilton's ideas on enclosure are closer to those of Rolle than to the earlier texts. However, he is not as indifferent as Rolle to the issue of bodily enclosure. He believes in the necessity of bodily enclosure, but favours the spiritual one:

I do not say that you can be converted immediately, and possess all virtues in the same way as you can enclose yourself in a cell; but you should bear in mind that the purpose of your present bodily enclosure is to enable you more readily to attain spiritual enclosure. You are shut away from dealings with other folk in order that your heart may be withdrawn from all worldly affections and fears. And in this book I propose to tell you as well as I can how you may best achieve this purpose.¹⁸⁵

According to Hilton, the aim of the bodily enclosure is the perfection of the soul and the perfection of the soul is certainly more important than the restrictions on the anchoress's body. This body versus soul-mind contrast is seen throughout Hilton's

184 *Ibid.*, 65.

185 Hilton, *The Ladder of Perfection.*, 11-2; 'I sey not that thou so lightli on the first day may be turnyd to hym in thi soule bi fulheed of vertues as thou may with thi bodi be speryd in an hous, but that thou schuldest knowe that the cause of thy bodili enclosynge is that thou myght the betere come to goosteli enclosynge; and as thi bodi is enclosid fro bodili conversacioun of men, right so that thyn hert myght be enclosid from fleisschli loves and dredis of alle ertheli thynges.'

text. It is certain that he pays great attention to emphasizing the importance of the soul-mind over the body, as he continually uses the two together. ‘The higher degree of this part may not be had nor held but of them which be in great rest and quiet both of body and mind’; ‘and was fed both body and soul by their presence’; ‘it is true that it works in and upon the soul, that the body itself is turned thereby into a heat and be as it were chafed through the labour and travail of the spirit’.¹⁸⁶ Whenever he mentions the body he feels obliged to add the soul or mind or spirit to demonstrate that the latter are more important. Indeed this contrast of body and soul and the association of the body with the corrupted world is a common point in most of the medieval texts.

While talking about the contemplative life he writes:

Now since your state requires you to be a contemplative — for the purpose of your enclosure is that you may give yourself more freely and completely to spiritual things- you must toil night and day both in body and soul in order to attain this state of life as best you may, employing whatever means seem best to you.¹⁸⁷

This close connection between the contemplative and the enclosed lives is important in two aspects. Firstly Hilton, by building this connection, brings the early Christian desert metaphor to the late middle ages. The solitary in the anchorhold is very much like the solitary in the desert waiting for an encounter with God. Secondly, it should be stated that according to Hilton’s text the intention of the enclosure is contemplation. Very much like Rolle, in Hilton we see that he basically employs positive images of the solitary, enclosed life. The anchorhold is not the tomb or the prison of the recluse, rather it is the vast desert where one might happily encounter God and understand his essence.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 59.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 3; ‘Now sithen it is so that thy staat asketh to be contemplatif, for that is the ende and the entent of thyn enclosynge, that thou myght more freli and entierli yyve the to gosteli occupacioun— thanne bihoveth the for to be right bisy nyght and day with travaile of bodi and of spirit, for to come to that lif as neer as thou may bi swich meenys as thou hopist were best unto thee.’

The security the enclosed life offered to the anchoresses, though never emphasized in the manner of the author of *Ancrene Wisse*, is also mentioned:

Ask for mercy with humility and trust, and seek salvation through the virtue of Christ's precious Passion: you will undoubtedly receive it, and will be saved both from original sin and from all other. This applies not only to you, an enclosed anchoress, but to all other Christian souls who trust in the Passion and humbly acknowledge their wretchedness, asking mercy and forgiveness through the merits of Christ's Passion alone, and humbly approaching the Sacraments of Holy Church.¹⁸⁸

In another instance Hilton likens the anchorhold to the soul of the anchoress:

You have lost Him. But where? In your own house; that is, in your soul. If you had lost Him outside your own house –that is if you had lost the power of reason through original sin- you would never have found Him again. But He left you your reason, and so He is within your soul, and will never be lost outside it¹⁸⁹

It is interesting that the anchorhold/body equation that is seen in Aelred and the author of *Ancrene Wisse* is turned into an anchorhold/soul equation in the contemplative late medieval texts. The anchorhold is also likened to the heart of the anchoress:

What hinders you, then. That you can neither see Him nor hear Him? Indeed, there is so much din and disturbance in your heart arising from foolish thoughts and bodily desires that you can neither hear Him nor see Him. Therefore put away all this restless noise, and break your love of sin and vanity; bring into your heart the love of virtues and true charity, and you will hear our Lord speak to you.¹⁹⁰

188 *Ibid.*, 52; '... aske oonli savacioun bi the vertu of his precious passion mekeli and trustili, and withoute doute thou schalt have it. And for this origynal synne and all othere that thou hast doon, thou schalt be saaf, as ankir incluse; and not oonli thou, but alle Cristene soulis whiche trusten upoun his passioun and meken hemself, knowelechyng her wrecchidnesse, askyng merci and forgyvenesse, by the fruit of his precious passioun oonli, lowynge hemself to the sacramentis of holi chirche.'

189 *Ibid.*, 61; 'Thou haste loste hym, but where? Soothli in thyn hous, that is in thi soule. Yif thou haddest lost hym oughte of thyn hous, that is to seie, yif thou haddest lost al the resoun of thy soule bi thi first synne, thi soule schulde nevere have founden him ayen; but he lefte to thee thi resoun, and so he is in thi soule and nevere schal be lost oute of hit.'

190 *Ibid.*, 80; 'What letteth thee thanne, that thou mai neither see hym ne heere him? Sotheli there is mykil dene and cryng in thyn herte of veyn thoughtes and fleischli desires, that thou mai neither heere hym ne see him; and therefore put away unrestful dene and breke the love of synne and of vanité, and bringe into thyne herte love of vertues and ful charité, and thanne schalt thou here thi Lord speke unto thee.'

The anchorhold, explained as the place for contemplation, is equated with the heart that should be clear and kept empty to welcome Jesus. This passage is also filled with complex images of the house, anchorhold, heart and body:

Follow Jesus in this matter if you can, for although your body is enclosed in a cell, nevertheless your heart, which is the seat of love, you should be able to attain some degree of this love for your fellows of which I have spoken.¹⁹¹

Here Hilton likens the enclosure of the soul in the body to the enclosure of the anchoress in the anchorhold. From this point onwards he passes on to the heart, sometimes depicted as the anchoresses' cell.

Hilton, although clearly optimistic in tone, admits that this solitary life will be a hard one:

Direct your whole intention and purpose to the Lord Jesus, desiring to seek, feel or find nothing except the grace and presence of Jesus. This requires great effort, for vain thoughts through into your mind to divert your attention to them.¹⁹²

And similar to Rolle, the remedy he offers for this kind of hardship is the love of Jesus.

For your consolation and that of all who have embraced the state of an enclosed anchoress, as well as those who by the grace of God have entered any Religious Order approved by Holy Church, I will say further that all those who by the mercy of God shall be saved will have an especial glory and reward for their lives in the joys of heaven.¹⁹³

191 *Ibid.*, 85; 'Folwe aftir sumwhat if thou may, for though thu be stoken in an hous with thi bodi, nevertheles in thyn herte, where the stide of love is, thou schulde mow have part of siche love to thyn even Cristen as y speke of.'

192 *Ibid.*, 64; 'And sette thyn entent and thi purpoos as thou woldest not seke, ne fele, ne finde, but upon thi lord Jhesu oonly, the grace and the presence, the techynge and the comfort of thi Lord Jhesu Crist. This is traveilous, for veyn thoughtis wolen alwei presen to thyn herte thikke, for to drawe thi thought doun to hem.'

193 *Ibid.*, 74; 'And overe this I seie more, in comforte of thee and of alle othere havynge the staat of anker incloos, and also bi the grace of God in comfort of hem alle that entren ony religioun approved bi holi chirche, that alle thoo that bi the merci of oure Lord schal be savyd, thei schal have special mede and a singuler worschipe in the blisse of hevене...'

The reward of the solitary life, which will certainly be a heavenly one, is the remedy offered by their advisor for the concerns of the anchoresses. When anchoresses finish their search, the thing they will find will be their own souls, says Hilton:

What else? Indeed, you will find nothing but a dark and painful image of your own soul, which has neither the light of the knowledge of God nor any love and devotion to Him. This image, if you examine it carefully, is entirely enveloped in the black cloak of sin –pride, anger, spiritual indolence, covetousness, gluttony, and lust.¹⁹⁴

The image of the soul depicted as invaded by the seven deadly sins is the most negative point in Hilton's text. At this point, remembering the desert image as a place conquered by the devil, where the solitaries are attacked from every corner, it is possible to argue that Hilton is playing freely with the images of the desert, anchorhold and anchoress's soul.

It is possible to argue that Hilton's comments on the anchoritic life and the enclosure theme in general are more down to earth than those of Rolle. As might be expected from the predominantly contemplative tone of the text, the anchorhold is represented as a metaphorical desert rather than as a physical narrow space in *The Scale of Perfection*. On the other hand, compared to Rolle's purely spiritual image of the solitary life, Hilton seems to be more concrete in tone. He believes in the importance of contemplation and from time to time offers it as a remedy for the hardships of the solitary life, but he still emphasizes the necessity of actual physical enclosure for the purity of soul. Rolle, however, even does not use the term anchorhold in his text, commenting only on the solitary life and its potential rewards.

This attitude of the fourteenth-century authors towards the idea of enclosure may be explained as an extension of their general attitude towards the religious life.

194 *Ibid.*, 64; 'What thanne? Sotheli, right nought but a merk ymage and a peynful of thyn owen soule, whiche hath neither light of knowynge ne felynge of love ne likynge. This ymage yif thou biholde it wittirly, is al bilappid with blake stynkande clothis of synne, as pride, envie, ire, accidie, glotonye, and leccherie.'

In complete contrast to the high medieval anchoritic texts, religious pursuit is not defined as a journey full of hardships and temptations that will last till the end of the life of the recluse. Rather it is certain that Rolle and Hilton believe in the coming of the happy, joyful days soon, through contemplation, even sooner than actual death. This contrast therefore changes the image of the sorrowful anchoress buried in her cell into a more optimistic one. Anchoresses are not truly alone in their cells anymore, but always together with their beloveds who help them bear the temptations of the devil and overcome the difficulties of the solitary enclosed life. Apart from this, there is a great change in the approaches of the authors of these five guide books towards the anchorhold as a physical place. We see the eagerness of the authors that believe in the necessity of bodily enclosure to rule and regulate the life in the anchorhold. The later writers, however, try to open the physically enclosed space of the cell with a reference to the freedom it offers. The cell which was defined as the chaste body of the anchoress becomes her soul that is filled with love and charity for Jesus and this change certainly reflects shifts in the dynamics of the religious pursuit in the minds of the authors.

