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# An Introduction to Devotional Anthologies

*One Volume 'Collections' and their Contexts*

RYAN PERRY

This essay will discuss a class of book in which a single codex might be regarded as a collection in its own right.<sup>1</sup> These books often contain vernacular items, and thus in the context in which my current research is primarily focused, are collections of English (or mainly English) texts. The following paper is intended not only to assess some material and textual aspects of these single volume 'collections', but further, to pick up on some of the issues that were raised as themes in the 'Bunch of Books' symposium held at Radboud University, Nijmegen. As such, this essay will include several contemplative detours, specifically concerning the relationship between researchers and archives, and a consideration of some of the implications of digital reproduction for the book historian. Therefore, before this essay focuses specifically upon Middle English devotional anthologies, I would like to briefly focus upon the ideological relationships of researchers to book collections, and particularly in respect of the significance of the modern material situation of collections – within large, institutional repositories.

## The exclusive nature of access to manuscripts

It is easy for scholars to develop an antagonistic point of view during the process of accessing medieval materials. In this I am thinking particularly about the situation of books following the break up of privately-owned collections, when old books are bought by large institutional libraries. Siân Echard sets a number of the issues out in her wonderfully provocative essay, "'House Arrest': Modern Archives and Medieval manuscripts".<sup>2</sup> Echard illustrates some of the problems of access for scholars in respect of manuscript materials, and she casts the contexts for humanities research in institutional libraries as being essentially inhibiting. Studying within modern archives, she suggests, curtails a scholar's ability to experience manuscript materials properly, and furthermore, serves to create an unhelpful fetishistic relationship between the book and the researcher. Echard argues that the metaphor of 'house arrest', which she takes from Derrida,

...describes, metaphorically and indeed literally, the situation of medieval manuscripts in the modern archive. The reading of a medieval manuscript today requires the scholar to enter a space

<sup>1</sup> My thanks in particular to Suzan Folkerts for inviting me to the 'A Bunch of Books' symposium in Radboud University in Nijmegen, and also to Renée Gabriël and Johan Oosterman for their organization and welcome.

<sup>2</sup> Echard 2000, 185–210.

that is both physical and imagined, and the manuscript's dwelling in this place thus controls both kinds of access.<sup>3</sup>

As in Echard's article, there is at times a tendency by manuscript scholars to cast the relationship between researchers and archivists, the modern custodians of collections, as part of a poacher versus gamekeeper dynamic. We recount cases where access to books has been made difficult, and occasions where the archivist did not freely volunteer information about things the researcher might want to know when studying a book. In opposition to such cases we may posit the more charming, informal circumstances of access to original book collections, perhaps preserved in stately homes, in venerable schools and colleges, or in religious houses. Whether we always fully appreciate the pressures and responsibilities incumbent on the modern custodians of collections is quite another point. A problem in Echard's article is in its assumption of informal and *laissez-faire* reading circumstances in the Middle Ages. Her essay records the kinds of familiar strictures to which a scholar must abide in order to gain access to a medieval book within a modern archive: 'I had to present my credentials, check my belongings at the door, and refrain from touching the manuscript any more than was absolutely necessary', and she teasingly contrasts this with feature such as the stains on Columbia University Library ms Plimpton 265, which appear to reveal someone may have once 'rested a plate of soup on the manuscript'.<sup>4</sup> Whilst Echard is right to suggest that medieval readers did not fetishize the protocols of access to the book in the same ways as modern archives, the fourteenth-century bibliophile Richard de Bury's treatise *Philobiblion*, reveals that for de Bury at least, there were yet material procedures and disciplinary expectations of a reader in the Middle Ages (here translated from the Latin):<sup>5</sup>

But the handling of books is specially to be forbidden to those shameless youths, who as soon as they have learned to form the shapes of letters, straightway, if they have the opportunity, become unhappy commentators, and wherever they find an extra margin about the text, furnish it with monstrous alphabets, or if any other frivolity strikes their fancy, at once their pen begins to write it... Again, it is part of the decency of scholars that whenever they return from meals to their study, washing should invariably precede reading, and that no grease-stained finger should unfasten the clasps, or turn the leaves of a book.<sup>6</sup>

With Richard de Bury's words in mind, it might be argued that a sense of liberality in respect of the medieval reader's experience of books is, in itself, an anachronistic concept. Although Echard sentimentalizes the informal nature of the relationship between past medieval readers and their books, with readers leaving their 'names, scribbles and doodles' upon them, she fails to acknowledge that medieval book collections, and the medieval book itself, were in some respects designed precisely to inhibit and prohibit access to all but a select few.<sup>7</sup> Consider the architecture of the book and

3 Echard 2000, 185.

4 Echard 2000, 188.

5 For 'archival fetishization', see especially Echard 2000, 187-190 (187).

6 De Bury 1902, 107-108.

7 Echard 2000, 196.

manuscript collections in their original contexts. The bindings of manuscript books, with their clasps and straps are not exactly inviting our access; a book's natural resting position is to be closed, with boards and leather protecting the information within; medieval books were regularly chained in place within institutional and public settings; even within institutional settings books often had terms proscribing access, with custodians who would prohibit the wrong kind of reader access to the wrong kind of book.<sup>8</sup> In private and secular contexts books might be held in locked chests. In Britain we have a common metaphor that employs the idea of the book as emblematic of freedom of access – with someone who is easy to understand, or to use the bibliophilic metaphor, to 'read', we might say he or she was like an 'open book' (which I believe is an established metaphor in the Low Countries too). However, in a medieval context, the metaphor might have been less apt. Literature was not something open to all. Books were not open to all.

