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He Said, She Said, We Said: Dialogue and Allegory in *Sawles Warde*

by

Jessica Snyder

A Thesis

Presented to the Graduate and Research Committee

of Lehigh University

in Candidacy for the Degree of

Master of Arts

in

English

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By Jessica Snyder

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the formal use of address and the allegorical content of *Sawles Warde* alongside two other instructional texts for anchoresses, *Ancrene Wisse* and *Hali Meidhad*, in order to argue that these texts represent a coherent pedagogical program that promotes the internalization of didactic dialogue. This comparative reading of the style of address employed in *Ancrene Wisse*, *Hali Meidhad*, and *Sawles Warde*, highlights the way in which the speaker–reader relationship in *Sawles Warde* fosters a pedagogical partnership rather than the relationship of subordination that structures *Ancrene Wisse* and *Hali Meidhad*. With this in mind, this paper also argues that the allegory of *Sawles Warde* disrupts misogynistic representations of gender relationships. The text does so by presenting the image of the hierarchically structured household as unstable, and offering in as an alternative, a vision of a more equitable and effective structure of the domestic space that relies on input from both masculine and feminine figures. By attending to this instruction coherence – reading these texts as interconnected – I argue that *Sawles Warde* emerges as a kind of pedagogical key, offering the anchoress a way of understanding and influencing the gendered relationship that structure her devotional education.

I. Introduction

Medieval scholars such as Carolyn Walker Bynum and Bernard McGinn have identified a flourishing of female spirituality between the twelfth and fifteenth centuries.¹ England, in particular, experienced a rise in the female practice of anchoritism. Enclosed for life in small cells adjoined to churches, anchoresses lived particularly isolated and ascetic lives, focused on contemplation and withdrawal from worldly desire.² Within their cells, called anchorholds, these recluses structured their spiritual programs with advice from a male spiritual adviser and, when they had access to them, made use of devotional texts. This paper examines one group of anchoritic texts – *Ancrene Wisse*, *Hali Meidhad*, and *Sawles Warde* – on the premise that because they were written for a female reader, they have a lot to tell us about the gendered relationship between the male religious advisor and the female anchoress.

My motivation, like many other scholars who have examined the role of the reader in anchoritic texts, is to consider how the texts construct agency in relation to hierarchically gendered social structures.³ But, unlike other critics, I identify a kind of feminine agency that does not emerge from the reader's resistance to the text. Instead, the form of address and allegorical content in *Sawles Warde*, asks the reader to participate with these three texts differently, as a co-creator of spiritual meaning with the writer of the text. This phenomenon becomes clear only through a comparative reading of the

¹ See Caroline Walker Bynum's *Fragmentation and Redemption* and Bernard McGinn's *The Flowering of Mysticism: Men and Women in the New Mysticism*.

² For more about anchoritic life see Linda Georgianna's *The Solitary Self: Individuality in the Ancrene Wisse*.

³ To note few: Elizabeth Ann Robertson's *Early English Devotional Prose for the Female Audience*, A.S.G. Edwards' "The Middle English Manuscript and Early Readers of *Ancrene Wisse*," and Susan Uselmann's "Women Reading and Reading Women: Early Scribal Notions of Literacy in the *Ancrene Wisse*."

texts, which shows how they urge the reader to take ownership over her devotional practice by turning away from the didactic instruction that privileges the male-authoritative voice and towards a model of self-regulation that can be read in and through the anchoress's lived experience of enclosure and devotion. This reading cannot overwrite medieval conceptions of female spirituality as grounded in the body, but it can offer a way to think of the female recluse as achieving a kind of freedom from worldly influence, by turning inward and embracing a form of pedagogical dialogue that is not predicated on the hierarchical relationship between male and female.

To make this argument, I approach the texts in the "AB group" as a holistic pedagogical program. This instructional coherence, however, only comes into view by turning to less studied text in this group. The "AB group" consists of *Ancrene Wisse* ("Guide for Anchoresses"), as well as the *Katherine Group*, which contains *Hali Meiðhad* ("Holy Virginité"), *Sawles Warde* ("The Guardianship of the Soul"), and the lives of Saint Katherine, Saint Margaret, and Saint Juliana.⁴ Despite the fact that each of these texts offers a rich exploration of the implications of gender in the anchoritic literature, *Ancrene Wisse* and the Saints' lives have garnered a great deal of critical discussion, while *Sawles Warde* and *Hali Meiðhad* in comparison have remained relatively neglected.⁵ This methodological approach to *Ancrene Wisse*, *Hali Meiðhad*,

⁴ Elizabeth Ann Robertson, "The Implications of Illiteracy for the Development of Middle English Literature," from *Early English Devotional Prose and the Female Audience*.

⁵ For the purposes of this project, I will not be examining the lives of the virgin martyrs. As exemplary narratives, they have a different didactic function, and the focus of this project is on texts with more explicitly dialogic structures. As Diane Mockridge notes in "The Order of the texts in the Bodley-34 Manuscript," the exemplary narratives of the saints' lives do not represent "everywoman" figures; they are extraordinary individuals who remain distant to the reader. They can be called upon for help, but their lives cannot be experienced vicariously by the audience" (210-211). Although the saints' lives lie outside the scope of the current paper, the prevalence of dialogue between saints and pagan tormentors suggests a

and *Sawles Warde* as comprising a coherent pedagogical program illuminates both previously under-described elements of *Sawles Warde* as well as the texts' collective interest in a reader who can internalize dialogue. While many scholars have examined anchoritic texts in cohesive groups, they are often interested in historical questions about audience, rather than the textual implications of the program addressed to those audiences. My argument for these texts' coherence makes historical sense because we know that these texts circulated together in manuscript form. *Sawles Warde* and *Hali Meiðhad* both appear in the Bodley 34 manuscript, which contains each of the "AB Texts" with the exception of *Ancrene Wisse*. In another Manuscript, Royal 17 A.xxvii, *Ancrene Wisse* appears with the rest of the *Katherine Group*.⁶ But, this argument does not rely only on manuscript evidence, but also on the formal interplay among the texts' use of dialogic structure, which provides a conceptual frame for understanding their manuscript history.

I focus specifically on *Sawles Warde*, which presents the self as an extended domestic allegory, with Wit, the husband struggling to maintain control over Will, the wayward wife, and her servants, the vices. To aid in the husband's efforts to keep the treasure of "monnes sawle [man's soul]" safe, God lends the husband his daughters, the four chief virtues, who help guard against the devil's attack.

To show how *Sawles Warde* frames anchoritic texts, I will work through the way the text addresses its readers through the use of first person plural pronouns, comparing

potentially fruitful avenue for further inquiry into their didactic role in relation to *Ancrene Wisse*, *Sawles Warde*, and *Hali Meiðhad*.