CHAPTER IV

Virginité and Chastity: Anchoresses Gendered and Re-gendered

Since the patristic age Christians have held indecisive notions about the meaning of virginité and the status of virgins in both the Church and the world, yet this fundamental concept of virginité preserved its importance within the Christian society throughout the Middle Ages. Recent research on patristic and medieval writings has demonstrated that the concept of virginité was developed within and across a number of different discourses. Patristic writings and medieval commentaries, medical and scientific treatises, legal records and documents, and various literary and religious texts have been employed by historians to see the representations of virginité and its verifications in these different discourses.¹⁹⁵ This recent enthusiasm for the subject of virginité, its verifications and meanings for contemporaries, have made the female body and, more specifically, some parts of it, and the meanings attributed to those parts, a new focus of recent historical and cultural studies. How did bodies come to have meaning? More precisely, how did a specific part of a gendered body, the hymen and its analogues, function as a metaphor and metonym for a group of ideas and beliefs about women and their relation to men and God? Answering this question has become one of the most important points of any study on medieval women, especially religious. The most recent studies have finally attempted to invalidate the highly valued assumption that

195 See Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity*. (New York, 1988); John Bugge, *Virginitas: An Essay in the History of a Medieval Ideal*. (The Hague, 1975); Vern L. Bullough and James Brudage, *Sexual Practices and the Medieval Church*. (Buffalo, 1982); Joyce Salisbury, *Church Fathers Independent Virgins*. (London, 1991); Barbara Newman, *From Virile Woman to WomanChrist: Studies in Medieval Religion and Literature*. (Philadelphia, 1995); Patricia Ranft, *Women and Spiritual Equality in Christian Tradition*. (New York, 1998).

there was a dualist concept of body and mind or body and soul in the Middle Ages. As Bynum puts it, virginity and its verifications, chastity and its confirmations, reveal that bodies and spirits were not so easily separated in the minds of medieval theologians and other writers.¹⁹⁶

Having stated the various discourses and their different approaches to the concept of virginity, it is hardly possible here even to sketch the history of the ideas on virginity throughout the patristic period and the middle ages. However, in order to perceive the meaning and understand the importance of the concepts of virginity and chastity in the lives of the anchoresses and the variations in the concept throughout the period between the eleventh and fourteenth centuries, it is better first to turn to the roots of the virginity idea which can be found in the writings of the Christian Fathers, a common source of all anchoritic writings for women. In the period from the second to the fifth century in the Christian world, the Church Fathers took on the duty of assimilation, explanation and declaration of the doctrine and the dogma of the religion of Christianity. They were concerned with matters such as the Trinity, and the human and Godly natures of Christ primarily, but they also attempted to develop a Christian anthropology as well as a Christian theology. Therefore, many Fathers wrote expansively on the nature of human beings, their life in the Garden of Eden and on the earth, and on the sexuality of humans and on their family life.¹⁹⁷ Questions about human sexuality were not only central to the understanding of the nature of human beings, but also of crucial importance for perceiving the condition of human beings before and after the Fall and God's intentions for the reproduction and continuation of the human life on earth.

196 Caroline Walker Bynum. *Fragmentation and Redemption : Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion*. (New York, 1991), 58.

197 Clarissa W. Atkinson. "'Precious Balsam in a Fragile Glass': The Ideology of Virginity in the Later Middle Ages." *Journal of Family History* 8 (Summer, 1983), 132

Early Christian writers' ideas on the issue of the primal condition of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden are divided very broadly into two by Bugge. He claims that on the one hand we have the writers who tended to indicate that the original sin that caused humanity's fall from heaven was a sexual one. Humans were created in the image and likeness of God and they led a perfect angel-like life in heaven with their perfectly unified minds and souls. This angel-like life of the first humans in the Garden of Eden and their perfect virginal state before the Fall formed the basis of the ideal of virginity.¹⁹⁸ According to Bugge, despite minor differences on the nature of human existence in the Garden of Eden, all the Fathers in this first group supported the idea that humanity's first sin was somehow related to sexual intercourse and that the original effect of this sin was physical sexuality and death. As sexual activity was related to impurity, the defective nature of humanity, and with death, the asexual, virginal life in complete contrast was associated with the perfect and immortal existence of angels. The perfect condition of the human spirit and mind was a property of the angelic life and they had the right to lead that angelic life, as they were virgins. In this respect it is certain that one of the most important prerequisites for the angelic life was abstention from sexual activity and this belief simply made the idea of virginity the most important aspect of the life of ascetics who were seeking a reunification with the creator.

On the other hand, Bugge explains, we have the second group of Church Fathers that can be called the Fathers of the Latin tradition. According to writers of this group, the Garden of Eden was a literal place that was physically located on Earth and Adam and Eve were real living human beings. Jerome, one of the most influential theologians of the patristic age and a member of this second group,

198 John Bugge. *Virginitas: an essay in the history of a medieval ideal*. (The Hague, 1975), 15.

according to Bugge, focuses on the issue of sexual experience in the Garden of Eden. For Jerome, '[in] paradise Eve was a virgin and it was only after the coats of skins that she began her married life'.¹⁹⁹ Sexual intercourse did not exist before the Fall and certainly it was one of the reasons for the impurity of Adam and Eve's existence on Earth. Besides, emphasising the connection between lack of sexual intercourse and the original innocence of humans, Jerome also explained the present methods of conception and birth as direct results of the Fall that happened as a result of humans' sin. In one of his letters to Eustochium he wrote,

I would not have you subject to that sentence whereby condemnation has been passed upon mankind. When God says to Eve, 'In pain and in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children,' say to yourself, 'that is a law for a married woman, not for me.' ... And when, last of all, He says, 'Thou shalt surely die,' once more, say, 'Marriage indeed must end in death; but the life on which I have resolved is independent of sex'.²⁰⁰

Augustine is undoubtedly the most important writer that should be mentioned as he was the one of the Fathers whom the western Christian world would be most familiar with. Augustine believed in the literal existence of Garden of Eden and its inhabitants.

Man then lived with God for his rule in a paradise at once physical and spiritual. For neither was it a paradise only physical for the advantage of the body and not also spiritual for the advantage of the mind ... But obviously it was both for both ends.²⁰¹

Adam and Eve in heaven had perfect '*apethia*'. There was no place for lust in heaven because the human mind had complete control over their bodies, and even if they had sexual intercourse it was free of lust and desire. As the sexual intercourse was free of the destructive power of the libido, Eve was still a virgin until the Fall. Bugge tells

199 P. Schaff, *Jerome: The Principal Works of St. Jerome*, <http://www.ccel.org/fathers2/NPNF2-06/Npnf2-06-03.htm#P583_110510> July, 2007.

200 Schaff, *Jerome.*, <http://www.ccel.org/fathers2/NPNF2-06/Npnf2-06-03.htm#P583_110510> July, 2007.

201 Augustine, *The City of God*, Book XIV, Chapter 11 <<http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/120114.htm>> July, 2007.

that in the teaching of Augustine, the original sin was not about lust or sexuality, but about the desire for knowledge, the aim of which was to be like the creator himself. This was therefore closely related to pride. 'It is a worse and more damnable pride which casts about for the shelter of an excuse even in manifest sins, as these our first parents did.'²⁰²

According to Augustine the desire for knowledge was actually the motive for the original sin, which was disobedience. It is clear that Augustine's teaching on the nature of life in the Garden of Eden, the Fall and the original sin that caused it was a turning point in the history of the idea of virginity. While in the 'Christian Gnostic' tradition,²⁰³ the greatest sin was the carnal one, in the teaching of Augustine the principal sin was to be explained as pride. As a result of his teaching on original sin, Augustine and the subsequent western medieval tradition explained death as the last point in the decay and deformation of a body that had broken free of the control of the will. Therefore, in the Augustinian tradition, death was not seen as a suitable punishment for the original sin but accepted as just a consequence of the decay of human body.

As it is clear, virginity did not have a very important place in Augustine's thought. In the Christian Gnostic tradition, an asexual life was the only way to unify with God, as it enabled the human mind to access the sacred knowledge that was revealed by God himself. Angelic perfection could only be achieved by leading an angel-like life, one of the most important prerequisites of which was being asexual. In Augustine's thought, however we see that virginity lost its etiological importance, as it had no organic function in his system.²⁰⁴ Therefore it is certain that what

202 Augustine, *The City of God*, Book XIV, Chapter 14
<<http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/120114.htm>> July, 2007.
203 for further information see Bugge, *Virginitas*, Chapter II.
204 Bugge, *Virginitas*, 30.

preserved the ideal in the West was its realisation in a plan for the perfect Christian living, the monastic institution. With reverence for its ancient eastern origins the cloister brought the ideal of virginity to the West, and installed it in the western tradition and that is why Latin Fathers following Augustine, and also Augustine himself praised chastity and virginity in their writings. Although it was not the first and foremost prerequisite of the religious life, virginity was still a very important aspect of the lives of religious men and women in the West. In this respect it is certain that any study of religious women that does not deal with the issue of virginity and its various meaning in the lives of those women would be incomplete.

Christianity was born into an age that was rarely favourable to women. Among pagan sects there were many that had fears and prejudices on the functions of women within their belief systems and many sects actively excluded women from all kinds of rituals. Judaism also adopted a dark view of the female sex, explaining humanity's fall through Eve. Women were excluded from most of public worship and rituals, as they were thought to be polluted by nature. The early Christians were no exception in this issue. The Christian Church was founded by the Church Fathers and most of them restricted their procreative instincts to their intellectual activities and therefore stayed away from the sexual society of women. It would not be too hard to indicate their fear of women's seductions and disgust of her physical functions. For some time now, the misogyny of the patristic age, expressed mainly in the writings of the Fathers on women, is well known thanks to the efforts of the scholars of the field.²⁰⁵

205 See the major works of Barbara Newman, Elizabeth Robertson, Jane Tibbetts Schulenburg and Caroline Walker Bynum and Anne Clark Bartlett for the misogynistic attitudes seen in the writings of fathers. Patricia Ranft on the other hand in her *Women and Spiritual Equality in Christian Tradition* (New York, 1998), claims that within Christianity there also exists a strong and enduring tradition that maintains the spiritual equality of women. Accepting the arguments on the misogynist views of the

This highly gendered ecclesiastical discourse from the earlier days onwards tried its best to ‘re-gender’ its female converts by instilling in them a masculine religious identification and an ideal of religious practice.²⁰⁶ More clearly, women were forced to reject some characteristics such as sensuality, weakness and irrationality that were defined as ‘feminine’ by the male authorities, and adopt some new ones that were defined to be ‘masculine’ such as rationality, orderliness and moral purity.²⁰⁷ According to Barbara Newman, Latin treatises for women focus on the maintenance of female celibacy, virginity preferably, rather than a variety of other religious and social concerns seen in the texts written for male religious. Newman argues that,

The male authors of religious texts for women voice masculine views of life they regarded in principle as gender-free, yet without divesting themselves of andro-centric perfections and stereotypes.²⁰⁸

According to Newman, the proper role models illustrated in the religious treatises written for women were created through the eyes of men, who identified themselves and their religious condition by contrasting it with the weak, defective and fallen female one. Margaret Miles’s comments on the issue are also worth quoting, as she suggests an understanding of the dark unattractive images of women in the religious writings. According to Miles, representations of women in ancient texts are:

nothing but an instance of a monk’s ability to force his governing metaphor onto someone who might falsify his construction of the world, not by her beauty, which contributes to his reading of “woman” but by her different subjective world. The possibility that she might succeed in appearing to him as a suffering, struggling human being, resistant to his figuration, constitutes his temptation.²⁰⁹

fathers, she tries to expand the scope of the studies of the field by introducing the argument that misogyny was not the *only* attitude towards women that Christianity embraced.

206 Anne Clerk Bartlett. *Male Authors, Female Readers: Representation and Subjectivity in Middle English Devotional Literature*. (Ithaca, 1995), 37.

207 See Peter Brown, *The Body and Society*. esp. p. 259-305.

208 Barbara Newman. *From Virile Woman to WomanChrist. Studies in Medieval Religion and Literature*. (Philadelphia, 1995), p. 5.