Particularly important in this regard are the social mechanisms through which literature is transmitted. Texts, and particularly vernacular literatures, depended on social contact between people for dissemination. Such texts, because they were generally not speculatively produced in England by scribes and stationers, invariably came to be transmitted through means of a social or institutional relationship – in order to possess a text, a book would need to be borrowed in order to be copied (which supposes a relatively close affiliation between loaner and loanee). In other words, as one often needed to be part of a social network in order to access literature, and certainly to patronize a new copy of a text, literature was disseminated within what I have elsewhere called "incestuous" textual communities.<sup>9</sup> It is thus possible to understand the medieval book in a less liberal, a less open way. The book in its medieval contexts should not necessarily be understood as a symbol for intellectual freedom, but a symbol for knowledge that is controlled, possessed and licensed. A medieval book might be considered as a symbol of exclusivity rather than inclusivity. Indeed, it might even be argued that the letters of introduction and qualifications needed to access medieval books that Echard sees as helping to divorce us from the experience of medieval readers, might actually provide a kind of modern parallel to the exclusive and privileged networks that acted to regulate access to literature and books in the Middle Ages. Instead of the idea of the 'open book', we might think of the chained book; the locked book; the book as vessel for knowledge to be shared only among select networks; such referents are perhaps more cogent when we think of the medieval contexts for book ownership and for access to books and the literatures they housed. Though I will come back to problematize this notion below, this is intended as a warning against sentimentalizing the conditions of access to books in the Middle Ages, and a suggestion that medieval access to books may have been every bit as fetishistic as it is in the modern archive.

<sup>8</sup> For a monograph length discussion of such issues see Kerby-Fulton 2006.

<sup>9</sup> Perry 2010, 311.

### English devotional anthologies: some characteristics

My essay will now move on to its main business, that is, to focus on a type of English vernacular book that was almost exclusively produced in the late fourteenth and throughout the fifteenth century. These books are categorized by Robert Raymo in the *Manual of Writings in Middle English* as ‘Miscellaneous manuals’, and they have also been described by scholars working on this corpus as ‘pastoral manuals’, ‘devotional compilations’ and a whole raft of similar designations.<sup>10</sup> For the purposes of this paper I have adopted the term ‘Devotional anthology’ but I will no doubt slip between these various designations as I write. What kind of books are these ‘miscellaneous manuals’? They are books that are entirely idiosyncratic, individualized collections of devotional writings. These ‘manuals’ characteristically contain a variety of types of religious texts, from basic catechetical literature, to more complex and ambitious contemplative or polemical tracts. They tend to be filled with vernacular texts, although, obviously depending on the patron’s tastes and proficiencies, might contain Latin texts too (as is the case in an example I will discuss below). In using the term ‘manual’ Raymo was linking this type of book to the pastoral mandates dating back to the fourth Lateran council of 1215; those stipulations which required priests to ensure that the laity had knowledge of the fundamental tenets of the faith in their own language, and which instigated a significant body of pastoral writing in vernaculars across Europe in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.<sup>11</sup> The fact, however, that these particular kinds of books only begin to appear in the latter part of the fourteenth century (in England at least) suggests that such a connection is not very useful. More important, perhaps, is the growing vogue for what might be called domestic piety – forms of religious practice, and devotional reading that took place in private homes instead of the communal liturgical spaces. These kinds of books were not, of course, only an English phenomenon, but could also be found in the European mainland, and in the Low Countries in particular, where they are associated with the *Devotio moderna* movement.

The main characterizing feature of Raymo’s ‘miscellaneous manual’ is that it will contain catechetical material in Middle English that relates to fundamental Christian formulae and prayers – the Ten Commandments, the Seven Deadly Sins, the Creed, *Pater Noster* and *Ave Maria* and so on. Such texts in these English miscellanies range from basic translations of fundamental religious lore (usually from Latin into English), to more lengthy didactic commentaries on these materials. Some commentaries became very widely transmitted, and can be found in dozens of manuscripts.<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, the materials in these commentaries were clearly subject to a riot of editorial interventions by their scribes (or those directing the scribes), resulting in a huge variety of theologico-political perspectives from the clearly Wycliffite, to reformist, neutral and reactionary perspectives.<sup>13</sup> Often a variety of such doctrinal outlooks,

<sup>10</sup> Raymo 1984, 2273.