⁶ See Bella Millett's annotated bibliography of *Ancrene Wisse*, the *Katherine Group*, and the *Wooing Group*. She notes that the Cotton Titus D. xviii is "incomplete, lacking the Preface and most of Part I, and reflecting a version sporadically modified for use by men."

this to the direct address offered in *Ancrene Wisse* and *Hali Meiðhad*. To ground this comparative reading of *Sawles Warde*, I use Margaret Hostetler's argument that the use of direct address in both *Ancrene Wisse* and *Hali Meiðhad* constructs a relationship where pedagogical dialogue is passed from an authoritative male voice to the female reader.⁷ I argue that while the speaker-reader relationship in *Ancrene Wisse* and *Hali Meiðhad* focuses on a hierarchical relationship between teacher and student, *Sawles Warde* constructs a relationship founded on commonality, in which both participants approach the text from the same subject position. Then, I offer a reading of the allegory, focusing on the images of gendered relationships and how they represent the internalization of pedagogical dialogue. Further, I argue that the presentation of these gendered relationships through a personification allegory suggest that gender is a psychic phenomenon, which allows the reader to call into question hierarchical relationships organized by a conception of gender as a materially significant quality. This shift influences the way the anchoress understands the presence of hierarchical gendered relationships within her devotional practice.

II. Models of Pedagogical Dialogue in *Ancrene Wisse*, *Hali Meiðhad*, and *Sawles Warde*

Ancrene Wisse, *Hali Meiðhad*, and *Sawles Warde* all participate in a pedagogical program that is founded in dialogue. In *Ancrene Wisse* and *Hali Meiðhad*, the dialogic

⁷ Margaret Hostetler's "The Characterized Reader in *Hali Meiðhad* and the resisting reader of feminist discourse," examines the way that the use of direct address in *Hali Meiðhad* ask the reader to identify with shifting subject position within the text. She argues that this shifting identification requires a more developed approach than a reader-resistance model that assumes that didacticism does not allow the reader to negotiate with the text. Additionally, in "The Politeness of a Disciplining Text: Ideal Readers in *Ancrene Wisse*" Hostetler revises traditional readings of *AW*, which focus on an oppositional relationship between text and reader. Rather, she examines the linguistic strategies of politeness, specifically the use of direct address, to create an "ideal environment for the text and its readers to pursue the genre's ideals.

relationship is between speaker and reader, so that the reader is positioned as a subordinate or student, desirous of the speaker's instruction. In this relationship, the dialogue passes between the reader and the speaker of the text, so that the pedagogical relationship is predicated on the difference between the speaker and the reader, specifically in terms of gendered spiritual authority. *Sawles Warde*, however, undoes that hierarchical model by identifying both the speaker and the reader with a single, anchoritic subject position. The speaker in this text shares in the reader's reflection on the message of the text in such a way that *Sawles Warde* breaks down the hierarchical student-teacher relationship we see in *Ancrene Wisse* and *Hali Meiðhad*, in favor of a relationship that imagines the anchoress as capable of textual production, as well as pedagogical influence of her own. This transition not only changes the reader's relationship to the speaker of the text, it also changes the role she plays in her own spiritual education by allowing her to understand herself as a devotional practitioner independent from the influence of a male authority figure. In order to make this argument, I begin with a detailed account of the didactic methods employed by *Ancrene Wisse* and *Hali Meiðhad* as they position the anchoritic reader as the addressee of the text, focusing specifically on the use of direct address.⁸ Then, I show how *Sawles Warde* is addressing the reader differently, primarily through its use of the first-person plural, which allows the anchoress to participate in the text alongside the speaker. This pedagogical progress only becomes apparent when we read *Sawles Warde* together with *Ancrene Wisse* and *Hali Meiðhad* – as anchoresses may well have done. Only in this collaborative reading, can we see the ways in which *Ancrene*

⁸ This is where I make use of Margaret Hostetler "The Politeness of a Disciplining Text: Ideal readers in *Ancrene Wisse*" and "The characterized reader in *Hali Meithhad* and the resisting reader of feminist discourse"

Wisse's interest in an addressee who is in need of the pedagogical lesson produced on her behalf and then is able to reproduce that lesson in the context of her own devotional life, is recreated in the movement from *Hali Meiðhad*'s external disciplinary voice to *Sawles Warde*'s vision of the anchoress's internalized devotional dialogue in Bodley 34.

First, I turn to *Ancrene Wisse*, which shares formal didactic qualities with *Hali Meiðhad*, as well as conceptual interests in internalization with *Sawles Warde*, and therefore provides a strong basis for comparison. Through the use of second-person directives, the *Ancrene Wisse* establishes a pedagogical relationship that relies on the transmission of a devotional education from the speaker of the text to the reader. Broken in to eight parts, in addition to an introduction, *Ancrene Wisse* provides instruction for both the Outer Rule, which is "concerned with outward things, and rules the body and bodily actions," as well as the Inner Rule, which is "always within and sets the heart right" (*Ancrene Wisse* 47-48).⁹ As the text works through these eight parts, separated into the following topics: Devotions, The Outer Senses, The Inner Feelings, Temptations, Confession, Penance, Love, and The Outer Rule, the speaker directly addresses the readers of the text as the audience of his instruction. He does so through second-person pronouns: "Say your graces standing before and after eating as they are written for you," as well as, the use of honorifics: "my dear sisters" or "My beloved sisters."¹⁰ Examples of this consistent reference to the reader's position in relation to the speaker can be seen

⁹ For all citations following, *Ancrene Wisse* will be cited as *AW*, *Hali Meithhad* will be cited as *HM*, and *Sawles Warde* will be cited as *SW*.

¹⁰ It is a common belief that *Ancrene Wisse* was originally written for three sisters who the author was very familiar with. As Yoko Wada notes in *A Companion to Ancrene Wisse*, "it is very likely that the work was originally composed for three daughters of good family whom the author knew quite well: in many versions 'three sisters' are mentioned or the author's personal references, of one sort or another, to them are found" (4).

in each section of the text, for example: “My dear sisters, just as you guard well your senses outwardly, so above all else, see to it that you are gentle and mild and humble within,” or “Understand then first of all, dear sisters, that there are two kinds of temptations, two kinds of testing, outer and inner; and both are of many different sorts” (AW 93, 114). Thus, the dialogue of the text exchanged between of the speaker of the text and the “you,” or reader of the text, situating the reader as the speaker’s student.