209 Bartlett. *Male Authors, Female Readers*, 40.

Therefore, negative representations of female attributions indicate the tension between the general beliefs on women and her position in religion in the minds of male authors. Miles continues:

The real woman is not peripheral to the monk or to the text. She is needed, indeed, essential. ... She is both desirable body and fascinating subjectivity. ... She localizes, focuses, “reduces” all temptations to the time and space occupied by her body. She is the litmus test of his ascetic practice, the “trial by seduction” that proves his accomplishment... the vision of women as subjects of religious commitment escalated male anxiety because it threatened to nullify the figure “women” by which men could understand and manage women.²¹⁰

In order to be assimilated into the religious practices of Christianity therefore, women were taught to give up some parts of their identities that were defined as evil and feminine by the male authors.²¹¹ It was only in this way possible for them to reverse their seductive difference and contribute to the expansion of the Church.

Caroline Walker Bynum in her influential article ‘Jesus as Mother and Abbot as Mother’ expands this re-gendering idea by contrasting the attitudes of the early middle ages to those of the twelfth century, at which point she claims the feminization of religious language took place. According to Bynum, the twelfth century, when feminine metaphors such as ‘mother Church’ and maternal imagery for religious authorities and even God (‘Jesus as mother’) were used and elaborated with an increasing emphasis, is ‘the mirror image of earlier medieval language’. She explains:

Whereas twelfth-century monks sometimes call themselves women, early medieval women sometimes call themselves men. ... Whereas twelfth to fourteenth-century texts call Jesus mother, in the Carolingian period we find an iconographic tradition of the bearded Mary, the mother of God with a male attribute. Whereas tenderness and comfort are stressed in later medieval spirituality, images of warfare — which were to medieval people clearly male images —

210 *Ibid.*, 42.

211 *Ibid.*, 40.

were dominant in the monastic spirituality of the tenth and eleventh centuries.²¹²

It is certain that in the early middle ages virginity was perceived as a liberator for women. The treatises written for women, in which virginity is praised, do not only offer virginal life to women as the most suitable way to free themselves from the bondage of marriage and the dangers of childbirth, but they also suggest that through virginity women become masculine. Virginity was presented as an ideal higher state of being for all and, basically was believed to be an opportunity to gain freedom from that condition which defined the inferior status of the female. The reward of this self-denial and re-gendering in the case of women was social honour and promise of a place among the high ranking saints in heaven. The virginal state was of great social importance and, as McNamara puts it:

Such a woman, with her virgin brother, stood on the most elevated level of the spiritual hierarchy. Since woman's special condition was defined by her status as a wife, the virgin must be viewed as having transcended that condition and therefore the limitations placed on her sex.²¹³

Asexual women were accepted as closer to men, but it should be stated that it was certainly not the object of the Fathers to turn women into men through the virginal life. As McNamara explains, their aim was rather 'to express the absolute equality which the two sexes enjoyed outside the limitations of marriage'.²¹⁴ They basically sought to bring women and men alike to a state where all differences and therefore all limitations on sexes were transcended and in this respect virginity meant a lot more for women than men.

212 Caroline Walker Bynum. 'Jesus as Mother and Abbot as Mother: Some Themes in Twelfth-Century Cistercian Writing' In *Jesus As Mother Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages*. edited by Caroline Walker Bynum. (London, 1979), 138-9.

213 Joe Anne McNamara. 'Sexual Equality and the Cult of Virginity in Early Christian Thought.' *Feminist Studies* 3 (Spring-Summer, 1976), 152

214 *Ibid.*, 153.

It is certain that the writings of the Fathers stress the necessity of the virginal state for the religious and its implications for the sexes. Approaching faith through the anti-material, world-denouncing tendency of the period, the Fathers repeated New Testament texts that seemed to renounce sexual and familial ties and formulated the doctrinal explanations accordingly. Although Christ blessed the marriage at Cana, he also asked ‘Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?’²¹⁵ The emphasis of St. Paul, who wished that all might be celibate though perhaps not necessarily virginal, as he was himself, was taken literally and understood to mean that Christians should choose lives that were separated from all the good things of the world. Christ himself never spoke against marriage, but he was not married and his virginity was a powerful model for all Christians to imitate. The importance of virginity and its roots are clear, but what was virginity?

It should be stated that the Fathers do not present an ideologically unified consistent body of thought on the meaning of virginity. Depending on the context the patristic writers and their commentators throughout the middle ages who used the terms *castitas* and *virginitas* may be referring either to one’s being physically virgin, to an individual’s commitment to a religious celibate life, whatever his or her physical status, or to a sexual faithfulness in marriage. The definitions and descriptions of the concepts of virginity and chastity varied in the patristic period and this fact reveals the degree to which these concepts were negotiable within the newly emerging institution of Christian Church. The variety of the ideas and the numbers of the writings that deal with the concept of virginity, its meaning and importance and the methods of preserving it reveal the importance of the subject within the Christian society and religious life.

215 Atkinson. “Precious Balsam in a Fragile Glass”., 132.

The ideas on the meaning of virginity can be divided into two very broadly. On the first side we have theologians that understood virginity as a physiological state. The virgin is the person who has never experienced sexual intercourse; if the virgin is female her unbroken hymen is an indication of virginal status. On the other side, virginity is defined basically as a moral or spiritual state, as a kind of purity or humility. In this second view physical virginity was unimportant for the relationship of the religious with God. It is not hard to exemplify both positions through important and influential writings of the period.

To start from the very early days of Christianity the lives of two female martyrs who lived in the second century and the attitude of the author of their lives is revealing. Perpetua and Felicitas, who lived and died at a period when Christianity was under great pressure, were not virgins. Felicitas was a newly married woman who ‘was about twenty years old and had an infant son at the breast’ and Perpetua was ‘glad that she had safely given birth so that now she could fight the beasts, going from one blood fight to another...’²¹⁶ The author of their *Passion* was not discouraged by the women’s sexual and marital condition. On the contrary he praised their sufferings and explained that their female weakness made their suffering all the more impressive. Their martyrdom was not dishonoured by their gender or marriage; on the contrary their heroism was perceived to be greater due to their gender. Their stories together with those of many other wives and widows were told to religious women throughout the middle ages representing these women as models to be imitated.

However, there were many other writings from the same century that emphasized the importance of physical virginity and made it a prerequisite for any

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 133.

religious vocation. Among Latin Fathers, St. Jerome was the most intense and the most extreme in his explanation of virginity. He mentions the concept of virginity in many of his writings especially in his writings for women.

I know that some people have laid down the rule that a Christian virgin should not bathe along with eunuchs or with married women, in as much as eunuchs are still men at heart, and women big with child are a revolting sight. For myself I disapprove altogether of baths in the case of a full-grown virgin. She ought to blush at herself and be unable to look at her own nakedness.²¹⁷

For Jerome, the sight of a pregnant women and even the sight of her own body was harmful to a young virgin. As for marriage, his comments are far more interesting.

Remember that what is born of wedlock is virgin flesh and that by its fruit it renders what in its parent root it had lost... I praise wedlock, I praise marriage; but it is because they produce me virgins.²¹⁸

Jerome was most concerned to maintain the status of virginity and he appreciated marriage, as he believed that marriage produced more virgins. According to Jerome, 'though God can do all things, he cannot raise a virgin up after she has fallen'.²¹⁹

Augustine was never as rigid as Jerome on the concept of virginity. He wrote,

Therefore let the rest of the faithful, who have lost virginity, follow the Lamb, not whithersoever He shall have gone, but so far as ever they shall have been able. But they are able every where, save when He walks in the grace of virginity... But surely even married persons may go in those steps, although not setting their foot perfectly in the same print, yet walking in the same paths.²²⁰

In the *City of God* Augustine was specifically concerned to comfort and to reassure women who had been raped during the sack of Rome. Consistent with his general emphasis on will and consent he emphasized the importance of the spiritual purity of the virgin over her physical integrity. He claimed that 'purity is a virtue of mind ... it is not lost when the body is violated' and added a story of a midwife who

217 *Ibid.*, 130.

218 *Ibid.*, 134.

219 *Ibid.*, 135.

220 Augustine <http://www.well.com/~aquarius/augustine-virginity.htm> July, 2007.

during a manual examination of a virgin ... destroyed her maidenhead, whether a malice, or clumsiness, or accident. I do not suppose that anyone would be stupid enough to imagine that the virgin lost anything of bodily chastity, even though the integrity of that part had been destroyed.²²¹

These two basic ways of defining virginity — the physical and the spiritual — were present all throughout the history of medieval Christianity and overlap from time to time. It is easy to overemphasize the differences between these two approaches. However, it is certain that when Jerome said ‘fallen’ he did not mean fallen as a result of an examination of a midwife and Augustine certainly praised the physically virginal state, ‘the state of innocence’ over the marital status. Nevertheless, the aims and the assumptions on the definition of virginity were various and these two definitions survived throughout the middle ages. Medieval Christians valued Jerome’s physical definition, while trying to protect virgins from the dangers of the outside world, but also praised Augustine’s ideas on the importance of consent and the human capacity to determine the good or evil of any human activity or sexual status. Actually, after Augustine, this spiritual definition of virginity was never discussed as every theologian accepted his views. These ancient notions of virginity were not reviewed for a long time and were preserved in the writings of each century to some extent with shifting emphasis on the physical and spiritual meanings.

Even in the twelfth century, the period of systematization of the laws and customs of the Church and the social order, and the period that saw the revival of the Augustinian notion of consent, the old ideas on the physical explanations of virginity continued to exist to some extent. The *Life of Christina of Markyate*, a life of a recluse written around the mid-twelfth century by a monk of St. Alban’s, is a

221 Atkinson. “‘Precious Balsam in a Fargile Glass’”, 134.

valuable text for illustrating the surviving importance of physical virginity. The activities of the heroine in the text and the author's assumptions are far stricter than those of the second-century *Passion* author. Christina had to fight for her physical virginity: she fought with her parents, with her fiancé and even with the representatives of the Church. Christina prayed when she was at the age of twelve,

O Lord God, merciful and all powerful, receives my oblation through the hands of Thy priest.... Grant me, I beseech Thee, purity and inviolable virginity whereby thou mayest renew in me the image of thy son: who lives and reigns with Thee...²²²

For Christina and obviously for the author of the text the image of God was the image of a virgin; therefore she could resemble God only by remaining a virgin. The sensational nature of Christina's adventures suits the literal physical meaning of virginity. She escapes from her family and her husband's attacks by climbing over fences with 'an amazing ease'.²²³ Thus her virginity is represented not only as some quality of her body that should be protected as her faith, but also as a source of extra power and bodily strength for her. Although it is clear that both meanings survived into the middle ages and were employed until the end of the period, it is not possible to mention a stable, standard definition of the concept. In each and every period and according to each and every author the concept of virginity gained a new aspect or came to be understood as a different metaphor. There were many different approaches to the concept and various different interpretations of it.

The interpretations of the concept of virginity we see in the anchoritic texts certainly reflect both the mind of the author, and the self-perception of the readers. In the light of the patristic roots for the necessity and importance of virginity for those who had chosen a religious life and through the basic definitions of the concept set in

²²² *Ibid.*, 136.

²²³ *The Life of Christina of Markyate*, translated by Monika Furlong with an introduction and commentary. (Hertfordshire, 1997), 22.

the patristic period, it will be easier to follow the shift of emphasis in the definitions of virginity and the re-gendering tendencies in the anchoritic texts, a shift I claim to be mainly from a more rigid physical definition towards a broader spiritual one.