<sup>11</sup> For discussion of these mandates and their relationship to the production of English literature see Boyle 1985, 30–43.

<sup>12</sup> See the discussion below of the Ten Commandments commentary.

<sup>13</sup> For the definitive guide to Wycliffism in its textual contexts in England see Hudson 1988.

mixtures of Wycliffite and orthodox materials are encompassed in a single codex, resulting in what Stephen Kelly and I have elsewhere tagged as signs of ‘devotional cosmopolitanism’.<sup>14</sup>

We know that these devotional manuals were extremely numerous. In Raymo’s survey he described them as existing in, ‘vast numbers’ and in ownership contexts pertaining to both ‘clergy and laity’.<sup>15</sup> Certainly, although reliable provenance information is fairly rare, we do have evidence of ownership of these books by secular households, as well as evidence for clerical ownership.<sup>16</sup> They appear to have been particularly widespread in London.<sup>17</sup> Raymo’s study listed 86 of such English manuscripts, making this an extremely impressive corpus, but his survey omits a significant number of books. Much work is still to be done in accurately recording all such manuals, but there are probably well over a hundred such books still extant, making it among the most important corpora in the English manuscript record. Tracking this corpus and describing it in detail is an important task, which is in the early process of being undertaken.<sup>18</sup>

From the analysis of the corpus of ‘miscellaneous manuals’ that has already taken place as part of the *Geographies of Orthodoxy* project (in Queen’s University of Belfast and the University of St. Andrews), there appear to be some interesting peculiarities in this manuscript grouping in terms of the scripts deployed by the scribes. Having looked at large numbers of manuscripts from other widely copied contemporary corpora of manuscripts, such as the Middle English prose *Brut* (which survives in larger numbers than any other non-religious vernacular work) and against other widely copied religious texts such as Nicholas Love’s *Mirror of the Blessed Life*, it is becoming clear that the types of scripts used can differ significantly between corpora.<sup>19</sup> Fifteenth-century scribes of vernacular materials in England will generally employ what are known as *Anglicana* scripts – a type of script, as the name suggests, which was particular to English scribes between the late thirteenth and sixteenth centuries.<sup>20</sup> Whilst initially developed for documentary purposes, versions of this script rapidly became almost ubiquitous in fifteenth-century books containing vernacular litera-

**14** See Kelly and Perry 2012, 365.

**15** Raymo 1984, 2273.

**16** For one of the most carefully studied examples of these books in lay hands, Westminster School MS 3, a London anthology from the early fifteenth century, see Moss 2003, 156–169 and Moss 2011, 41–64; for an essay exploring a fascinating cluster of these books that probably implicates both lay and clerical owners see Connolly 2003, 170–181; for a recent study of two anthologies that were probably made for the use of priestly consumers see Rice 2013.

**17** This has been suggested to me by work on the *Geographies of Orthodoxy* project (Queen’s University of Belfast and University of St. Andrews), in which a sample of the corpus was analysed and where a significant number appear to have been made in the metropolitan area.

**18** The project, led by Dennis Reveney, is being undertaken in the University of Lausanne: ‘Late Medieval Religiosity in England: The Evidence of Late Fourteenth and Fifteenth Century Devotional Compilations’ <<http://www.unil.ch/angl/page99064.html>>.

**19** Based on research from two large-scale AHRC projects which involved manuscript analysis of two of the largest and most significant corpora of Middle English Texts – the Middle English Prose *Brut* (see *The Imagining History Project* website <<http://www.qub.ac.uk/imagining-history/>>) and the Middle English translations of pseudo-Bonaventure (see *Geographies of Orthodoxy* website <<http://www.qub.ac.uk/geographies-of-orthodoxy/discuss/>>).

**20** For discussion of *Anglicana* with illustrative plates see Roberts 2005, 161–210.

ture. *Anglicana* scripts might vary considerably in terms of calligraphic execution, and in the fifteenth century would rapidly begin to assimilate forms from another documentary script adapted for book production known as ‘Secretary’. Versions of these scripts are dominant in almost every significant corpus of English texts from *The Canterbury Tales*, to Nicholas Love’s *Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ* and to the Middle English Prose *Brut*. Because these *Anglicana* (or hybrid *Anglicana*/Secretary scripts) licensed a significant degree of scribal idiosyncrasy, it means that the works of a particular scribe (or a scribal ‘school’ – scribes who have learned a similar set of graphs) are relatively straightforward to identify.<sup>21</sup> In contrast, the scripts used by the scribes of pastoral anthologies are non-descript. Generally the scribes of these books adopted staid, comparatively old-fashioned scripts based on *textualis* forms. The standard of the scripts could vary significantly in respect of calligraphic quality, and many such books were written in what might be called lower-grade *textualis*.<sup>22</sup> In contrast, the scribe of a book I will discuss below, Oxford, ms. Bodley 789, writes his *textualis* script with great calligraphic skill and with hints of his awareness of *Anglicana* forms. The eminent paleographer A.I. Doyle described this script as ‘a fine large text-hand, as if for some ecclesiastical purpose’.<sup>23</sup> It is a beautifully executed script, and the commodious dimensions of writing space to page, reveals a production scenario in which economy was not a prime factor. Doyle’s comment is perhaps telling – this is precisely the kind of hand one would expect to see in a church service book, the missals, breviaries and other liturgical codices used in churches, chapels and monastic houses. It is perhaps the case that such scribal forms occur so regularly in these books because this kind of script (even when penned in lower-grade forms) was thought of as being particularly apposite for this kind of book – that these books were thought of as being quasi-liturgical.