Additionally, *Ancrene Wisse* makes it clear that the demand for this pedagogical material is coming from the anchoress, so that the guidebook centers on anchoritic need. In this way, the text not only suggests that the writer is offering information that the female recluse does not have access to, but also that anchoress desires the male speaker’s intervention. The introduction to *Ancrene Wisse* points to this: ““They are righteous who live according to the rule; and you, my beloved sisters, have for a long time begged me for a rule. There are many kinds of rules, but there are two among all of them that I will speak of at your request, with God’s grace” (AW 47). By situating the anchoress as the addressee of the text, specifically an addressee who is desirous of the speaker’s help, *Ancrene Wisse* sets up a model of devotional pedagogy that affirms the female reader’s dependence on the male speaker’s instruction, but also points to the anchoress’s own influence on its production for her own devotional purposes.¹¹ We are not getting a generalized sermon, but rather an extended guide for a specifically female life of enclosure and devotion. While we might be tempted to read this relationship between the speaker and the reader as one of pure dependence, doing so would elide the role the student plays in generating her own instruction. When the speaker of the text indicates

¹¹ See Anne Savage, “The Communal Authorship of *Ancrene Wisse*,” from Yoko Wada’s *A Companion to Ancrene Wisse* (49-54)

the motivation for the text, saying “So, you ask what rule you anchoresses should keep” he also indicates the anchoress’s influence in her own devotional education (AW 48). The speaker of the text may be in a position of authority, and this authority extends over the reader, but the text is not produced out of the speaker’s desire to teach the unknowing female a particular lesson. Rather, the anchoress is seeking out what she feels she needs to aid her in her life of enclosure. Even as we appreciate the anchoress’s desire for the text, it is nonetheless the case that she seeks knowledge for spiritual practice from an authority figure, so while she is actively involved in guiding the pedagogical subject matter, she is still dependent on a spiritual advisor for its administration.

In addition to the anchoress’s influence on the production of the text, which disrupts what appears to be a relationship predominantly based on the subordination of the reader to the speaker, the text also suggests that its didactic aim is to give the reader the tools to use that educational material in her own isolated practice. While it is clear that the dialogic relationship set up in *Ancrene Wisse* positions the reader as the educational subject who receives directions from the speaker, these directions leave room for the anchoress to tailor her devotion to her own need. As a reader, she is submitting to the didactic voice of the speaker, but she is also asked to reflect on how to make use of the pedagogical message within her enclosure. This becomes clear in two ways: first, through the moments in the text that do not use the second person, which indicate the reader’s participation in the didactic lesson; and second, through the text’s emphasis on the need for the anchoress to internalize these devotional practices within her isolation. While the text primarily addresses the anchoress in the second person, there are moments when this is replaced with a first person plural address, or when the speaker uses a more

distant third person address. For Hostetler, the use of third person address reflects a concern on part of the speakers for how to “warn his readers while not accusing them directly,” while the use of the first person plural addresses “show solidarity between the author-character and the reader character.”¹² The moments of first person plural address often occur at moments of transition within the text, as the speaker guides the reader from one topic to the next. For example, in the end of the third part, *The Inner Feelings*, the speaker says, “Now we go on, beloved sisters, to the fourth part,” and again in the closing paragraph of part five, the speaker says, “After confession, it is fitting to speak of penance, that is making amends. And so we have entry out of this fifth part into the sixth” (*AW* 175). While these moments don’t change the dominant didactic relationship that structures the text, they indicate the speaker’s awareness of the anchoress’s participation in the message of the text, as well as his commonality with the anchoress as a devotional subject in her own right. These moments also lessen the distance between the speaker and reader in relation to the text, implying that they are moving from lesson to lesson together. Even as the speaker maintains a position of authority within the text, then, these transitional moments affirm that the generation of the text comes from a combination of the anchoress’s desire for certain instruction and the speaker’s knowledge of those specific topics.

Ancrene Wisse further disrupts the hierarchical relationship between the speaker and the reader, affirming the anchoress’s agency outside this gendered relationship by emphasizing the importance of self-instruction and regulation within her enclosure.

While the text still relies on the authoritative voice of the speaker instructing the

¹² Hostetler 38,35, “The Politeness of a Discipline Text: Ideal Readers in *Ancrene Wisse*.”

anchoress, it also suggests that, because the anchoress is ultimately isolated in her practice, her devotional education will eventually become one of internalized discipline. Thus, the goal of the text is not to maintain the anchoress as a subordinate to the male speaker of the text, but rather to provide her with the tools to continue her contemplative practice within the anchorhold. So, while the text is invested in a hierarchical dialogic relationship between the authoritative voice of the speaker, who outlines in detail the specific behavior necessary for keeping the Outer Rule, it also makes it clear that the reader's primary focus should be on the maintenance of her Inner Rule, which involves recognizing the limits of external influence. For the speaker of *Ancrene Wisse*, the Inner Rule is the primary concern for the anchoress because it is not demanded or measured by man, but rather it is a universal condition required by God. The speaker refers to this as "the lady rule, who rules and sets right and smooths away sin from the heart and the conscience" (AW 48). This lady, who stands in for the Inner Rule, is served by the Outer Rule, as the text says, "All that good religious do or wear according to the outer rule, all is entirely for this, all is nothing but a tool to build toward this, all is nothing but a handmaid to serve the lady in ruling the heart" (AW 51). This passage makes it clear that while the guidance offered in the *Ancrene Wisse* for how to regulate one's daily behavior is important, it is only effective if it is used in service of the anchoress's maintenance of her internal devotion.

The text is figured as a tool that is first extended from the writer of the text to the reader, and then is meant to be individually integrated into the anchoress's understanding of her own devotional practice. As the text explains, "The inner is always the same, the outer differs; for each should keep the outer according to the way she can best serve the

inner using her” (AW 48). This emphasis on the universality of the Inner rule, despite the variations of the outer rule indicate the fact that this text cannot be entirely immersive, and requires the anchoress to do work in order to fit its instruction to her own situation. It also points to the speaker’s awareness of the limits of his own authoritative voice, knowing that the inner rule is not the domain of human instruction, but rather “a commandment of God,” the speaker is offering topics for contemplation in, what must ultimately become, the anchoress’s individual practice of guarding the inner rule (AW 48). The text suggests that because vows to God are universal, there can be no one way of keeping them. As an enclosed and isolated individual, the anchoress must adapt her individual practice to maintain her vows, not to the speaker of the text, but to God. The speaker’s effectiveness depends, in part, on the reader’s ability to internalize the didactic message, and the speaker seems to recognize that this will not occur through her devotion to him, but through her fidelity to the promises she makes to God. As he explains, the keeping of laws that “are not human inventions nor a man-made rule, but are God’s commandments” are the most important in keeping the lady rule, and while “the greatest part of what [he] write[s] is about ruling her,” ultimately this work must be done by the anchoress (AW 49). For this reason, he emphasizes that the anchoress “shall not make vows, my dear sisters, about what I write for you of outer things in the first part of the book, about your devotions, and especially in the last, but keep it in your hearts and do it as though you had vowed it” (AW 49). By addressing the reader directly, the text initiates the anchoress as the intended receiver of the text and then directs her implementation of the text within her devotional process, while acknowledging the limitation of the speaker’s authority in terms exerting control over her practice.