In Goscelin's *Liber Confortatorius* the concept of virginity is not dealt with in detail. It is certain that Goscelin was well aware of the fact that Eve, brought up in one of the most important monasteries of England as a nun, was most probably a virgin in the physical sense. He rarely talks about it and when he does he just informs Eve on some doctrinal points such as the roots and the rewards of the virginal life rather than warning her against possible encounters that may danger her virginal status. However, his respectful attitude to Eve's intellectual and religious capacities is also apparent in his comments on the concept of virginity. Goscelin emphasizes spiritual chastity over physical virginity. Although he does not comment on the issue explicitly, the examples he mentions in the text are revealing. After explaining that Jesus stands on the steps leading to heaven to decide who will rise 'from humility and constancy' and who will fall 'because of pride and negligence', he passes on to the stories of St. Perpetua and Felicity and tells their frightful stories in detail, ignoring their marital status. St. Perpetua, Goscelin tells:

was shown in a dream a golden ladder reaching up to heaven, narrowed for humans to ascend one by one. ... Crosses, racks, lances, swords, hurdles, fires, claws, clubs, lead-line scourges, scorpion instruments, beasts and all kinds of terrible punishment were threatening.²²⁴

Perpetua 'fixed as stone by her faith' does not dare to move. As she ascends she sees a certain Ethiopian 'who was about to wrestle against her but she fights, conquers him and takes the honour of the palm'. Here it is not only Goscelin's indifferent

224 Hollis., *Writing the Wilton Women.*, 128-9; '*Oranti demonstrata est in somnis scala aurea in celum cacuminata, ad unius hominis ascensum arctata. ... Cruces, eculei, lancee, gladii, crates, ignes, fustes, plumbati, scorpiones, bestie omnesque penarum facides terribiles asperabantur.*', Talbot, 'The *Liber Confortatorius.*', 50.

attitude towards Perpetua's marital status that makes this passage important. Goscelin does not only point to some mystical, supernatural powers of Perpetua that earlier writers generally grant to the virgins and tend to explain it as a result of virginal status, but by describing the fighting scenes he also replaces general female attributions of weakness and passivity with some male-defined ones such as activity, dominance and strength.

The story of Felicity conveys similar insights. Goscelin tells that Perpetua's sister Felicity, who was eight months pregnant, was afraid that she would be deprived of martyrdom, 'because it was not permitted for a pregnant women to be punished'.²²⁵ However with her constant prayers she won the right to be a martyr as she was miraculously freed from her offspring. Goscelin's decision to tell Felicity's story does not only affirm the fact that he saw the passion of Felicity, although she was pregnant, as an appropriate model for Eve, but the story itself also indicates that as a married woman she was not excluded from one of the highest ranks for Christians in heaven, martyrdom. Goscelin certainly praises humility and chastity over a virginal body.

On the other hand it is not that easy to perceive Goscelin's ideas on the importance of virginity as an opportunity for women to be equal with men. Following Bynum's comments that images of warfare and single combat seen in the religious texts and the male attributions they matched in the minds of medieval people; it is possible to claim that Goscelin seems to be re-gendering Eve by constantly praising active, fighting and dominant characters and images. He tells the adventure stories of 'the splendid Agnes', 'the glorious Lucy' and 'the valiant Potamina'. Moreover, the second book of *Liber Confortatorius* starts with a long

²²⁵ *Ibid.*, 129.

detailed warfare metaphor at the end of which Goscelin states that ‘the greater the struggles, therefore the stronger the divine assistance and ... the more copious the rewards that will follow the battle’.²²⁶ Goscelin wrote:

Awake in bravery, because the Lord has come with deliverance. Stand fast in faith, act *manfully*, ... Put on the armour of God the breastplate of faith the helmet of hope the arms and shield of the soul trusting in the Lord.²²⁷

In the third Book at the point where he turns to war imagery, Goscelin repeats his words:

I did well, when formerly you were wavering, to encourage you amid your sighs with this verse, and to respond with it in writing, so that you would consider it more carefully: “Expect the Lord, act *manfully*, and let your heart take courage, and wait for the Lord”.²²⁸

As is clear, Goscelin, with his examples from the passions of early martyrs and with the constant imagery of war, tries to create a self-image for Eve that is basically ‘manly’. He expects her to be brave, courageous and to behave ‘manfully’. On the other hand, we do not see any explicit statement throughout the book on Eve’s virginal status and a re-gendering through virginity. First of all, as mentioned in the previous chapters, Goscelin’s attitude towards Eve and her religious profession contains none of the negative assumptions about women and their place in the world. Rather, Goscelin approaches his reader in sincerely positive terms and builds a relationship based on mutual respect. Therefore, seeing the optimistic tone of the work on Eve’s religious and intellectual capacity, it is hard to claim that Goscelin tries to free his reader from her inferior position through her virginity.

²²⁶ *Ibid.*, 125.

²²⁷ *Ibid.*, 125; ‘*State in fide, uiriliter agite, omnes qui speratis in Domino confidentis animi.*’, Talbot, ‘The *Liber Confortatorius.*’, 47.

²²⁸ *Ibid.*, 173; ‘*Bene te quondam fluctuantem in suspiriis tuis hoc uersu confortabam, et notis hunc ut attentius perpenderes intentabam: Ecpecta Dominum, uiriliter age, et confortetur cor tuum et sustine Dominum.*’ Talbot, ‘The *Liber Confortatorius.*’, 89.

Goscelin's text is not gendered, except in his exhortation to manly virtues, and his relative lack of interest in the virginity or the chastity of his reader is a sign of the work's early composition. Compared to the attitudes of Aelred and the author of *Ancrene Wisse* towards female virginity, which will be examined next, it is possible to claim that we do not see in *Liber Confortatorius* the tendency of the twelfth- and thirteenth-century writers to stress virginity and chastity as the basic and most valued virtue of a woman. On the contrary, Goscelin's ideas on the issue are somehow closer to the later writers of the fourteenth century who praised humility above everything else. Goscelin wrote:

And thus pride is the occasion of all ruin. ... Humility is the guardian of the virtues; whoever has lost it has lost the virtues, and he has given up his vineyard unguarded to plunderers. ... Humility is both the foundation and the fortification of good works.²²⁹

Besides, virginal status could be recovered according to Goscelin. He wrote:

The good Lord has made all things good, and has done all things well, but good perishes from them for whom the giver has not preserved it. But he has given it to all to be born as virgins; ... Others, either by the ignorance of their age or the curiosity of Dinah,²³⁰ have run upon the bite of the serpent but with the Lord's healing have soon shaken off the poison ... A widow is joined also with virgins if she has emulated virginal chastity even after her loss. The Lord found a serpent and made a prophet ... He found a prostitute and made her equal with virgins.²³¹

For Goscelin it was possible to rise from prostitute to virgin and the physical condition of women was certainly less important than their spiritual purity. Even if Goscelin was under the influence of Jerome and his own contemporary literary traditions while formulating this letter of consolation, it is hard to claim that he was

229 *Ibid.*, 175-6-7; 'Itaque elatio totius ruine est occasio. .. Humilitas custos est uirtutum, quam qui perdidit, uirtutes perdidit et uineam suam incustoditam direptoribus tradidit. ... Humilitas igitur et fundamentum bonorum operum est munimentum.', Talbot, 'The Liber Confortatorius.', 91-2.

230 Genesis. 34.1-2.

231 Hollis., *Writing the Wilton Women.*, 183; 'Omnia bonus Dominus bona condidit, et bene omnia fecit, sed illis bonum periit, quibus dator non seruauit. Sed omnibus nasci uirgines dedit, ... Alie uel etatis inscitia uel Dine curiositate ictum serpentis incurrere, sed Domino sanante mox uenena excussere, ... Virginibus quoque oungitur uidua, uirgineam castitatem er post uulnera emulata. ... Iuenit meretricem et uirginibus coequauit.', Talbot, 'The Liber Confortatorius.', 97-8.

as rigid as Jerome on the issue of virginity, who claimed that it was even impossible for God to raise a fallen virgin. Goscelin's talking about certain virtues and capacities as 'manly' is certainly a gendered approach, but each and every gendered attitude should not perhaps always be regarded as an attempt to re-gender. It seems that it is more appropriate to consider the constant metaphors of warfare and detailed descriptions of the 'manly' fights of female martyrs as an influence of the literary traditions of his age and the previous models he relies upon, rather than claiming them to be indicators of Goscelin's desire to re-gender Eve through virginity.

Aelred, on the other hand, is closer to Jerome in his approach to the concept of virginity and can be considered as a man of his age. His text represents the qualities of the twelfth century with its undoubted bias towards the physical understanding of virginity and strict regulation of the bodily necessities of the recluse to preserve the virginal status. Aelred devotes nearly one third of his rule to his comments on the idea of virginity and its meanings for religious women. Firstly, according to Aelred, virginity is essentially a bodily quality that can never be recovered if once lost.

Bear in mind always what precious treasure you bear in how fragile a vessel and what reward, what glory, what a crown the preservation of your virginity will bring you. In addition remember unceasingly what punishment, what shame, what condemnation the loss of it will involve.... With this ever in mind let the virgin guard with the utmost care and the utmost trepidation the priceless treasure of virginity which she already possesses to her advantage and which one lost cannot be recovered.²³²

As the passage clearly indicates Aelred favoured the physical definition of virginity.

The precious treasure, that is the virginity, is placed in a 'fragile vessel' which

²³² *Treatises: The pastoral prayer.*, 63; '*Cogita semper quam preciosum thesaurum in quam fragili portas uasculo, et quam mercedem, quam gloriam, quam coronam, uirginitas seruata ministret; quam insuper penam, quam confusionem, quam dampnacionem importet amissa, indesinenter animo revolve. ... Hec uirgo iugiter cogitans preciosissimum uirginitatis thesaurum, qui iam utiliter possidetur, tam irrecuperabiliter amittitur, summa diligencia, summo cum timore custodiat.*', Talbot, 'The "De Institutis Inclusarum"', 189-90.

reminds one of the ideas of bodily integrity. The fragile vessel, once broken, could never be fixed again. The same idea is also seen in the piece where Aelred likens virginity to gold:

Virginity is the gold, the cell is the crucible, the devil is the assayer, temptation is the fire. The virgin's flesh is the earthenware vessel in which the gold is put to be tested. If it is broken by the intensity of the heat the gold is spilt and no craftsmen can put the vessel together again.²³³

Here actually Aelred's metaphor is a complex one. He likens 'the gold' to spiritual virginity and the 'earthenware vessel' in which the gold is put to physical virginity. The gold is put into the vessel to be tested by fire, that is temptation; and if by the intensity of the heat the vessel is broken, that is, the bodily integrity is lost, there is no way of fixing it. Therefore Aelred argues that spiritual purity is lost through the loss of bodily virginity, and as it is impossible to 'put the vessel together again', the spiritual purity is also unrecoverable.

Another interesting point Aelred's text reveals is that Aelred, in great contrast to Goscelin, does not trust in his female reader's capacity to remain chaste. He explicitly states that it is impossible by nature alone for a woman to remain chaste:

First then, virgin, commend your good resolution with the utmost intensity to him who is inspired in you and with earnest prayer beg of him that what is impossible for you by nature may become easy through grace.²³⁴

Aelred's choice of direct address 'impossible for you by nature' indicates that he is specifically talking to his reader rather than making a general comment on human nature. Therefore this makes it clear that his mistrust is greater for female nature.