Interestingly, there is another very large corpus of books produced around this time in which the scribes also deploy such non-descript *textualis* scripts. Copies of the first widely transmitted Middle English translation of the Bible, the so-called Wycliffite Bible, were also regularly copied using these paleographic forms instead of the newer, more fashionable and efficient *Anglicana* scripts.<sup>24</sup> This was a book that became, by 1407, outlawed by ecclesiastical authority in England, and depending on who you were, might be a dangerous book to own.<sup>25</sup> In a paper given by the chief historian of the Wycliffites, Ann Hudson, she commented on the timelessness and concomi-

**21** For perhaps the most important study of the development of *Anglicana* scripts for English vernacular books see Doyle and Parkes 1978, 163–210.

**22** Examples include Oxford Laud Misc. msS 174 and 23 – for descriptions of these books see the resources of the *Geographies of Orthodoxy* website: <<http://www.qub.ac.uk/geographies-of-orthodoxy/resources/>>; for an example in print of a lower-grade *textualis* script (though in a different kind of book, a small, single-text volume containing the supposedly Lollard text, the *Lantern of Li3t*) see Roberts 2005, 181.

**23** Doyle 1953, 36–7, n. 20.

**24** For examples see the plates in Dove 2007, 89, 93, 144 and 168 (Oxford, Christ Church, ms 145, f. 71r; British Library, ms Egerton 617, f. 18r; Oxford, Bodleian Library, ms Bodley 959, f. 269v; British Library, ms Cotton Claudius E. II, f. 80r).

**25** Although, despite official censure, it remained a book which was transmitted widely among audiences who were not necessarily ‘Lollard’; see Hanna 2005, 308–13.

tant anonymity of the scripts used in Wycliffite bibles.<sup>26</sup> These scripts are notoriously difficult to date in an English context, precisely because they are not innovatory – as subject to changing schools and fashions as the *Anglicana* scripts and their hybrids. Whereas the scribes in other vernacular corpora tend to play up their idiosyncrasies, regularly furnishing their books with elaborate flourishes (especially upper-margin ascenders and lower-margin descenders) features that provide something akin to a scribal signature, this tends not to be the case with the scribes of pastoral manuals. Instead, they are doggedly formulaic, and seldom include the kinds of the extravagant flourishes that are so common in English fifteenth century book hands. It is possible that there was an inclination among the producers of these books, that is, of the pastoral manuals as well as Wycliffite Bibles, to produce texts *incognito*, in deference to the potential for official censure. Certainly, it is the case that many devotional miscellanies mix unproblematic religious materials with texts that might have attracted the disapproval of conservative ecclesiasts. It is also perhaps the case that such books, and the pastoral manuals in particular, were produced by a different kind of scribe than those responsible for copying the long and supposedly voguish texts that occur in more fashionable scripts.

### The Vernon and Simeon manuscripts

Although these books are frequently what might be termed as utility grade manuscripts – books that are physically unremarkable, and with little investment in terms of decorative features – this kind of multi-text volume might also be bracketed with the two most extraordinary English vernacular codices ever created, the so-called Vernon and Simeon Manuscripts (respectively, Bodleian Library, Eng Poet A. 1, and British Library Additional. 22283). These books were the largest English vernacular books produced in the Middle Ages. Vernon would have originally contained 422 or more leaves; and although it currently has 350, it still weighs in at approximately 22 kilograms. Simeon now has fewer than half of its probable 382 original leaves. It is the size of the leaves that renders this number as truly impressive. The leaves of the Vernon manuscript's leaves were possibly 550 mm x 400 mm before trimming and Simeon, even larger at around 590 mm x 400 mm.<sup>27</sup> Each bifolium was made from a single calfskin of high quality, trimmed with the spine running horizontally. In other words the whole of Vernon required 211 or 213 animals and Simeon somewhere in the region of 191! Depending on what way you divide the texts you might count around 370 separate items in Vernon. Although some items are brief, many are large texts that would normally occupy an entire volume in their own right. These books, in an English context are utterly anomalous examples of the genre. Nevertheless, despite

<sup>26</sup> Ann Hudson's plenary paper was delivered at 'Lollard Affiliations: Historical, Literary, Theological', Oriol College Oxford, 11–13<sup>th</sup> July, 2007; for Hudson's seminal study of Wycliffism and Lollardy see Hudson 1988.