The presence of this dialogic relationship, in which the male speaker instructs the female reader from a position of authority, coupled with the emphasis on the anchoress's internalization of pedagogical dialogue, is also present in Bodley 34. Unlike *Ancrene Wisse*, where these two didactic impulses are contained within one text, in Bodley 34, they are split between *Hali Meiðhad*, which maintains the dialogic relationship that structures *Ancrene Wisse*, and *Sawles Warde*, which departs entirely from this dialogic structure and instead instructs the anchoress through a dialogue that is already imagined as internalized through personification allegory. I turn now to the ways in which *Hali Meiðhad* constructs a pedagogical relationship between speaker and reader that functions in the same way that it does in *Ancrene Wisse*. Like *Ancrene Wisse*, *Hali Meiðhad* speaks directly to the female anchoress through the use of second person as well as the consistent use of what Margaret Hostetler has called "parenthetical honorifics."¹³ This use of direct address in *Ancrene Wisse* and *Hali Meiðhad* establish both texts as "implicated in the direct and explicit textual control of its readers."¹⁴

Like *Ancrene Wisse*, *Hali Meiðhad* is interested in offering the anchoress support in her practice of enclosure, but, instead of offering a set of rules for the anchoress's devotional practice, the text affirms her choice of virginity. *Hali Meiðhad* is constructed as a sermon on the theme of virginity, and reinforces the idea that virginity is a superior form of human life, an enactment of free will. *Hali Meiðhad* dissuades the anchoress from being tempted by the imagined promises of marriage. It begins with a long reflection on virginity, its value on earth, and rewards in heaven, but then it begins to speak directly to the anchoress's position, crafting its message in response to the logic

¹³ Hostetler 91, (*Hali Meiðhad*)

¹⁴ Hostetler 90, (*Hali Meiðhad*)

women might use to justify entering into marriage with a “man of clay.” In order to instruct the anchoress on the benefits of a marriage to Christ and the ills of earthly marriage, *Hali Meiðhad* relies on a reader who recognizes herself as the addressee of the text and is able to imagine herself into the roles of wife and mother in order to be better convinced away from them. Like *Ancrene Wisse*, *Hali Meiðhad* achieves this in part through its use of direct address. In her examination of the ways in which devotional texts for women make use of direct address to “entice reader participation,” Margaret Hostetler argues that the use of direct address “has the effect of creating the reader as a character in the text.”¹⁵ In a similar vein, Ann Clark Bartlett argues in, *Male Authors, Female Readers*, that it’s the reader’s ability to imagine herself within the text that “activates personifications that actual readers must imitate or resist, in order to access the devotional material.”¹⁶ Just as the writer of *Ancrene Wisse* makes use of the second person, while also appealing to his “dear sisters,” in *Hali Meiðhad*, the text opens by invoking David the psalmist’s message, “Avdi filia, et uide, et inclina aurem tuam; et obliuiscere populum tuum et domum patris tui.[Listen, daughter, and behold, and incline your ear; and forget your people and your father’s house.]” The text follows this identifying the addressee as the reader, saying, “Take note of what each word means separately” (*HM* 3). Doing so, initiates a dialogic relationship between the authoritative speaker and the subordinated reader, which resembles the one formed in *Ancrene Wisse*.

A key difference however, is that, while *Ancrene Wisse* points to the fact that it is the anchoress who has requested this set of rules, potentially indicating her involvement in the production of the pedagogical materials, *Hali Meiðhad* calls the anchoress, as a

¹⁵ Hostetler 88, (*Hali Meiðhad*)

¹⁶ Bartlett 19

“maiden who has maidenly virtues” to listen to what he has to say. Instead of an anchoress who seeks out an authoritative intervention, the text suggests that the speaker calls out to an anchoress who is unwittingly at risk without his intervention. This becomes evident as the speaker consistently uses the hypothetical statement of temptation towards marriage as the impetus for his treatise against it. For example, the text voices the anchoress’s imagined concern on her behalf: “‘No,’ you will say, ‘for that indecency it is not worth while; but a man’s strength is worth a great deal, and I need his help for support and food. Worldly wealth springs from the union of man and wife, and a brood of fine children who give much happiness to their parents.’” (*HM* 23-25). In attempting to respond to these endorsements of marriage, the text asks the reader to imagine herself within a brutal depiction of married life and motherhood, in order to highlight the ways in which virginity is the better choice. The speaker in *Hali Meiðhad* is clearly set up as the teacher or authority figure, of the text, and he even likens his efforts to David the Psalmist, breaking down David’s message¹⁷ so that the anchoress can better understand how that passage relates to her devotion. Further, the speaker speculates that the anchoress would respond by saying, “And now what is this teaching that you take so seriously, and instruct me in so earnestly” (*HM* 4). Rather than indicating of the reader’s desire for instruction, the speaker assumes that she does not understand the importance of instruction on her own, even if she can appreciate his intervention. The dialogue that passes through this text, from speaker to reader, assumes that the reader needs convincing and that this convincing must come in the structure of the sermon, making it clear that the student of this text did not know whether she was in need of the lesson or not.

¹⁷ “Hear me , daughter, behold and incline your ear, and forget your people, and your father’s house” (*HM* 3)

This point about *Hali Meiðhad* highlights a key difference in the paired text, *Sawles Warde*; just as the transitions between the parts of *Ancrene Wisse* suggest a more collaborative dialogic relationship between speaker and reader, this pedagogical possibility finds full expression in *Sawles Warde*. The text achieves its didactic ends – teaching the anchoress how to manage the self – by positioning the reader as the speaker’s partner in working through the lesson together. Instead of a set of codified guidelines or a sermon, *Sawles Warde* presents the didactic lesson through an extended domestic metaphor. While metaphor and simile are certainly used throughout *Ancrene Wisse* and *Hali Meiðhad*, they operate as supporting examples or illustrations of the more explicit lesson within the text. In *Sawles Warde*, the entire message is submerged in the allegorical rendering of the household of the self. For this reason, the text offers a dramatic depiction of the relationship among the inner faculties working to guard against the devil, as well as the arrival of two messengers (Fear and Love of Life) who enter the home to teach the inhabitants. The content of this allegory and its influence on the anchoritic reader will be the focus of this essay’s second section, but for now it is important to note that the use of personification allegory as a formal technique changes the reader’s relationship to the text. Because the text is centered on the characters within this personification allegory, the didactic message unfolds through the dialogue that passes between them. While *Ancrene Wisse* and *Hali Meiðhad* establish a pedagogical relationship between the speaker of the text and the implied reader, *Sawles Warde* asks its reader to access the pedagogical content of the text through the characters of the allegory.

The opening of *Sawles Warde* signals this difference in the relationship between the speaker of the text and the reader, by urging the anchoritic reader to imagine herself

as the head of the household within the allegory, and therefore, as the speaker of the text. In *Ancrene Wisse* and *Hali Meiðhad*, the opening address of the text is explicitly designed to speak to the female anchoress, directing the reader toward the appropriate association with the student subject position. *Sawles Warde*, however, does not open with a direct address to the reader. Instead, the text opens with this hypothetical state concerning the father of the household: “Si sciret paterfamilias que hora fur uenturus esset, vigilaret utique et non sineret perfodi domum suam.[If the head of the household knew at what time a thief would come he would keep watch and not allow his house to be broken into]” (SW 86). This opening address to the father figure becomes increasingly interesting when we consider that the text was purposefully adapted to speak to a female audience. This means that the choice to invoke the father figure here cannot be reduced to a remnant of the source text, but should be acknowledged as an intentional choice by the author.¹⁸ Despite the fact that this opening addresses the father figure, the author transitions directly into the third-person plural (“us” and “we”), saying “Our Lord in the Gospel gives us instruction and teaching through a parable of how we should carefully guard ourselves against the Devil of hell and his wiles” (SW 87). By using the first-person plural, rather than direct addresses to a female subject, such as “seli meiden [innocent maiden],” “dochter [daughter],” or “my beloved sisters,” the text flattens the distinction between the subject of the opening address and the anchoress herself, so that the reader understands herself as the head of household.