233 *Ibid.*, 63; '*Virginitas aurum est, cella fornax, conflator diabolus, ignis teptacio. Caro uirginis, uas luteum est, in quo aurum reconditur ut probetur. Quod si igne uehemenciori crequerit, aurum effunditur, nec uas ulterius a quolibet artifice reparatur.*', Talbot, "The "De Institutis Includarum", 189.

234 *Ibid.*, 63; '*Primum igitur o uirgo. Bonum propositum tuum ipsi qui inspirauit cum summa cordis deuocione commenda, intentissima oracione deposcens, ut quod tibi impossibile est per naturam, facile scenciat per graciam.* Talbot, "The "De Institutis Includarum", 189.

Aelred, very much like Jerome, believes that even the sight of someone from one's own sex is dangerous to his or her virginity. As for Jerome's ban on bathing with eunuchs or pregnant women Aelred writes:

Do not think ... that a man cannot be defiled without a woman or a woman without a man, since that abdominal sin which inflames a man with passion for a man or a woman for a woman meets with more relentless condemnation than any other crime. But virginity is often lost and chastity outraged without any commerce with another if the flesh is set on fire by a strong heat which subdues the will and takes the members by surprise.²³⁵

Here it is certain that Aelred does not mention the loss of bodily but rather spiritual virginity. His point, very much like Jerome's, is that spiritual virginity can also be lost without any sexual affair, and his following sentence makes it quite sure that thinks of this kind of improper behaviour as a grave sin.

Let the virgin always consider that all her members are consecrated to God, incorporated in Christ, dedicated to the Holy Spirit. She should be ashamed to hand over to Satan what belongs to Christ; she should blush if her virginal members are stained by even the slightest movement.²³⁶

Apart from praising virginity over all other virtues, Aelred also indicates its importance for anchoresses by stating that each and every aspect of a recluse's life in her cell should be relevant to her virginal status and that each and every action should be done to preserve it. Aelred explains:

Let the whole object then of her striving and her thoughts be the preservation of her virginity, so that in her hunger for the perfection of this virtue she will consider want of food a pleasure and poverty wealth. In food and drink, in sleep, in speech let her always be on her guard against a threat to her chastity, lest by allowing the flesh more

235 *Ibid.*, 64; '*Nec si hoc dictum estimes, quasi nin uir sine muliere, aut mulier sine viro possit fedari, sum detestandum illud scelus quo uir in uirum, uel femina furit in feminam, omnibus flagiciis dampnabilius iudicetur. Sed et absque aliebe carnis consorcio uirginitas plerumque corrumpitur, castitas uiolatur, sed uehemencior estus carnem concuciens, uoluntatem sibi subdiderit, et rapuerit membra.*', Talbot, 'The "De Institutis Inclusarum"', 190.

236 *Ibid.*, 64; '*Cogitet semper uirgo omnia sua membra sanctificata deo, incorporata Christo, spiritui sancto dedicata. Indignum iudicet quod Christi est tradere Sathane, uirgineaeius membra erubescat uel simlici motu maculari.*', Talbot, 'The "De Institutis Inclusarum"', 190.

than its due she may increase the enemy's strength and nourish the hidden foe.²³⁷

Moreover, it is certain that Aelred believed in the superiority of virgins over all other religious. According to Aelred, virginity is the treasure 'with which the heaven is bought' and for 'which Christ himself longs'. Besides, virginity even enables recluses to act boldly in heaven. In a meditation on the crucifixion he wrote:

But you, virgin, who can feel more confidence with the Virgin's son than the women who stand at a distance, draw near to the Cross with the Virgin mother and the virgin disciple, and look at close quarters upon that face in all its pallor.²³⁸

Female recluses are encouraged to go closer and feel more confident than other women in front of Jesus on account of their virginity.

Aelred devotes nearly all the second part of his rule to the concept of virginity and his comments on the importance of it. However, despite his obsessive emphasis on the praise of the virgin body of the recluse, at some point Aelred reminds his sister that chastity and virginity are worth nothing without humility:

My purpose in making these observations has been to make you aware of the care you must take to preserve your chastity. Yet although it is the flower and adornment of all the virtues, it withers and fades away without humility.²³⁹

Therefore, it can be said that although Aelred's approach to the concept of virginity is much more on physical terms than Goscelin's, it is possible to see that there are some other virtues that are praised above virginity in Aelred's rule. However, the overall tone of the parts that comment on the concept of virginity are serious, and

237 *Ibid.*, 64; 'Ita proinde in uirginitatis sue custodiam totum animum tendat, cogitationes expendat, ut uirtutis huius perfectionem esuriens, famem delicias putet, diuicias paupertatem. In cibo, in potu, in sompno, in sermone, semper timeat dispendium castitatis, ne si plus debito/carni reddiderit, uires prebeat aduersario, et occultum nutriat hostem.', Talbot, 'The "De Institutis Inclusarum"', 190.

238 *Ibid.*, 90; 'At tu uirgo, cui maior est apud uirginis filium fiducia, a mulieribus que longe stant cum matre uirgine et discipulo uirgine accede ad crucem, et perfesum pallore uultum cominus intueri.', Talbot, 'The "De Institutis Inclusarum"', 207.

239 *Ibid.*, 70; 'Hec diximus, ut quanta tibi debeat in conseruanda pudicitia esse sollicitudo aduerteres. Que cum omnium uirtutum flos sit et ornamentum, sine humilitate tamen arescit atque marcescit.', Talbot, 'The "De Institutis Inclusarum"', 194.

severe. Compared to Goscelin's indifference towards the physicality of Eve's solitary life and considered together with Aelred's strict regulation of the life in the cell, it would not be hard to claim that Aelred's perception of virginity is more limited, strict and oppressive in terms of the female body.

Another basic difference between Aelred's and Goscelin's rule is that Aelred certainly employs early medieval techniques of re-gendering in his text. According to Bartlett, the twelfth-century *De Institutione Inclusarum* is a text that illustrates 'the masculinist techniques of the self perpetuated for women by the early church'.²⁴⁰ Aelred encourages his reader to a self-denial in terms of gender in two basic ways. On the one hand, he repeatedly discourages his female reader from identifying herself with femininity by referring to the weak and defiled nature of females and expressing his mistrust of female nature. On the other hand, throughout the text Aelred actively tries to re-gender his reader through suppressing her feminine identity and identifying her with a male-gendered discourse of speech asceticism and sexuality. According to Bartlett, Aelred's rule makes few accommodations for the special needs of women. Rather, Bartlett claims, 'it urges those in its female audience to become aware of and eradicate a feminine identity ... and then to adopt an explicitly masculine perspective that reorients and produces a "male" self'.²⁴¹

As explained above, one of the most important qualities of Aelred's work is its concentration on the suppression of any kind of female sexual activity or even thoughts of sex for the sake of preserving 'the treasure of virginity'. The anchoress is told that her whole object in striving and thoughts should be the preservation of her virginity. Although the strictly enclosed solitary life of the anchoress apparently frees her from all kinds of real threats to her virginity, and allows her to concentrate on

²⁴⁰ Bartlett, *Male Authors, Female Readers*, 41.

²⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 43.

other issues, Aelred insists that she should be ever-aware of her continually active sexual desires and should try to eliminate those desires every minute of her life.

As she sits at table let her then meditate on the beauty of purity, in her longing for its perfection let her have no appetite for food... If she has to speak to someone let her always be afraid of hearing something which might cast even the least cloud over the clear skies of her chastity...²⁴²

Aelred by referring to the ever active desires of her body reminds his reader to examine herself constantly and never to stop being aware of her weaknesses — bodily and spiritual — ‘like the timid dove [that] goes often to streams of water’ where it is possible to see the ‘hawk as he hovers overhead’ as in a mirror.²⁴³ The anchoress’s unique responsibility is then to examine her body constantly for the slightest desire and especially to study herself for stirrings of sexual desire.

Aelred’s words on speech and silence are also revealing on the text’s repressiveness of the female identity of its primary audience. Throughout the passage where he praises silence over speech, Aelred uses negative words for female speech. The words of women are defined as ‘chatter’, ‘poison’, ‘venom’ and ‘gossip’, which are all potential dangers for the recluse’s virginity. Besides, as Barratt argues, female speech is associated with sexuality in Aelred’s text. Aelred, while warning his reader against listening to the tales and idle talk of ‘old women’, writes:

At her window will be seated some garrulous old gossip pouring idle tales into her ears ... When the hour grows late and they must part both are heavily burdened, the old woman with provisions, the recluse with sensual pleasures... When darkness falls, she welcomes women of even less repute... The opening of the cell must somehow be enlarged to allow her to pass through or her paramour to enter; what was a cell has now become a brothel.²⁴⁴

242 *Treatises: The pastoral prayer.*, 64-5; ‘*Sedens igitur ad mensam decorem pudicicie mente reuoluat, et ad eius perfectionem suspirans cibos fastidat, potum exhorreat. ... Si ei sermo fuerit cum obnibilet, deserendam se a gracia non dubitet, si uel unum uerbum contra honestatem proferat.*’, Talbot, ‘The “*De Institutis Inclusarum*”’, 190.

243 *Ibid.*, 68.

244 *Ibid.*, 45, ‘*Vix aliquam inclusarum huius temporis solam inuenies, ante cuius fenestram non anus garrula uel rumigerula mulier sedeat, que eam fbulis occupet, rumoribus ac detraccionibus pascat, illius uel ilius monachi, uel clerici, ... Sic cum discedere ab inuicem hora campulerit, inclusa*

Aelred's identification of female speech as a danger to chastity is also seen in his remarks that he does not want anyone to approach the anchoress — 'a little old women perhaps ... whispering flattering words in her ear ... who as she kisses her hand on receiving alms, injects her with venom'.²⁴⁵

Besides trying to suppress his reader's female identity by negative definitions of some qualities that are traditionally associated with the female gender, Aelred also uses a highly gendered discourse while offering remedies or suggesting assistance on the issues of sexuality. Barratt explains:

Since Aelred's supply of ideas about women evidently provides no fully developed model of female resistance to this pervasive carnality, ... it is understandable that he attempts to assist the anchoress's mastery of desire by offering examples of male sexual trial.²⁴⁶

As Aelred does not offer any female examples for the chaste, virginal life and generally expresses his mistrust of the female nature when he tries to make suggestions against carnal desires, he employs a male gendered discourse:

I know a monk who at the beginning of his monastic career was afraid of threat to his chastity from the promptings of nature ... and so declared war on himself ... Often he plunged into cold water and stayed in there for sometime singing psalms and praying. Frequently, too, when he felt forbidden movements, he rubbed his body with nettles and so by inflaming his bare flesh overcame the inflammation of lust.²⁴⁷

uoluptatibus, anus cibarii onerata recedit. ... Refusa mundo luce, citantur muliercule, ... Nam manifestior sermo, non iam de accendenda, sed potius de sacianda uoluptate procedens, ubi et quando et per quem possit explere que cogitat in commune disponunt. Cella ueritur in prostibulum, et dilatato qualibet arte foramine, aut illa egreditur, aut adulter ingreditur., Talbot, 'The "De Institutis Includarum"', 178.

²⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 48.

²⁴⁶ Bartlett, *Male Authors, Female Readers*, 47.