<sup>27</sup> For details relating to the material and textual attributes of these manuscripts see the introduction to Doyle 1987; the updated digital facsimile and transcription of the manuscript on DVD-Rom (Scase 2011), incorporates Doyle's observations, see 'Codicology, Palaeography and Provenance'. See also the preface to Scase 2013, xix–xxiv.



their size and extraordinariness, they do raise methodological issues of more general concern within this corpus of ‘miscellaneous manuals’ – they raise questions, albeit in massive scale, of the methods by which more pedestrian devotional manuals were formed. They also require us to think in terms of the utility of devotional compilations. For what purposes were such books formed? This is a question as pertinent to the enormous Vernon and Simeon manuscripts as it to their smaller cousins. With literally hundreds of texts within Vernon and Simeon these books reveal the inclination to have a collection of vernacular texts within a single codex; this is an impulse testified to within smaller compilations equally as within these huge tomes. In the case of Vernon and Simeon, the collection of texts encompassed a large swathe of the entirety of orthodox religious literature in the English vernacular that existed at the time of production. In order to produce the books the compilers must have plundered a huge variety of books and collections. Scribal identifications by Simon Horobin demonstrate that the codices appear to have been made by producers in the orbit of Lichfield cathedral, and these producers have not only plundered the collections of English books they in the Cathedral library, but accessed collections in other religious houses across the West Midlands, and probably much further afield.<sup>28</sup>

Interestingly, great care was taken with the materials that were copied into these books. Texts were not only copied as they were found in an attempt to accumulate a mountain of texts, but many were thoughtfully adapted for their new contexts in these mammoth books. Sometimes texts were interpolated into others, and an interesting example I have looked at is the taking of a relatively small section from a little known text, Robert Mannyng’s *Handlyng Synne*, and incorporating it into the lessons for *Corpus Christi* day in the Northern Homily cycle – a huge text, apparently for church use that provides readings for the entire yearly liturgical cycle.<sup>29</sup> Throughout Vernon there was an attempt to standardize the various Middle English dialects found in the mass of exemplars into a relatively consistent form.<sup>30</sup> This attention to detail, this inclination not only to copy, but to engage with the texts proactively, is again a feature found in these devotional miscellanies more generally. Indeed, within devotional anthologies texts dealing with the fundamentals of pastoral edification were often not only merely copied, but were commonly spliced together with related texts. Religious literature was augmented and refashioned for use among new reading communities, perhaps with varying politico-religious perspectives. One such text, a commentary on the ten commandments of which a foundational version appears in the Simeon manuscript, occurs in 24 different versions in only 40 manuscripts.<sup>31</sup> This amazing degree of editorial interference demonstrates that we are witnessing a completely different mindset to what we see in copies of the long vernacular texts which generally occupied a single volume, those texts commonly understood as late medieval England’s ‘bestsellers’, such as those I cited above, the Middle English *Prose Brut*, *The Canterbury Tales*, Nicholas Love’s *Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ* and so on.

<sup>28</sup> See Horobin 2013.

<sup>29</sup> See Perry 2013.

<sup>30</sup> For the most recent dialectal appraisal of the Vernon MS, see Smith 2013.

<sup>31</sup> For discussion of this text and its variety of versions see Jefferson 1995.

Although such texts did receive scribal adaptation, it was nothing like on this scale of intervention. Scribes of these sorts of text tended to produce a copy, not an adaptation. In the case of these devotional anthologies, adaptation and individuation was the norm. We will return to the implications of this as I conclude.

If I may take another brief detour, I should point out that the Vernon manuscript is also of interest in respect of another theme covered within the ‘Bunch of Books’ symposium – that is, the implications of digitization to scholars of book history. At present one can access the Simeon manuscript in the manuscript reading room of the British Library without too much trouble. Indeed, considering this is perhaps the most remarkable Middle English book in the library – the access is no more stringent than in respect of accessing any medieval manuscript (or so I found when I last looked at the book in 2010). However, access to the Vernon manuscript in the Bodleian library has been notoriously difficult for years. The Bodleian have recently sponsored a digital edition of the Vernon manuscript, which came out last year, partly as a means of satisfying demand for access to the manuscript. This, I must say, is a truly remarkable edition, with extraordinary high quality images, a full transcription, and accompanying collation information and essays. It is certainly a much superior option to the grainy microfilms that are sometimes the only option offered by an intractable keeper of manuscripts who refuses access to the actual book. Nevertheless, if, as seems to be the case, this DVD-rom has been produced as a substitute to examining the Vernon manuscript, then it is a bittersweet achievement. The necessity of protecting this wonderful codex is unquestionable, and yet it is nonetheless impossible to fully comprehend the Vernon manuscript via digital access only. The very quality of the digitisation on offer in the Vernon DVD-rom offers the conservative archivist a powerful reason not to offer access to the actual book. How might one appreciate something that is not merely image and text, but is in fact a physically imposing and monumental artefact through digital access only?