¹⁸ For more about the way *Sawles Warde* was adapted from *De Anima*, see Elizabeth Ann Robertson’s chapter, “Allegory and the Emotions in ‘Sawles Warde’” from *Early English Devotional Prose and the Female Audience*, as well as Anne Eggebroten’s “*Sawles Warde*: A Retelling of *De Anima* for a Female Audience.”

Like Hostetler, I am interested in how this relationship to the speaker of the text influences the ways in which the anchoritic reader's "individual response is guided or conditioned by the text."¹⁹ This opening not only identifies the goal of the text, to understand how to guard the self against the "devil of hell," but it also asks the reader to both identify with the speaker of the text, as a part of the "we" or "us," and to think of herself as the "head of household," who is receiving this parable about how to protect his house. Using the third-person here indicates that the speaker of the text, like the reader of the text, is concerned with guarding the self. This casts the personification allegory as instructional for both parties. *Sawles Warde* is not constructed as a hierarchical relationship between a devotional authority and the anchoress; rather, the speaker is part of the same learning community as the reader. Further, the text makes it possible for the anchoritic reader to understand the speaker of the text as writing from the same subject position, so that there is a direct identification between the speaker of the text and the reader. This identification flattens any sense of hierarchical distinction between the two characters, speaker and reader.

The removal of this direct pedagogical address from speaker to reader allows the reader to identify with the speaker as an authorial voice that comes from an anchoress, rather than an external authoritative figure. Through the identification offered by words like "we" and "us," the text addresses the reader alongside the speaker as an equal. Further, by situating an anchoritic voice as the speaker, and producer of the text, *Sawles Warde* also offers a way of thinking about the anchoress as an author of the pedagogical material. In explaining how the head of the household welcomes Temperance, the

¹⁹ Hostetler 88, (*Hali Meidhad*)

narrator notes, “He makes the third sister – that is, Temperance –the director of his unruly house, which we mentioned before, to teach them moderation” (SW 89). Again, in this moment, the reader encounters the first person plural, so that as the speaker notes what “we mentioned before,” the text identifies the reader as co-speaker of this former point. Here, *Sawles Warde* is explicitly highlighting the collaborative work of the reader-speaker community. Moreover, the reference to what “we mentioned before” opens up the possibility of reading the other texts in Bodley 34 as part of this collaborative production particularly because *Sawles Warde* is the final text in the manuscript. Potentially, phrases like this in *Sawles Warde* refer back to texts like *Hali Meiðhad*, casting the speaker as not only the author of *Sawles Warde*, but also a co-producer of the pedagogical project these grouped texts tackle in collaboration.

This identification between the speaker and the reader of the text also sets up a way for the reader to understand her anchoritic lifestyle as or lived version of the textual drama. The text is offering, from the anchoress’s perspective, an account of the what it is like to be an enclosed woman, and therefore offers the reader a way of thinking of her own experience within the anchorhold as an enactment of the allegorical drama. We can see this in the opening paragraphs of the text, as the speaker outlines the structure of the household, and how the husband must control the servants:

“His inner servants plot in all kinds of ways to please the housewife against God’s will, and swear with one voice that things shall go as she wants them to. Although we do not hear it, we can feel their din and unruly disturbance, until Reason intervenes and, with both fear and love disciplines them better. Because of these servants, his house will never be properly guarded if he falls asleep or travels anywhere away from home – that is, when man forgets his reason and lets them be.” (SW 87)

In the second sentence, the passage shifts suddenly away from the allegory and back to the speaker's own experience of the disturbances of their inner and outer servants. In the first sentence, Reason is the subject, attempting to control the unruly servants of his home, but the second sentence connects the speaker directly to the drama of the allegory, as describing a sense shared between speaker and reader. This turn, away from the allegory and towards its manifestation in the speakers' own lives, suggests that both speaker and reader are engaged in the same struggle as the figurative husband in the allegory. As the speaker recounts the metaphorical drama, she is also participating in and experiencing the same internal clamor, and relying on the influence of Reason to intervene and discipline the unruly servants. After this connection between the allegorical drama and its embodiment in the speaker's own life, we move quickly back into the allegory, but the paragraph ends with explication: "- that is, when man forgets his reason and lets them be." This signals a further break with the allegory, as reason refers here to the conceptual term rather than the allegorical character. The more direct message to the reader is not addressed to the anchoress herself, but instead is universalized through the invocation of "man," rather than the specific subject position of maiden, anchoress, or virgin, which seems appropriate if we take the speaker to be an anchoress herself. In this passage, she is both drawing a connection between the allegorical content and her own practice of anchoritic devotion, and establishing her voice as a participant in the pedagogical discussion that surrounds the production of this text.

The final paragraph of *SW* returns to the first-person plural subject to reflect on the ways in which the message of the text should be implemented into the daily habits of the anchoritic life. The text maintains the identification between the reader and the

speaker of the text as members of the same devotional community, as well as practitioners of the same efforts of enclosure and devotion, saying:

“We should all meditate often on this theme, and with such meditations awaken our hearts, which in the sleep of heedlessness forget the soul’s salvation, drawing on the news brought by these two messengers; we should look from the vision of hell to the joy of heaven, feel fear of the one, love towards the other, and conduct ourselves and our servants, which are all the parts of the body, not in accordance with the instructions of the Will, the unruly lady, and our desire, but according to what is required by Reason.” (SW 109)

This passage emphasizes the text’s pedagogical importance, but it does so without setting the speaker up as a distinct subject who must teach the anchoress this lesson. Rather, the speaker and the reader encounter this pedagogical gloss on the same plane, and share in the effort to convert the allegorical content into a usable precept. Both the speaker and the reader are asked to meditate and reflect on the theme of the allegory in order to aid in their efforts to secure the “soul’s salvation.” This passage also makes it clear that the content of this text is meant to be transcribed into the anchoress’s own experience of enclosure and asceticism. The speaker reminds the reader that “we should guard God’s treasure, which is our own soul, in the house of the body, from the thief of hell” (SW 109). This reminder makes it clear that the model of domestic maintenance that we get in the allegory can be read as a textual model for the anchoress’s own project—or, indeed, for any human being’s. Importantly, however, this message is not coming from an external authority figure, but is rather voiced by the anchoress herself.