²⁴⁷ *Treatises: The pastoral prayer.*, 66-7; '...noui ego monachum, qui cum in inicio sue conuersacionis, tum naturalibus incentuis, ... erexit se contra se, ... Plerumque uero se frigidis aquis iniciens, tremens aliquandiu psallebat, et orabat. Sepe eiam illicitos senciens motus, urticis fricabat corpus, et nude carni apponens incendium/incendio superabat.' Talbot, 'The "De Institutis Includarum"', 192.

This passage offers a good example of superimposition of a model of male physiology on the anchoress's female body.²⁴⁸ Aelred's description of the manifestations of sexual desire, his male-discoursed vocabulary such as 'forbidden movements' and inflammation of lust' and his warning of the anchoress against 'nocturnal emissions', represent male sexual behaviour as a model for the recluse. Aelred suppresses his reader's identity by negative descriptions of female attitudes and offers a highly male-gendered discourse of sexuality instead. Consequently it is clear that the model of self-formation set for the anchoress is certainly not the female virgin, but a re-gendered one whose perspective on sexuality depends on male experiences.

It is hard to find out the exact reason for Aelred's obsessive emphasis on physical virginity, but still it is possible to offer some explanations for it. First of all, it is certain that Aelred was living in an age that was different from Goscelin's to a great extent. The atmosphere of the twelfth century with its rigid regulation of female religious life, enclosure and growing mistrust of females among religious orders, was a totally different one from the age of Goscelin. Besides, it is impossible to think of Aelred, a devout Cistercian, as a man exempt from his order's negative and suspicious approach to women. Therefore, it is possible to explain Aelred's concerns on female sexuality in general and on the virginity of religious women in particular as a sign of his age's growing tendency to represent virginity as the virtue *par excellence*.

Secondly it is possible that Aelred's personal experiences had an influence on his writings on the concept of virginity. We know that Aelred himself was not a

248 Bartlett, *Male Authors, Female Readers*, 48.

virgin, as he frequently laments his loss of chastity in his works. He wrote to his sister:

With my wretchedness then in the loss of my chastity compare your own happiness in the protection accorded to your virginity by God's grace. As often as you were tempted, as often as you were attacked, your chastity remained inviolate, while I freely abandoned myself to all that is base, accumulating material for fire to burn me, for corruption to stifle me... I gave myself up to uncleanness.²⁴⁹

His regret for the loss of his chastity might be an explanation of his recurrent recommendation to recluses of preserving virginity. Considered together with his familial background — his father was also a religious — and the importance Cistercians attached to bodily and spiritual purity, Aelred's obvious mourning for his loss becomes more understandable. Therefore it is possible to claim that Aelred's personal experiences as well as his age's concerns affected his ideas on the concept of virginity and his representation of this concept in his rule.

Ancrene Wisse is ambivalent about the meaning of virginity. On the one hand very much like Aelred, the author of *Ancrene Wisse* wrote explaining the reasons for an anchoress's enclosure and solitary life:

if anyone were carrying a precious liquid, a costly drink such as balsam is, in a delicate vessel, balm in a brittle glass, would she not unless she were foolish, keep away from the crowd? We have this treasure in earthen vessels, says the Apostle. This frail vessel, that is, woman's flesh, although the balm, the balsam contained in it is virginity (or after the loss of virginity, chaste cleanness), this frail vessel is as fragile as any glass, for once it is broken it may never be mended to its former wholeness any more than glass can.²⁵⁰

249 *Treatises: The pastoral prayer.*, 93-4; '*Quam miser ego tunc qui meam pudiciciam perdididi, tam beata tu, cuius uirginitatem gracia diuina proteit. Quociens temptat, quociens impetita, tua tibi est castitas reseruata, / cum ego libens in turpia queque progredians, coaceruau mihi materiam ignis quo comburerer, materiam fetoris quo necarer, materiam uermium a quibus corroderer. ... ibam longius a te et sinebas, iactabar et effundebat, difflebar per immundicias meas, et tacebas.*', Talbot, 'The "De Institutis Inclusarum"', 210-11.

250 *The Ancrene Riwe*, 72; '*...the bere a deore licur, a deore-wurthe wet as basme is, in a feble vetles, healawi i bruchel gles, nalde ha gan ut of thrung bute ha fol were? Habemus thesaurum istum in vasis fictilibus dicit apostolus. This bruchele vetles, thet is wummone flesch, thah no-the-leatere the basme, the healawi is meidenhad thet is th'rin other eft[er] meith-lure, chaste cleanness. This bruchele vetles [is] bruchel as is eani gles. For beo hit eanes tobroken, i-bet ne bith hit neaver, i-bet ne hal as hit wes ear, na mare thene gles.*'

Using essentially the same image as Aelred, the author of *Ancrene Wisse* explains the importance of virginity and his explanation indicates his ideas on virginity as a dual concept. Firstly he states that female body is a 'fragile glass' in which virginity is contained. Once the glass is broken it is impossible to fix it to its former unity. This highly physical definition of virginity, together with the warning that women should keep their fragile glasses away from the crowd, indicates that the author of *Ancrene Wisse*, at least in this passage, emphasizes the importance of physical virginity. On the other hand the addition made in commas is obviously an important one. The addition 'or after the loss of virginity, chaste cleanness' in commas makes it obvious that the author does not limit his comments to virgins who are 'virgins bodily', but also tries to include women who have lost their virginity but have chosen a chaste religious life. Therefore it can be said that in the mind of the author virginity is something that can never be replaced or fixed to its primary situation, but the loss of it does not close all doors of religious life for women. Spiritual virginity, or actually in this case virginity that is reasserted after the loss of the hymen with the vow of chastity, seems to be of value together with the physical one. Therefore it is possible that in *Ancrene Wisse*, we find out an implicit new type of virginity, one that is certainly not related to the hymen, as it is acquired after the loss of bodily virginity, through a vow of chastity.

In addition, the author of *Ancrene Wisse* states that an earthly marriage 'makes a virgin into a wife' but marriage to Christ restores virginity to one who has been married. In this respect it is clear that the author is not talking about a bodily re-establishment of virginity; as mentioned above, he believes that the fragile glass 'may never be mended', but rather he is talking about religious status of women. Briefly, he believes that the vow of chastity may elevate a widow to the level of a

virgin despite her previous loss of virginity, as explained above. At this point it should be stated that even though he tries to include widows and women who have lost their bodily virginity into the sphere of virgins, he certainly does not underestimate the importance of physical virginity. His comments mentioned above and the condition of his primary audience (young recluse girls whose purity and virginity is praised frequently) indicates that he admires bodily virginity over anything else. He continually warns his enclosed audience against any explicit or implicit attack on their virginity and chastity:

Not also desiring man but also wiling to be desired by him; both of these are mortal sins... lust the stinking whore, makes war against the lady of chastity, that is, the spouse of God... Not only any sensual touch but also any unclean word, even if there is no more than this between a man and an anchoress is loathsomely vicious and merits God's anger.²⁵¹

After repeating his comments on the dangers of even the slightest touch to their virginity the author adds that he would rather see them dead than living impurely:

Touching with the hands or any other kind of touch between a man and an anchoress is a thing so anomalous, an action so shameful, and a sin so plain, so loathsome to everyone, and so great a scandal, that there is no need to speak or write against it... God knows, I would rather see all three of you, my dear sisters, to me the dearest of women, hanging on a gibbet in order to avoid sin, than see one of you giving a single kiss to any man on earth in the way I mean.²⁵²

Furthering his arguments on the dangers of even the solitary life for an anchoress, the author makes a comment that can easily be compared to Jerome's ban on bathing and Aelred's warnings against even the sight of someone from one's own sex:

251 *Ibid.*, 26-7; 'Non solum appetere, sed et appeti velle crimosum. "Yirmi mon, oter habbe wil for-to beon i-yirned of mon, ba is haved sunne." Oculi prima tela sunt adultere.... lecherie, the stinkinde hore, upon the lavedi chastete - thet is, Godes spuse.'

252 *Ibid.*, 51; 'Hondlunge oter ei felunge bitweone mon ant ancre is thing swa uncumelich, ant dede se scheomelich ant se naket sunne, to al the world se eatelich ant se muche scandle, thet nis na neod to speoken ne writen ther-toyeines,... Godd hit wat, as me were muche deale leovere thet ich i-sehe ow alle threo, mine leove sustren, wummen me leovest, hongin on a gibet, for-te withbuhe sunne, then ich sehe an of ow yeoven anlepi cos eani mon on eorthe swa as ich meane....'

Looking at her own white hands does harm to many an anchoress whose hands are too beautiful because they are idle. They should scrape up every day that out of the grave in which they shall rot.²⁵³

Despite this similarity between the approaches of Aelred and the author of *Ancrene Wisse* on the concept of virginity, it is hard to see the re-gendering concern of Aelred in the later text. Actually it is an interesting point that the author of *Ancrene Wisse*, contrary to the approaches of his age, does not see virginity or spirituality as a way of freeing women from their bodily and spiritual restrictions. Rather he offers a predominantly female spirituality that stems basically from the weaknesses of female nature. Therefore it is clear that instead of re-gendering his audience, the author of *Ancrene Wisse* asserts the femininity of his readers and roots his ideas on spirituality in their feminine nature. *Ancrene Wisse* is 'illustrative of the ways in which biological views of women shape the author's representation of female spirituality' according to Elizabeth Robertson.²⁵⁴ Robertson convincingly claims that the author of *Ancrene Wisse*, especially in the last three chapters of his rule, refers to the biologically weak sides of the female body to explain his ideas on confession, penance and love. Arguing from the definition of the female nature as weak and moist and the especial impurity of female blood according to the medical authorities of his age, the author chooses to formulate spirituality around these, instead of repressing the femaleness of his audience and constructing a male identity for them.

253 *Ibid.*, 51; 'Hire-seolf bihalden hire ahne hwite honden deth hearm moni ancre, the haveth ham to feire as theo the beoth for-idlet.'

254 Elizabeth Robertson, 'Medieval Medical Views of Women and Female Spirituality in the *Ancrene Wisse* and Julian of Norwich's *Showings*.' in *Feminist Approaches to the Body in Medieval Literature*. edited by Linda Lomperis and Sarah Stanbury, 142-167. (Philadelphia, 1993), 150.

According to Catherine Innes-Parker the imagery used in *Ancrene Wisse* is highly influenced by the idea of enclosure and the gender of the text's readers.²⁵⁵ Throughout the text we see that the spirituality of the anchoress as inextricably mixed with her sexuality, dominantly characterized by her representation as a virgin on the one hand and as the lover and bride of Christ on the other. Actually, as mentioned before, this spirituality tends to claim to transcend nature and the flesh of women and often denies the ability of the female body to reach this final aim of union with God as a result of its weaknesses. The text of *Ancrene Wisse* on the contrary begins with the acceptance of the weaknesses of body and centres the spirituality of anchoresses on their bodies.²⁵⁶ This quality is certainly a result of the highly penitential nature of the text. The author of *Ancrene Wisse* believes that it is only through an understanding of the sinful nature of the flesh and through doing penance for it that one can reach salvation. Therefore he suggests an acknowledgement of the nature of female body rather than denying it and accordingly, rather than the spiritual purity of the soul, the physical intactness of the body comes to the fore throughout the text.

The physical body of the recluse and all the spiritual qualities that an anchoress should have are all represented in appropriately feminine terms in the text. The anchoress becomes both bride and mother in a union with Christ; her body is represented as 'bower', 'nest' and 'womb'. The author writes:

Greek fire is made from the blood of a red man and cannot be quenched; it is said except with urine, sand and vinegar. This Greek fire is the love of Jesus our Lord... See then how much good envious people lose. Stretch out your love to Jesus Christ. You have won him!