Oxford, Bodleian Library, ms Bodley 789

For the penultimate part of this essay I will give a sense of how these devotional ‘collections’ were structured. As I have suggested above, there is an incredible dynamism in terms of textual selection in these books that reveals consumers and producers who were simply not willing to replicate what they found in another manual – something that would have made for the easy multiplication of these books. Instead, the compilers of these books would poach single items, or small clusters of items from the exemplars they sourced, but matched these with texts sourced from elsewhere, in other books, and no doubt exploiting other friendships, affiliations and institutional or personal connections to do so. The resulting admixtures of texts mean that the corpus of pastoral manuals contains insistently idiosyncratic productions, even if the books often share similar kinds of materials. The pastoral manuals also appear to be formed according to a shared understanding of appropriate structure. By appropriate structure I mean that the texts are not just copied into these codices in random orders, but there

seem to have been some commonly held guiding principles in the construction of these books. Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Bodley 789 provides an interesting example of this genre of books. Here follows the list of items in this collection:<sup>32</sup>

- Middle English *Meditationes de Passione*; ff. 1r–51v.  
 ‘Sixe þinges to knowe bi god almiȝti’; ff. 51v–68v.  
*Speculum Peccatoris*, in Latin; ff. 68v–85r.  
 ‘Incipit formula honeste uite bi bernardi ad fratrem sumi’; ff. 85v–94r.  
 ‘Uerba beati Bernardi’; ff. 94v–95r.  
 ‘Oracio ualde’ (prayer to the holy name); ff. 95r–96r, line 16.  
 Commentary on the *Pater Noster*, (Wycliffite?), ‘Here bigynneþ þe pater noster’; ff. 97r–102v.  
 Commentary on the *Ave Maria* (Wycliffite?), ‘Here bigynneþ þe Aue Maria’; ff. 102v–104v.  
 The Creed, ‘Here bigynneþ þe crede’; ff. 104v–105r.  
 A general form of confession (English), ‘Confiteor deo celi & cetera’; ff. 105r–108v.  
 Commentary on the Ten Commandments (Wycliffite?), ‘here beginneþ þe ten comaundmentis’; ff. 108v–120v.  
 Abridged translation of Deuteronomy 28, ‘IF þou kepe þuse maundmentis þat god haþ bedyn þee’; ff. 120v–123r.  
 Translation of chapter 5, the *Ars Moriendi* of Suso’s *Horologium Sapientiae*, ‘Here beginneþ þe mooste profitable sentence to deedli men in þe whiche þei moue leerne for to deie’; ff. 123r–139v.  
 Chapter AB of *Contemplations of the Dread and Love of God*, ‘¶ Here is a techinge & oon ensaunple bi what meditacione. a man or a womman may be stired to trewe deuocione and haue in his herte greet compuncione and sorwe for his synnes’; ff. 139v–143r.  
 ‘What maner praier þou maist praie if it like þee whanne þou hast deuocione’; ff. 143r–146r.  
 English verse prayer, ‘¶ þis is an orison to þe holy trinite’; f. 146r–v.  
 An address by Christ to the damned, ‘Here men mai biholde a dreedful sentence þat crist schal speke at þe doom to men þat schulen be dampned’; ff. 146v–147v.  
 Seven sheddings of Christ’s blood, ‘Here men mai see how oure lord ihesu crist schadde his precious blood. vii tymes’; ff. 147v–149r.  
 A poetic address to the reader from a corpse, unique text, ‘¶ Here is a good counseil for synful men to tak heede to while þei ben in þis lyf’; ff. 149r–150r.  
 Prose exposition of the *Pater Noster*, ‘¶ þis is þe Pater Noster schortli declared’; ff. 150r–152r.  
 ABC on the Passion, verse, ‘Here is an .a. b .c . of þe passionne of oure lord ihesu crist þe whiche is profitable to alle cristene men and wymmen to see & to knowe’; ff. 152r–156r.  
 Short, unique prose treatise, ‘Here ben foure þingis þat maken god oure freend’; f. 156r–v.  
 A spiritual preparation for death, ‘þis be wordis of greet cumfort to seke men. after þ<sup>e</sup> sentence of seint austyn’; ff. 156v–160r.  
 Bede’s exposition of Christ’s last seven words, English prose, ‘¶ þe orisone of bede þe prest’; ff. 160r–161v.