While *Sawles Warde* deals with many of the same concerns as *Ancrene Wisse* and *Hali Meidhad*, it imagines how they might get worked out by the anchoress herself, rather than through the direction from speaker to reader. In fact, both *Ancrene Wisse* and *Hali Meidhad* suggest that the anchoress should vigilantly guard herself, both physically and

psychically, against temptation, and often this instructional guideline conceives the anchoritic body as kind of domestic space. For example, *Ancrene Wisse* tells the anchoress that “through your five senses, you must guard your heart, within which are order and religion and the life of the soul,” and Hali Meiðhad instructs the anchoress to “Guard yourself, innocent maiden...flee those things, and avoid them earnestly, from which such irremediable losses may arise” (AW 51, HM 15). These moments attempt to tell the reader how she should understand her metaphorical body, but they are limited insofar as they emanate from an externalized voice: What does such understanding look like in psychic terms? *Sawles Warde* provides an answer to that question by bringing the inner rule to life, from the perspective of an anchoritic subject. *Sawles Warde* thus picks up threads of instruction from both *Ancrene Wisse* and *Hali Meiðhad*, but recasts those pedagogical dialogues as internal to the anchoritic subject rather than between the anchoress and her spiritual adviser.

III. The Gendered Self: Images of Collaboration in Sawles Warde

The form of address in *Sawles Warde* is only one part of its didactic strategy, and I turn now to the personification allegory itself in order to analyze its pedagogical function in the context of the *Katherine Group*. As we have just seen, the use of address in *Sawles Warde* offers the anchoress a way of thinking of her own authorial voice as part of her devotional education. The intimate relationship between reader and speaker in *Sawles Warde* suggests a devotional community of equals, founded on the co-production of knowledge about spiritual desire and its embodied practices. The allegorical content of *Sawles Warde* also breaks down the dyadic model of gender in the marriage between Reason and Will, in favor of a more collaborative model of domestic space. The initial

image of marriage in the text is founded on the hierarchical, gendered relationship between Reason and his unruly wife, Will. However, this model gets displaced through the introduction of the feminized Virtues as daughters in the domestic setting. In *Sawles Warde*, the successful household depends, not on a dyadic relationship between husband and wife, but rather on the collaborative efforts of multiple voices, both feminine and masculine.

Sawles Warde's depiction of the domestic space is not only important because it imagines a more collaborative relationship between the masculine and feminine figures that populate the household, but, as a personification allegory it also describes these figures as the anchoress's psychic faculties. This allegorical correlation accomplishes two things: first, it imagines the dialogic structure of devotional education as an internalized process, occurring among an individual's Reason, Will and Virtues. Second, it prioritizes the psychic dimensions of gender over the material ones. In doing so, *Sawles Warde* offers a way of reading the hierarchical relationship between male spiritual advisor and female reader as founded more in the material than psychic aspects of gender. And, in the latter sense, speaker and reader cannot easily be distinguished, as we have just seen. A hierarchical model of gendered subordination does not disappear from *Sawles Warde*, however. Rather, the allegory reframes its relevance to psychic life. This reading of *Sawles Warde* is in part a response to Masha Raskolnikov, who argues that the allegory works to bolster the hierarchical organization of gender difference.²⁰ I argue that *Sawles Warde* uses allegory to reinterpret gender as a psychic phenomenon, rather than a material one, linked to sex. In doing so, *Sawles Warde* offers a way of reading the

²⁰ See Raskolnikov's chapter, "Defending the Female Self: 'Sawles Warde' and Sowlehele," from *Body Against Soul: Gender and Sowlehele in Middle English Allegory*.

hierarchical relationship between male spiritual advisor and female reader as problematic in that it is founded on material rather than psychic aspects of gender. Thus, the imagery deployed in *Sawles Warde*, like its use of address, offers insights that influence the way we read other anchoritic literature.

While the text offers a revised model of domestic community, it nonetheless opens with an image of marriage that corresponds to the hierarchical model reflects misogynistic conceptions of gender difference. We see this in the marriage between Reason and his wife, Will, through the association of the male figure with authority and control, and the female figure with waywardness and bodily lust.²¹ The text outlines the relationship between Reason and Will:

“The house which our Lord is talking about is man himself. Inside, man’s reason is master in this house, and Will can be described as the unruly wife, who, if the household follows her lead, reduces it to chaos, unless Reason as master disciplines her better, and often deprives her of much she would like. And yet all that household would follow her in everything, if Reason did not forbid them, because they are all undisciplined as careless servants unless he corrects them.” (SW 87).

The servants referenced in this passage are the outer senses and the inner senses, an image of feminine susceptibility to sensual input, which makes the association between femininity and bodiliness even more apparent. The outer servants are “man’s five senses – sight and hearing, taste and smell, and sensations in every part of the body,” while the inner senses, represent the vices, who “plot in all kinds of ways to please the housewife” (SW 87). This conception of the relationship between masculine and feminine characters reflects misogynistic understandings of female spirituality, setting up the housewife as a character that is clearly in need of the masculinized Reason’s influence. In order to

²¹ For more on this, see Elizabeth Ann Robertson’s chapter, “Medieval Views of Female Spirituality,” from *Early English Devotional Prose and the Female Audience*.

combat the influence of the wife and her servants in the domestic space, Reason “intervenes and, with both fear and love, disciplines them better” (SW 87). This not only establishes the housewife as unruly and wayward, it also establishes a disciplinary relationship between the married pair that depends on the subordination of the feminine figure to the masculine figure of authority and control. In fact, without the masculine figure, the “house will never be properly guarded,” so not only is the wife subject to reason “as master,” she is also dependent on him in trying to protect the household.

The characterization between the two gendered figures within the allegory map well onto medieval perceptions of the difference between male and female spirituality, a difference that was strongly rooted in an Aristotelian views on femininity. Elizabeth Ann Robertson traces the influence of Aristotelian concepts in order to better understand “how medieval views of women in general shaped medieval notions of spirituality,” noting specifically that for Aristotle, sexual difference was “a primary distinction among individuals.” This belief that women were inherently lacking in comparison to men extended to their souls:

“That differentiation was more than merely physical to Aristotle, and his misogynistic views of women’s physical nature extended to the nature of their souls as well. Conceiving of the soul as possessing nutritive, sensitive or appetitive, and reasonable faculties, Aristotle saw women’s souls as deficient in all three aspects but especially in the faculty of reason.”²²

This misogynistic conception of the difference between men and women and their spiritual capacity is visible in *Sawles Warde*’s presentation of the marriage between Reason and Will. So that, as we enter the allegory, the imagery seems to affirm a hierarchical division of power based on sexual difference. This relationship also

²² Robertson 32

resembles the hierarchical versions of the dialogic relationship between speaker and reader that we see in *Ancrene Wisse* and *Hali Meiðhad*, which is very much determined by material difference between the male spiritual advisor and the female reader.