255 Catherine Innes-Parker. 'Fragmentation and reconstruction: images of the female body in *Ancrene Wisse* and the Katherine Group.' *Comitatus: A Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies*

26 (1995): 27-52. 28

256 *Ibid.*, 29-30.

Touch him with as much love as you sometimes feel for a man. He is yours to do with all that you will.²⁵⁷

The representation of Christ's love towards the anchoress as Greek fire certainly refers to medical views on women, that is, accepting the female body as moist and in need of heat. However, more importantly, the author formulates the union with Christ frequently as an erotic experience rather than as an allegorical ascent of the mind to God. The union with God is defined in physical terms and the author even compares the anchoress's union with Jesus to her desire for an ordinary man.

It is certain that using erotic images to define the mystical union with God is a general tendency seen in the thirteenth-century religious texts. However, as Robertson argues, eroticism is used differently for men and women. Texts composed for males generally see eroticism as a tool to raise the mystic's mind to allegorical union, whereas in texts written for women we see that the erotic union is the end of the meditation. The author of *Ancrene Wisse* in the single moment where he expresses his ideas on mystical union writes:

After the kiss of peace in the Mass, when the priest communicates, forget the world, ... and with burning love embrace your Beloved who has come down from heaven to your heart's bower, and hold Him fast until he has granted you all that you ask.²⁵⁸

The end of the Mass is the climax where the anchoress may find and hold her beloved. The author indicates that it is the end of the meditation not the starting point of an allegorical spiritual union with Jesus. Erotic representation for women's union with God ends at the point where men's minds start to ascend for the allegorical

257 *The Ancrene Riwe*, 178-180; 'Grickisch fur is i-maket of reades monnes blod, ant thet ne mei na thing bute migge ant sond ant eisil - as me seith - acwenchen. This Grickisch fur is the luv of Jesu ure Laverd... Lokith nu hu muchel god the ontfule leoseth. Streche thi luv to Jesu Crist, thu havest him i-wunnen. Rin him with ase mucche luv as thu havest sum mon sum-chearre, he is thin to don with al thet tu wilnest.'

258 *Ibid.*, 14; 'Efter the measse-cos, hwen the preost sacreth - ther foryeoteth al the world, ther beoth al ut of bodi, ther i sperclinde luv bicluppeth ower leofmon, the into ower breostes bur is i-liht of heovene, ant haldeth him hete-veste athet he habbe i-yettet ow al thet ye eaver easkith.'

union. Therefore mystical union is defined mainly in bodily terms for women, and the allegorical union of the mind is not mentioned.

The literal and the metaphorical senses of the words at similar points become intertwined and the love relationship with Christ is defined more in bodily terms rather than spiritual ones. Doing this, the author of *Ancrene Wisse*, both in his representations of mystical union and through the elaborate metaphor he uses in the seventh chapter of the text which represents Christ as an earthly knight and anchoresses as ladies whom he woos, employs the female characteristics of his readers rather than repressing them. As Innes-Parker puts it, it is certain that women would more naturally respond to a physical erotic relationship with a male Christ than men, and that 'women were culturally and psychologically more conditioned to accept themselves as weak and therefore were more open to a form of spirituality that transformed physical weakness rather than denying it'.²⁵⁹ The author of *Ancrene Wisse* very cleverly manipulates some qualities of the female body and spirit to formulate a feminine 'physical' spirituality that celebrated the femininity of the addressee rather than repressing femaleness as we saw in the case of Aelred.

The fourteenth-century anchoritic texts written for women do not say much on the subject of virginity, which in itself is significant. However, it is possible to comment on the ideas of Richard Rolle and Walter Hilton on the concept of virginity through their positions on other important issues in their texts such as enclosure and the anchorhold and their ideas on the general connotation of the solitary life for women. As mentioned in the previous chapters, fourteenth-century texts are filled with the joys of contemplation instead of mourning on the sinful nature of the human body and soul. Therefore it can be said that these fourteenth-century works shift their

259 Innes-Parker, 'Fragmentation and Reconstruction', 33.

emphasis from sex and gender to religious vocation by adopting a gender-neutral tone on every issue in relation to anchoritic life. Anchoresses were freed from the restrictions put on their bodies and were encouraged towards spiritual mystical experiences rather than penitential sufferings. These general shifts in the tone of the texts certainly influenced their expressions on the issue of virginity.

The Form of Living does not suggest any explicit comment on the issue of virginity, its definition and its importance for the contemplative life. This apparent ignoring of the topic indicates that the author does not see virginity as the virtue par excellence of women. Instead, he categorises religious men and women according to their love and charity:

For I will nor that thou wene that all er haly that hase the abet of halynes, and er nought occupyed with the world; ne that all er ill that melles tham with erthly bysines. Bot thai er anly hali, *what state or degree thai be* in the whilk despises all erthly thying, thae es at sat, lufs it nocht, and byrnes in the luf of Jhesi Criste, and all their desires er sett til the joy of heven...²⁶⁰

According to Rolle, it is not the earthly state of the contemplative that affects his or her success in the contemplative religious pursuit but rather his/her love of Jesus and hatred of worldly pleasures. In this respect it is clear that the hierarchy among religious men and women has nothing to do with bodily virginity or intactness for Rolle. He praises spiritual cleanness and chastity over the previous bodily sins of anchoress. He wrote:

And than the fire of lufe verrali ligges in their hert and byrnes tharin, and makes clene of al early filth. And sithen forwards thai er contemplatife men an ravyst in lufe.²⁶¹

The fire of the love of Jesus Christ is the thing that can free all humans from their earthly sins and bodily filth. In this respect it may well be argued that Rolle is a lot more flexible on the issue of loss of virginity than the writers of the previous

²⁶⁰ Rolle, 'The Form of Living.', 48.

²⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 66.

centuries. He did not see the female body as a fragile glass that can never be mended if broken once. For Rolle the greatness of the fire of love could fix every crack and compensate for every loss.

It should also be stated that as mentioned in the previous chapter, mystical writers, and specifically Rolle, have a tendency to praise the heavenly over the worldly, the spiritual over the bodily and in general the abstract over the concrete. His thoughts on the concept of virginity are shaped accordingly. He believed in the superiority of the abstract qualities of the soul such as humility, chastity and love over concrete bodily virtues. Placing lust in the heart, not in the body he directly shifts the place of the sin of lechery:

Whatfore, that thou be ryght disposed, bath for thi saule and thi body, thou sall understand fowre thynges. The fyrst thing es: what thing fyles a man... for the first, wyt thou that we synne in thre thynges that makes us fowle that es wyh hert, and mouth and dede...²⁶²

After this detailed groupings of the things that cause man to sin, he makes a short list of the sins of the heart:

Ill thought, ill delyt, assent till synne, desyr of ill, wikked will, ill suspicion, undevocon, ... ill drede, ill lufe, errour, fleschly affection till thi frences, ir till other that thou lufes...²⁶³

Rolle's list of sins of the heart includes fleshly affection, or lust. It can be said that by putting lust under the sins of heart rather than the sins of deed, which seems to be more suitable for sexual activities, he indicates that the important point is the heart of the anchoress not her body. Rolle suggests a purely spiritual idea of sexuality and accepts impure thoughts to be enough for uncleanness, a similar attitude to Aelred's idea on spiritual virginity. However, Rolle certainly undermines the importance of bodily virginity and claims that whatever one's earthly state is, virgin, married or widow, it is possible for one to lead a perfectly clean religious life without mourning

²⁶² *Ibid.*, 50.

²⁶³ *Ibid.*, 50.

for their loss, starting from the point of their decision to live chastely and in this point, his is certainly closer to the author of *Ancrene Wisse*. This explanation surely devalues the necessity of bodily virginity, as it equates women from different backgrounds at the level of chastity.

Walter Hilton's text also indicates similar tendencies, in a more complex way though. It is certain that Hilton praises humility and chastity as the most perfect and necessary virtues of a recluse:

You can be certain that anyone who directs all his desires and efforts to nothing except humility and charity, and is always longing to acquire them, will by so doing grow in all the other virtues such as chastity and abstinence... Acquire humility and charity, then, and if you devote all your efforts to this end, you will be fully occupied. If you acquire them, they will be an inward rule and guide...²⁶⁴

In contrast to the authors of *Ancrene Wisse* and *De Institutione Inclusarum*, Hilton praises and gives more space to humility and charity over all other virtues and states that through humility and charity it is possible to reach perfection in all other virtues. For him, very much like for Rolle, the physical qualities are of secondary importance compared to the spiritual ones. Therefore, throughout the text, Hilton reminds his readers that they should check their hearts for any filth or undesirable thought.

Hilton divides heavenly rewards into two, as supreme and secondary, and claims that charity leads everyone to pure bodies and the love of Christ to the rewards of heaven:

For he who loves God with the charity in this life, whatever his status, whether simple or learned, secular or religious, will have the highest

264 Hilton, *The Ladder of Perfection*, 95; 'For wite thou wel, he that hath in his desire and in his travaile noon othir reward to noon othir thinge but to mekenesse and charité, ai cravyng aftir hem how he myght gete hem, he schal in that desire with worchynge folwyng aftir, profite more and waxe in alle other vertues, as in chastité, abstinence, ... Gete to thee thanne mekenesse and charité, and yif thou wole traveile and swynke bisili for to have hem, thou schal mowe have inow for to doo in getyng of hem. Thei schal rule and mesure thee ful pryveli,...

reward in the glory of heaven, for he will have the deeper love and knowledge of God, and this is the supreme reward.²⁶⁵

And according to Hilton it is possible for everyone to reach that heavenly reward of the first kind:

As to this reward it may happen that some man or woman of the world, lord or lady, knight or squire, merchant or ploughman will have a higher reward than some priest or friar, monk or canon, or enclosed anchoress. And why? Surely because he has a greater love of God.²⁶⁶

The other reward is the secondary one, which is reserved for special good works. Hilton explains that the doctors of church mention three special things in particular: martyrdom, preaching and virginity. These three things are excellent, and since they surpass all other virtues, those who have done these good works will get a special gift that is called 'aureole', a radiant, luminous cloud:

This is an exceptional honour special sign ordained by God to reward outstanding achievements, and it is given in addition to the supreme reward of the love of God, which is given to them and to others alike.²⁶⁷

Here it is clear that Hilton refers to the exceptional bodily purity of virgins and claims that they will be additionally rewarded in heaven together with martyrs and preachers, only for their virginal bodies. It is clear that Hilton tries to encourage his primary audience who was most probably a virgin in her pursuit, by reminding her of her special status and difference from all other religious who will get rewards in heaven. Therefore it can be stated that, very much like the author of *Ancrene Wisse*, Hilton praises spiritual chastity over physical chastity and includes all women from

265 *Ibid.*, 75; 'For he that most loveth God in charité here in this liyf, what degree he be in, be he lewid or lelid, seculer or religious, he schal have most mede in the blisse of hevene, for he schal most love God and knowe hym, and that is thee sovereyne meede.'

266 *Ibid.*, 74; 'And as for this meede, it schal falle that sum wordli man or woman, as a lord or a ladi, knyght or squyer, marchaunt or plowman, what degree he be in, man or woman, schal have more meede than sum prest or frere, monke or chanoun or ankir incloos. And whi? Soothli for he lovede more God in charité of his yifte.'