Bodley 789 reveals both some of the patterns that are characteristic of this genre of book whilst demonstrating its own specific focus. This codex is an example of a collection of texts that seems to have a slightly odd structure in comparison to the most commonly found patterns in English devotional anthologies. Whilst these text collections generally open with treatments of fundamental Christian lore (such as the Ten Commandments, Seven Deadly Sins etc.), MS Bodley 789 is an example of a compi-

<sup>32</sup> For a version of this list with fuller bibliographical information, see the MS description on the *Geographies of Orthodoxy* website: <<http://www.qub.ac.uk/geographies-of-orthodoxy/resources/>>.

lation that instead begins with a meditative treatise on the Passion of Christ – in this case, the Middle English *Meditationes de Passione Christi*. Of course, it is easy to imagine why some book producers may have seen it as appropriate to begin a devotional manual with an exposition of what is the central biblical story for Christian devotional practice. In fact, it is one of the idiosyncratic features of Bodley 789 that the compiler has sourced a large number of texts with a Christological focus. It is a book that might be described as being ‘Christ-themed’. We can see for instance that the fourth text is a Latin item by pseudo-Bernard, that focuses on a cenobitic reader who is to keep Christ in mind throughout monastic routines such as during the divine office, and in particular spaces within a monastic house such as the Refectory.<sup>33</sup> This is a text that obviously would appear to have a particular relevance for incumbents of religious houses and the pseudo-Bernardine tract may provide the best clue to the manuscript’s early provenance – either belonging to the incumbent of a religious house, or to someone interested in modeling their devotional regimen upon monastic religious practices. This mainly Latin portion of the manuscript near the opening (items 3–6), appears to have been something of an afterthought, and the book in its initial conception probably began with the structure we most commonly see in these books, that is, commencing with materials focusing on the fundamental tenets of Christian lore, with the Latin items subsequently interpolated into a book that was mostly completed.<sup>34</sup> The portion from item 7 onwards may have thus been the original opening portion of the book, and with commentaries on the *Pater Noster*, *Ave Maria*, *Credo*, a ‘form of Confession’ text and a commentary on the Ten Commandments. It is possible that the compiler of Bodley 789 sourced this node of pastoral items in a single exemplar, as the items in this section of the manuscript appear to be, for the most part, Wycliffite adaptations and may have thus been located in a single Wycliffite-influenced collection. Indeed, the English translation of Deuteronomy 28 is a telling sign of a reading community with scant regard for Ecclesiastical prohibitions in England concerning biblical translation (the book probably postdates Arundel’s *Constitutions* of 1407/9). At some subsequent point someone has expunged materials from this part of the book that may have been deemed particularly offensive Wycliffite positions, although this section retains much that is radical.<sup>35</sup>

As I mentioned above, the characterizing feature of this book is its particular Christological focus. Christ’s passion is put in the service of a number of devotional functions in the book; we have the penitential ‘Seven Sheddings of Christ’s Blood’, the catechetical ‘ABC on the Passion’, and the invocationary prayers focusing on Christ’s holy name. In the latter third of the volume these Christological texts are interwoven with literature dealing with preparation for death and final judgment, paralleling a common tendency in these devotional manuals to reflect on eschatology in their final gatherings. In pastoral books one often sees such an artful tendency to focus on

33 The text is pseudo-Bernard of Clairvaux, *Formula honestae vitae*; printed in Migne 1844–1864, vol. 184, 1167–1170; Bloomfield et al. 1979, no. 3897, listing variant titles: *Formula honestae vitae*, *De moribus et honesta vita*, and *Tianctatus de fórmula vitae sive de novitiis*, and recording more than fifty-two manuscripts.

34 For discussion see ‘Collation’ in the description of MS Bodley 789 on the *Geographies of Orthodoxy* website.

35 For further discussion see Kelly & Perry 2012, 373–374.

final things in the final portion of the book – preparation for death, treatises on Last Judgement and apocalypse. Final things, appropriately, come in the final parts of the book. Perhaps the most extraordinary text in this section is a unique work that blends eschatology with reflection on the Passion. In it the crucified Christ speaks directly to an audience of the damned on Judgement Day, displaying his wounds to the hell-bound, and castigates his listeners for choosing sin in spite of his pain on their behalf: *I suffride deeb , þat þ<sup>u</sup> schuldis haue heritage of lijf [...] where is þe prijs of mi blood[?]*.<sup>36</sup> The text chillingly invites its listeners / readers to imagine they are present at the moment Christ in Judgement banishes the unredeemed to hell.

The compiler of Bodley MS 789, through opening his/her book with the meditation on the Passion and closing with a treatment of Christ's last words from the cross, book-ends the volume with a Christological focus. The structural decision to close the collection with a prayer that treats Christ's last seven words from the cross means that the Passion is advertised as the book's central theme in a manner that was clearly deliberately conceived. Such 'themed' collections appear to have been common. Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Bodley 938 is a pastoral manual that demonstrates a similar artfulness in establishing its theme. On this occasion, the book emphasizes the importance of the scriptures in the everyday religion of the laity, opening with a unique text that establishes the importance of Old Testament law, and Christian forgiveness as taught by Christ in the New Testament: *Thees ben þe wordis of god in þe olde law [...] þees ben þe wordis of crist in þe gospel*.<sup>37</sup> Among the pastoral treatises and other more spiritually ambitious texts in the book (including Rolle's *Form of Living*) there is a consistent layering of texts explicitly advertising their scriptural authority. The collection concludes with a final reminder of the authority of scriptural teaching – a Middle English translation of 2 Timothy 3. 16–17: *Euery scripture of god enspirid is profitable to techen [...] þ<sup>t</sup> þe man of god be perfit enfourmed to euery good werk*.<sup>38</sup> These 'collections' of religious texts, suggest something of their own specific compilation story and reveal idiosyncratic tastes and preferences. At the core of all such books, we will find treatments of the fundamental tenets of Christian lore, but there are always individual accretions reflective of the spiritual interests of the compiler, and, no doubt, the distinctive links he or she held between other reading communities and other collectors of texts.