This opening imagery and the misogyny that structures it, however, shifts toward a much more egalitarian vision of gender when we encounter the Virtues. Lent to him by God, Reason calls forth the four chief Virtues, Prudence, Fortitude, Temperance, and Justice, who take up the role of instructor within the allegory. That these feminine figures are sisters is important, because it invokes a domestic relation that does not function hierarchically, but rather horizontally. Each sister might be different, but made equal in terms of influence. In this way, the sisters enter the household as a team, each one has a certain responsibility in attempting to complete the united goal of protecting the treasure of the soul:

“Reason the husband, whom God has made the commander of this stronghold, calls out Prudence and makes her doorkeeper, so that she may keep a careful eye on those she allows to go in and out, and see from a distance all those approaching, and which of them deserves to be given admission, or to be locked out. Fortitude stands beside her, so that if anything attempts to get in against Prudence’s will she can warn Fortitude (who is her sister), and she can throw it out. He makes the third sister - that is, Temperance - the director of his unruly household, which we mentioned before, to teach them moderation, which is called ‘measure’, the middle way between two evils (for that is a virtue in every case, and the right course to follow), and gives them all orders that none of them should ever defy her wishes and overstep the limit through lack of moderation. The fourth sister, Justice, sits as judge in the highest seat, and punishes those who offend and crowns those who do well, and gives everyone his judgment as he deserves. Out of fear of her every member of this household undertakes to keep watch according to his function: the eyes theirs, the mouth his, the ears theirs, the hands theirs, and also each one of the other senses, so that no vice should enter through his fault.” (SW 89)

This image of the household looks very different from the dyadic married couple that opens the allegory. Here, the controlling agents of the household, Reason and the Virtues,

work together to achieve a common goal, acknowledging and affirming each member's contributions. While Reason still maintains a position of authority as the "commander of the stronghold," the act of calling forth the Virtues, diffuses his authority. Where before, Reason was solely responsible for disciplining the members of the household, the introduction of the Virtues redistributes this responsibility, so that it becomes a shared project of guardianship. In fact, it is only when the work of organizing this community is finished that "all is quiet inside" (SW 89). In this structure, femininity is not inherently tied to waywardness, as it is in the depiction of the housewife. In fact, each of the feminized virtues becomes an important disciplinary figure, and their duties do not conform to misogynistic conceptions of feminine attributes. Where Aristotelian conceptions of femininity associated women with what they lack in comparison to men, often deeming them passive, bodily, and inconstant, the Virtues escape this dualistic definition of femininity, and are portrayed as competent, active, and resolute.

This mutual dependence and distribution of necessary duties becomes central to the collaborative project of the household as a whole, in which each member acknowledges not only what they can contribute, but also what they must rely on from other participants. This recognition of collaboration is seen most prominently when each of the Virtues describes her particular role and the limitations of that role. For example, Prudence explains that in their defense against the Devil, she can "warn you against his hatred, since [she] knows his wiles, but [she] can do nothing against his strength," to which Fortitude responds by saying, "Do what you are meant to do...for we are not afraid of his strength" (SW 95). Fortitude supports this confidence in their communal strength by saying, "If the Devil shoots at me with riches and worldly pleasure, with the

gratification of physical desires, I might be troubled to some extent by such soft weapons, but nothing hard can frighten me, and no suffering or want can make my heart false” (SW 95,96). This exchange reveals the truly collaborative work that these Virtues share. This mutual acknowledgement also becomes a way of expressing humility, so that none of the individual figures become prideful. This is evident when Justice responds to each of her sisters’ speeches:

“For although my first sister may be wary of every evil, and my second may be strong against all adversity, and my third temperate in all kinds of pleasure, and I do right and judge, unless with all this we are mild and meek, and consider ourselves frail, God may rightly condemn us for all this because of our pride” (SW 97)

This passage not only highlights the cooperative efforts of the Virtues, it also suggests that this shared work, the equal distribution of roles and responsibilities also helps to stave off pride.

This cooperative effort and appreciation also extends to Reason, who comes to depend on the Virtues to share the work of guarding the soul. While Reason might position the Virtues, he does not rule over them, but instead comes to rely on their contributions. He indicates his appreciation for the Virtues’ influence, in his reaction to the speeches noted above:

“Reason, the husband, whom God has made the commander of the stronghold, hears all the speeches and thanks God earnestly with a very glad heart for such a rich loan as these sisters are, the four daughters of God, whom he has lent him as his help to guard and defend his castle well, and God’s precious treasure which is locked up inside. The willful housewife remains quite silent, and all the household that she was used to attracting as followers transfer their loyalty to Reason their lord and to these four sisters” (SW 99)

This passage highlights the way that Reason understands the Virtues as aids in achieving a shared goal. And, in the last sentence of this passage, we see the equity of this

relationship, as the followers transfer their loyalty not only to Reason as the head of the household, but also to the Virtues. This also becomes apparent in the redistribution of disciplinary authority, so that tasks that used to be allotted to Reason are now shared with the Virtues. For example we learn that it is Prudence who “sends them in a messenger she knows well,” welcoming Fear into the household, and directing him to “tell us truthfully what hell is like” (SW 30). This differs from the opening of the text, where it is Reason who intervenes “with both fear and love” (SW 87). The responsibility for instruction is transferred in part to Prudence, who can discern which messengers to admit to the household. She initiates Fear’s visit and “instructs him to tell them publically who he is” (SW 89). The fact that the messenger’s arrival is not incidental but rather a consequence of Prudence’s worry that “someone should grow over-confident,” indicates that Prudence is actively involved in educating or correcting the members of the household.

Despite the active involvement of the Virtues in the disciplinary concerns of the household, Reason is not sidelined by their presence within his household, but rather has come to work cooperatively with them. It is important to note that Prudence does not assume total control over this disciplinary action, as it is Reason who calls for the admittance of the second messenger, Love of Life. Prudence sees the messenger approaching, but it is Reason who says, “‘Let him in!’ ... ‘If it is God’s will, he brings us good news’” (SW 99). This confirms that within this model of domestic organization, Reason shares his responsibility to educate the members of the household about the sorrows of hell and the joys of heaven with the Virtues. After we have heard from both of the messengers, Temperance dictates a plan for how to balance the influence of their

respective messages in order to maintain the control that has been established through the combined efforts of Reason and the Virtues:

“‘Each of you,’ says Temperance, ‘has his time to speak, and neither of your accounts should be shunned in its time. You warn of sorrow, he tells of joy. It is very necessary that both of you should be heard with attention. But go away now, Fear, while Love of Life is here, and resign yourself to the judgment of Justice; for you will be very gladly received again whenever Love of Life ceases to speak.’” (SW 107)

This passage not only confirms that the Virtues are actively involved in the efforts to discipline the household, but also points to the sustainability of this model of domestic organization. The Virtues are not a temporary solution sent to reinstate the dyadic structure of marriage that we see in the opening of the text. While they do help to reestablish Reason’s control, they do so by integrating themselves into the community. Within that community, they establish a relationship of collaboration between masculine and feminine figures that will continue to be effective in guarding the soul. The passage above, suggests that Justice will continue to judge whether or not the household is in need of Fear’s message. With all of this in place, we find that “Will the housewife, who was formerly so willful, is entirely subdued, completely directed by the guidance of Reason” (SW 107). While this does recreate the hierarchical structure between Reason and Will, it is no longer predicated on gender difference that privileges masculinity over femininity. The household achieves this peaceful state because of both “the guidance of Reason” and “what the four sisters taught above” (SW 107). This model of control functions successfully because of the collaboration between both feminine and masculine figures. Further, in order to continue to effectively guard the soul, this communal model of management has to stay in place.