267 *Ibid.*, 75; '...thei schullen have a special meede, whiche thei calle auriole, and that is not ellis but a synguler worschipe and a special tokene ordeyned of God in reward of that special deede, bifore othere men that didn not so, over the sovereyne meede of the love of God whiche is comoun to hem and to alle othere.'

all worldly status amongst those who will get the first type of reward in heaven, but then, reminding her of her special condition, comforts his reader that her status as a virgin will lead to still greater heavenly reward.

However at the end of the chapter he returns to his basic idea that the loss of bodily virginity does not exclude anyone from the religious pursuit, or cause a major disadvantage for them:

For although it be true that if you come to heaven you will receive the special reward for your state of life, there may be many a wife and a woman living in the world who will be nearer to God than you, and who will love Him more and know Him better than you despite your way of life. This will put you to shame unless you labour to acquire as full and perfect a degree of charity as anyone living in the world.²⁶⁸

Here it is clear that Hilton's ideas on virginity are more down to earth and complex than Rolle's. Praising spiritual purity and cleanness of heart, Rolle reduces the status of virgin to nothing and explicitly equates her to any other women in the world. According to Hilton, on the other hand, while accepting that a wife or widow may attain contemplation and be rewarded with one the highest ranks in heaven, anchoresses who are virgins physically will always get greater rewards than the others.

Despite this slight difference between their approaches to the issue of virginity, Rolle and Hilton can be differentiated from Goscelin, Aelred and the author of *Ancrene Wisse* in one certain aspect. That is, in contrast to Goscelin's, Aelred's and the author of *Ancrene Wisse*'s ranking of the religious according to their sufferings in this world, and therefore their representation of virginity as a part of these sufferings, Rolle and Hilton praise the love of God and humility over all

²⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 76; 'For though it so be that thou schalt have thus moche mede special for thi staat of lyvyng, yif thou be saaf, nevertheles it mai be that many a wif and many a wordli woman schal be neer God than thou, and more schal love God and betere schal knowe him than thou, for al thi staat, and that oweth to be schame to thee but thou be besi to gete love and charité of the yifte of God as he or sche hath that dwelleth stille in the wordli besynesse.'

other virtues and therefore rank the religious according to the greatness of their love for God. After all it is the constancy of the burning love of Jesus that elevates one to the rank of heavenly reward. This particular aspect of the texts written by fourteenth-century writers basically stems from their general views of the religious life. As mentioned before, fourteenth-century writers, contrary to the penitential writings of the earlier periods, focus their attention on the joys and rewards of the solitary life rather than on the sufferings and passions. And this general quality of the texts certainly influences their approach to virginity. Staying away from sex is not a specific part of the sufferings of the recluse, but rather it is a complementary piece of the general idea of withdrawal from the world.

In conclusion it should be asserted that virginity, with its all definitions and connotations, was one of the most important aspects of the lives of religious women in general. Guidance treatises written for women, in one way or another, deal with the concept of virginity and the authors of the texts offer various differences under the influence of their personal experiences, their view of women and the purity of the female body, and the general tendencies of their age, basically shaped according to shifts in the common perception of religious vocation and ascetical life. The ideas of the authors on the concept of virginity are shaped according to the huge body of literature praising virginity, together with their own specific concerns, and it is certain that the self-perception of the medieval recluse in England was influenced by these various representations. The authors of the medieval English anchoritic guide books with their writings asserted or suppressed the female identities of their audience, and gendered and re-gendered the anchoresses in connection to their approaches to the female body and sexuality. Although it is possible to say that in the end spiritual chastity won a victory over physical virginity, both meanings survived

throughout the Middle Ages and were employed by the authors of anchoritic literature on different levels.

CHAPTER V

Conclusion: English Anchoritic Rules from Eleventh to Fourteenth Centuries

An analysis of the basic themes and motifs of the anchoritic rules written for women in England from eleventh to fourteenth centuries demonstrates that the solitary lives of the anchoress were not immune from the influence of the outside world and the changing religious atmosphere of the society. Anchoritic life was certainly not a standard or static one that was free from the authority and direction of outside factors such as the regulations of the Church and the personal inclinations of spiritual advisors. Solitary life was not a simple, standard alternative to marriage, chosen and led freely by women; on the contrary, a close consideration of the anchoritic rules indicates that both the choice of becoming a recluse and the lifestyle in the cell were manipulated, influenced and ruled not only by individuals and their specific agendas, but also by the general shifts in the society's and religious men's understanding of the contemplative life as it might apply to women.

Despite being a part of the long and well developed tradition of religious guide literature, Goscelin's *Liber Confortatorius*, Aelred's *De Institutione Inclusarum*, *Ancrene Wisse*, Rolle's *Form of Living* and Hilton's *Scale of Perfection* all bear witness to the problematic tension of spiritual friendship among religious, particularly those of different genders. The authors of the anchoritic guides — and probably also the recipients of the texts — each in their own way tried to justify their relationship with their audience as spiritual advisors. The advisor-advisee relationship was based on different dynamics in each case. Goscelin and Eve's highly

personal and sincere relationship based on mutual respect; Aelred's sincere yet professional advice to his older sister who was experienced in the religious profession and his authoritative tone throughout the text; *Ancrene Wisse's* anonymous author's fatherly but highly authoritative and restrictive attitude towards the young, noble recluse sisters, and Rolle's and Hilton's gender-neutral approaches to their audience which seem to be free from all concerns about worldly identities, did not only shape the general approach of the authors to their subject, that is regulating the life in the anchorhold, but also presumably influenced the self perception of the solitary women who read themselves through the eyes of their advisors in the texts composed for them.

Besides, it is certain that the attitudes of the authors of anchoritic guides towards their primary audience were also influenced by the changes in the religious atmosphere of their societies. In great contrast to the eleventh-century Goscelin's *Liber Confortatorius*, the texts written in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries were less flexible in their regulations on the issues of enclosure and virginity and were certainly more repressive in their tone. Aelred is cautious about visitors and their conversations with women; while the author of *Ancrene Wisse* is certainly against male visitors. An increase in negative ideas on women caused a great mistrust towards women and this mistrust resulted in a more repressive, restrictive and male-dominated tone in the anchoritic texts. On the other hand, the texts from the later periods, Rolle's and Hilton's works, due to their non-penitential, mystical objectives were more inclined to promote spiritual friendship and other proper contact than sexual segregation. Mystic writers, as they were indifferent in their guidance towards the concerns of the previous writers on sin and repentance, could easily approach

females as their equals and this certainly weakened the authoritarian tone seen in Aelred and *Ancrene Wisse*.

The solitary life of the anchoress was defined by the spiritual advisors first and foremost as an enclosed one, at least until the fourteenth century. Therefore, the changing ideas on the necessity and limits of bodily and spiritual enclosure and the multi-dimensional desert and wilderness motifs were of great importance for the anchoress's self valuation and perception. The idea of being enclosed gained different meaning in different texts analysed here. Goscelin, openly states that he did not favour a strictly enclosed life for his advisee and puts a great emphasis on the exile theme, trying to console his audience on the hardships of solitary enclosed life with his advice. It is not possible to detect this understanding, empathising tone of Goscelin in the following texts namely *De Institutione Inclusariorum* and *Ancrene Wisse*. While Aelred does not say much on the necessity of and reasons for enclosure, the author of *Ancrene Wisse* explains the enclosure idea through the weaknesses of female nature, and the necessity of protecting the anchoress from the world and the outside world from females. Both texts, however, are strict about bodily enclosure and certainly interested in the life in the cell. We also see the equation of the cell to the anchoress's body and tomb in both of these writings, but it is certain that the image of a solitary, enclosed life created by the author of *Ancrene Wisse*, who defined the cell also as prison, is gloomier than Aelred's.

Later writers, Rolle and Hilton are not interested in the physical conditions of the cell or the regulation of the daily life in it. Rather they praise spiritual enclosure, which is keeping oneself totally out of worldly affairs and concerns. Hilton in his approach to this issue is certainly more concrete than Rolle but in contrast to Aelred he, and the author of *Ancrene Wisse* equate the cell to the soul of the anchoress rather

than to her body. This highly abstract connotation of the cell is coupled with the metaphorical desert image in the mystical texts. As an overall comparison it should be stated that we do not find the negative connotations of the cell and the idea of enclosure in the late medieval texts, which can be explained by the mystical rather than penitential tone of these later texts.

Virginity and chastity were obviously issues of great importance for female recluses and we see the importance given to the issue of virginity in the anchoritic rules written for women. Following Jerome's and Augustine's definitions of virginity and chastity as bodily and spiritual purity, the authors of the anchoritic rules generally mention both definitions and praise the second over the former. Nevertheless, the emphasis differs.

Goscelin, most probably as a result of his gender neutral attitude towards his primary reader, does not mention virginity and praises the deeds of the non-virgin martyrs of the first Christian centuries, indicating that bodily virginity was not important at all. Goscelin certainly does not see Eve as weak and inferior to men; therefore he does not perceive virginity as a way to equate females to men. In this respect we do not see the re-gendering attitude of Aelred in Goscelin's text.

Aelred, indicating the importance of the issue for him by devoting one third of his text to virginity, certainly follows Jerome in his teaching that even God cannot raise a fallen virgin. The physicality of virginity is praised throughout the text and preserving bodily chastity is defined to be the first and the most important duty of the recluse. Aelred's text also employs early medieval techniques of re-gendering. Throughout the text Aelred suppresses the female identity of the reader and reconstructs it by identifying the recluse with a male-gendered discourse of asceticism and religious life.

The author of *Ancrene Wisse* is unclear about the definition of virginity. The author praises physical virginity similarly to Aelred, but he also stresses the importance of spiritual virginity. The most striking point in his text is that he introduces a new form of virginity that is gained after the loss of bodily virginity through a vow of chastity. Therefore it is clear that for the author of *Ancrene Wisse* although it was impossible to recover the loss of bodily virginity; there was a possibility for non-virgins to lead a religious life equal to virgins. The author of *Ancrene Wisse* does not attempt to re-gender his audience; on the contrary he formulates a female spirituality. By manipulating some qualities of the female nature, defined as weak and defective, he suggests a feminine spirituality that celebrates the female body and identity rather than suppressing it.

The later writers, Rolle and Hilton, offer similar explanations on the issue of virginity. They both praise spiritual virginity over the physical one and both of them reject the idea that the loss of virginity was an unrecoverable fault in a woman's life. In contrast to previous writers they do not see virginity as the virtue par excellence for women; rather they rank men and women according to their humility and love of God and that is why they believe that married women or widows could achieve the highest rank in heaven, even surpassing a physical virgin. Despite Rolle's total indifference towards the rewards of physical virginity over spiritual virginity, Hilton claims that physical virginity is one of the deeds that will be paid a special and specific reward in heaven.

In conclusion, this analysis of the anchoritic rules written in England shows that there occurred great changes in the attitudes of the writers of these rules and their discourses on issues such as enclosure and virginity from eleventh to fourteenth centuries and these changes can be related to the personal inclinations of the authors

and the nature of their relationships with their primary audience, as well as the changing perception of religion in their ages. The restrictive religious atmosphere and the highly penitential tones of the works written by Aelred and the author of the *Ancrene Wisse* are reflected in their texts. However, with the coming of the fourteenth-century mystics and the changing of the overall theme of the anchoritic texts from repentance to the joys of religious life and mystical union, the genre became less commanding and restrictive. Although it is hard to comment on the actual influence of these changes we see in the texts on the lives of recluses, one would expect, given particularly that the primary audiences for these texts were well known to their writers, that at least to some extent the changes affected the anchoresses' self perception.

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