### Conclusion

Devotional anthologies present us with a number of fascinating codicological conundrums. Chief among these are finding ways of explaining the unusual dynamism in this corpus of books, and relatedly, understanding the nature of the corpus's primary producers and consumers. These are problems for which, at present, only tentative answers might be forwarded. The textual enterprise we perceive in this corpus is certainly suggestive. As was mentioned previously, these books were never mere-

<sup>36</sup> Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Bodley 789, f. 147r.

<sup>37</sup> Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Bodley 938, f. 1r–v.

<sup>38</sup> Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Bodley 938, f. 278v.

ly copied from another single exemplar in the manner so typical of long vernacular works that might fill, or largely fill, an entire codex. In the production of such long single-volume texts, a scribe and other members of the book's production team could complete a book with relatively little interference from a patron, once details such as decorative features, quality and cost of material features of the commission had been agreed upon. Devotional compilations clearly came into being by means of considerably more complex processes of sourcing and decision making, involving the acquisition of multiple exemplars (exemplars that usually also housed multiple texts), from which some items were copied, and as importantly, others were elided by the copyists as they produced entirely new textual formulations. As Margaret Connolly writes of a cluster of manuscripts in which six compilers have manufactured their own unique variations on the same node of texts, producers of these books had the inclination and ability to 'adapt the material in front of them in order to make it appropriate to its new context'.<sup>39</sup> What those contexts were is impossible to say with precision, but it is enough to say that the variations in these books must have reflected the specific needs and interests of their compilers. The status of the 'compiler' of the book is likely to have differed from case to case. Many of these books were probably penned by their own patron-compilers – people sourcing exemplars and producing their own books – the sometimes uncalligraphic and staid scripts discussed earlier perhaps make sense when imagining such production scenarios. Other books may have involved a patron supplying materials to a scribe, no doubt with meticulous instructions given in respect of how to incorporate exemplars into the accreting commission. Almost certainly, the phenomenon of devotional anthologies must have been facilitated by substantial clerical involvement. This is in part suggested by the confident modificatory interactions between compilers and the texts disseminated within the corpus. Texts were frequently rewritten or spliced together with others in a creative religio-literary process of adaptation that makes most sense among those directly involved in pastoral activities – priests, canons and friars – though no doubt incorporating other non-official purveyors of religious wisdom and spiritually ambitious lay-people. The extensive circulation of exemplars between compilers that the corpus evidences (perhaps in unbound booklets), is suggestive of multifarious and overlapping conduits of religio-literary traffic, the story of which, is largely yet to be told.<sup>40</sup> Clerical compilers – and in particular those occupied in London, were both generating and somehow fulfilling their own demand for systems through which booklets filled with religious literature were allowed to move freely. They may even have found some means for 'pooling' pastoral and other religious literature. The manuscript evidence is suggestive of these sorts of connections, but it is a notion, given the likely personal and *ad hoc* nature of such arrangements, that may never be definitively proved.

<sup>39</sup> Connolly 2003, 178.

<sup>40</sup> There have been hints at such a scenario, however, such as in Gillespie 1989, 325–329.

## Samenvatting

Centraal in dit artikel staat een groep Engelse devotieele ‘meerteksthandschriften’ die beschouwd kunnen worden als op zichzelf staande verzamelingen. Vooral in te gaan op deze devotieele bloemlezingen, wordt aandacht geschonken aan de beperkingen die de onderzoeker van middeleeuwse handschriften in institutionele collecties ondervindt, dit in tegenstelling tot de vermeende liberale omgang met boeken in de middeleeuwen. Als alternatief voor zulk een vrije omgang met boeken, wordt beargumenteerd dat ook in de middeleeuwen toegang tot collecties en boeken vaak voorbehouden was aan een selecte groep van mensen die allen behoorden tot een concreet sociaal netwerk. Vervolgens worden inhoud en uiterlijke kenmerken van deze devotieele bloemlezingen verder onder de loep genomen. De keuze van en omgang met teksten in twee monumentale verzamelingen, Bodleian Library, Eng Poet A.1 (‘Vernon’) en British Library Additional 22283 (‘Simeon’), wordt verbonden met het ruimere corpus. Een laatste casestudy, Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Bodley 789, werpt licht op de structuur van de besproken bloemlezingen. Het artikel besluit met een voorzichtige schets van de context waarin devotieele verzamelingen werden vervaardigd en het proces dat aan hun productie ten grondslag lag.

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