The allegory offers the anchoress a vision of gender relations that does not dismiss feminine influence in service of misogynistic formations of the domestic space. Rather the text begins with a hierarchical relationship, founded on the subordination of the feminine character, but then suggests that this organization is unstable. As a solution, the text imagines an alternative form of domestic organization, which imagines an equitable and effective relationship between feminine and masculine characters. This reading of *Sawles Warde* is important not only because of its depiction of a collaborative model of domestic devotional management, but also because its allegorical form suggests that the gendered figures that populate the allegory are all present within the self. By including both feminine and masculine characters in the drama, the text argues that gender is a psychic phenomenon, rather than one that is marked in material, bodily terms.

Because the domestic organization of these faculties in the text is meant to serve a didactic end – educating and correcting the Will and her unruly followers in order to protect the soul – the form they take often resembles the dialogic relationships that structure other anchoritic texts. As an allegory, the text imagines this pedagogical dialogue as an internalized version of the speaker-reader relationship, so that the figures of the allegory come to represent different forms of didactic exchange. The marriage between Reason and Will is the first dialogic form offered in *Sawles Warde* is structured as a marriage, where the masculine figure is responsible for the devotional education of the subordinate wife. This relationship resembles the type of dialogic structure offered in *Ancrene Wisse* and *Hali Meidhad*, between the male spiritual advisor and the anchoress. For Raskolnikov, this type of gendered relationship is maintained in *Sawles Warde*, because she understands it to be “about how best keep the willful wife from misbehaving

and how best to keep the feminine aspect of the self appropriately imprisoned.”²³ Part of the reason for Raskolnikov’s reading of *Sawles Warde* as a text that maintains this hierarchical conception of gender, is that she reads the inclusion of the Virtues as an attempt by the male author of the text to appeal to a female reader, in order to direct her identification toward the virginal figures of the Virtues, rather than the wayward femininity the text associates with marriage.²⁴ For Raskolnikov, this means that the allegory’s “purpose seems to be to anatomize, comprehend, and discipline women by populating the self with primarily female figures.”²⁵ Reading the allegory this way, however, makes *Sawles Warde* an extension of the same speaker-reader relationship we see in *Ancrene Wisse* and *Hali Meithhad*, where the text is used by a male authorial figure in order to control the devotional practices of women.

This reading of the text does not acknowledge the other form of pedagogical discourse that is offered in the text through the inclusion of the feminine Virtues. I argue, instead, that while the model of marriage as a hierarchical relationship is certainly part of the text, *Sawles Warde* suggests that the alternative formation of the domestic community as an equitable relationship between both the feminine virtues and the masculine figure of Reason is also made available to the anchoress through the text. Further, as I have shown throughout this section, the text suggests that this model of collaboration is more effective than the dyadic relationship figured in the marriage. This cooperative

²³ Raskolnikov 156

²⁴ Raskolnikov is also building off of Anne Eggebroten’s argument that the revision of the source text (*De Anima*) to include the lengthy characterization of the four virtues, forces the reader of *Sawles Warde* to wrestle with the different versions of femininity offered through Will and the Virtues. She argues that the main conflict within the text is between the Virtues, as a representation of virgin femininity, and Will, as a representation of femininity within marriage, so that the text works, like other texts in the *Katherine Group* to affirm the anchoress’s virgin devotion over and against marriage to a “man of clay.”

²⁵ Raskolnikov 141

relationship between both feminine and masculine devotional figures within the allegory also seems to correspond to the style of address used in *Sawles Warde*. By placing the reader alongside the speaker as a mutual participant, the text suggests that the relationship between a male spiritual advisor and a female reader can also be collaborative rather than hierarchical. This option is not available in Raskolnikov's reading because it assumes that the authorial voice of the text is using the female figures within the allegory to substantiate gender difference as a material phenomenon in order to more effectively control the female reader. I have shown, instead, that *Sawles Warde* reinterprets gender as a psychic phenomenon, and because it is framed by a narrative voice that suggests equal participation by both speaker and reader, it argues that a relationship between male spiritual advisor and female reader founded on material rather than psychic aspects of gender is problematic and ineffective.

IV. Conclusion: Reading *Ancrene Wisse* and the *Katherine Group* Differently

For the anchoress, enclosed and isolated from the social world that exists beyond the anchorhold, the texts she carried with her would have constituted a form of companionship, leading her on different devotional paths through different authoritative voices. In *Ancrene Wisse* and *Hali Meithhad*, this companionship takes the form of a student-teacher relationship, predicated on the transfer of pedagogical dialogue from a male authority figure to the female reader. While *Ancrene Wisse* opens up spaces for the anchoress to exert agency in her own disciplinary work, its use of direct address maintains a relationship of hierarchical difference between the speaker and reader. *Hali Meithhad*, similarly remains firmly rooted in the separation of the speaking voice from

the implied reader, anticipating the social and sexual desires that threaten the anchoress's vow of virginity. In *Sawles Warde*, however, through the use of the first-person plural, the difference between the speaker and reader collapses, so that the reader approaches the text alongside the speaker, participating in the pedagogical program of the text from the same perspective. This transition, from a dialogic relationship of subordination towards a model of pedagogical discourse founded in collaboration, allows the reader to think of herself as equal to the speaker of the text.

By grounding the pedagogical dialogue in the personification allegory, the text positions the anchoress as the head of her own household, independently containing the necessary psychic faculties required for guarding the soul. By suggesting that the pedagogical dialogue that passes from speaker to reader in *Ancrene Wisse* and *Hali Meithhad* is internalized in *Sawles Warde*, the text shows the anchoress how to direct her own devotional education. Further, and for me, most importantly, the allegory offers the anchoress a vision of gender that does not foreclose feminine influence or power. Rather, the allegory first imagines the internal organization of the faculties as a hierarchical and gendered model of power, in which the masculine Reason must subdue the feminized Will. But, through the introduction of the feminized Virtues, who educate the household, affirms a vision of the self that does not privilege masculinity and rather depends on the collaborative work between both masculine and feminine figures in order to maintain the soul. Thus, the anchoress's psychic structure becomes a more equitable vision of gendered relations than she can achieve in the social world outside the anchorhold, or through the pedagogical relationship between her and the male speaker figured in *Ancrene Wisse* and *Hali Meithhad*. Through this reading of *Sawles Warde*, alongside

Ancrene Wisse and *Hali Meithhad*, we can see that the project of these three texts in collaboration, promotes the internalization of pedagogical dialogue in service of a self-regulated practice of discipline for the enclosed anchoress. And within that model of internalized dialogue, the anchoress has access to a vision of gender difference that cannot entirely escape misogynistic assumptions about femininity, but does not privilege the masculine over the feminine. Instead the text suggests that the proper orientation of the soul depends not masculine power, but on the collaborative work shared by masculine and feminine figures.

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