

Anchoritism and the Everyday: The Sacred-Domestic Discourse in the *Ancrene Wisse*

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If we cannot distinguish the author's features, we can at least recognise some of the furniture of his mind.

— Geoffrey Shepherd¹

Geoffrey Shepherd's choice of metaphor in the above quotation points to the crucial concern of the *Ancrene Wisse*'s author with the domestic situation of his anchoritic audience. Although the *Ancrene Wisse* emphasizes keeping the senses of the anchorite and the curtains of the anchorhold closed to the outside world, the proximity of the anchoritic life to the community made total seclusion an ideal and not a reality. As is evident from the number of manuscripts and from the change to the addressees of the text from the original three sisters to a much larger audience of female and male anchorites, the *Ancrene Wisse* (c. 1230) was widely disseminated, and the spiritual life it represented widely popularized.² As Bella Millett argues, "The internal evidence of the works of the [*Wisse*] Group certainly

1 Shepherd, Introduction to *Ancrene Wisse: Parts Six and Seven*, xxv. All quotations from the *Ancrene Wisse* are taken from Bella Millett's EETS edition of Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 402; references are to Part and line numbers in this edition. Unless otherwise noted, Modern English translations are my own, adapted from the Notes in Robert Hasenfratz's TEAMS edition based on the same manuscript.

2 For a discussion of the changing audience of the *Ancrene Wisse*, see Millett and Wogan-Browne's "Introduction" to *Medieval English Prose for Women*, xii. As Millett and Wogan-Browne demonstrate in *Medieval English Prose*, "The 'Outer Rule' in the Corpus version has been heavily revised"; indeed, the Corpus manuscript appears to be a later, revised version of the Cleopatra manuscript (xxxiii). Millett and Wogan-Browne go on to point out that the Corpus manuscript "has a special position among *Ancrene Wisse* manuscripts, not only because it offers a text exceptionally free from errors but because it is the only surviving manuscript of a revised version of the original text" (xli).

suggests that we should be thinking in terms of more than a single audience.”³ The appealing element in this text is not the confinement of the anchorite in a small space, but that the author of the *Ancrene Wisse* represents a devotional life to his audience that is real, everyday, and possible. In this paper, I am interested in an intrinsic quality, specifically the language of domesticity and household that created an anchoritic identity. The everyday in the anchorhold exists in a nexus of material and spiritual benefits for both anchorite and community. Through the examination of the anchoritic manual, the *Ancrene Wisse*, I will examine the ways in which the *Wisse*-author creates a spiritual identity from the overlap of household and anchoritic space.

Anchoritism, which has its theological roots in the life of the early desert hermits, such as St. Anthony, was considered the most authentic medieval Christian life.⁴ The anchorite lived in a cell usually attached to a church, but sometimes in a private home.⁵ In order to be considered for an anchorhold, the anchorite must be judged fit by the archbishop of the community and, most practically, the community must be able to support the anchorite and a space must be available. If judged spiritually sound, the anchorite undergoes an enclosure ceremony in which she is sealed into a cell; it is this sealing up that is disturbing to modern minds. However, this sealing up should not be understood as a sealing *off*; rather, because of its attachment to the church, the anchorhold is a space in flux — it is both spiritual space and domestic space — and is treated as such by anchorites, their patrons, and even the author of the *Ancrene Wisse* (despite his best efforts to argue otherwise).

This paper addresses the anchorhold not as a spiritual ghetto, set apart and liminal, but as a dynamic space that encompasses both spiritual and domestic uses. The idea that “the anchorhold may constitute another *domain* like the slums, the fair, and the theater,” as Sarah Beckwith writes,⁶ needs to be re-examined, notably with regard to the relationship of the anchorhold to other spaces, especially the household. Theorizing the anchoritic space as a domestic space — rather than seeing the anchorhold as “another” domain with an emphasis on solitude within a wider community — reveals the relationship between spaces. So, the anchoritic space is created not only as a result of the spiritual desire of the anchorite, but also in response to the day-to-day life of the community, the demands of the Church, and the bequests of patrons, as well as the advice and

3 Millett, “The *Ancrene Wisse* Group,” 12.

4 Warren, *Anchorites and Their Patrons*, 2.

5 See Margaret Hostetler’s discussion of the instability in defining enclosures in her article “I Wold Thow Wer Closyd in an Hows of Ston.”

6 Beckwith, “Passionate Regulation,” 805.

regulations set out in anchoritic literature, which come to affect the make-up of the anchoritic space.

One of the more influential spatial theorists, Henri Lefebvre writes, “a space is not a thing but rather a set of relations between things (objects and products).”⁷ Although Lefebvre explicitly connects these ideas to the Christian altar, his definition has important ramifications in thinking about the anchorhold and its space. Lefebvre’s definition as applied to the anchorhold and the anchoress would emphasize the relationship between the body of the anchorite and the windows and walls of the anchorhold — as a further extension, the walls connect to the church and thus to the centre of the spiritual community. The objects in the spatial relationship of the anchorhold are the anchorite’s body and the architecture of the anchorhold itself. In turns, the products of this relationship are prayer, devotion, and an ascetic example. As Lefebvre writes, “In the Middle Ages, spatial practice embraced not only the network of local roads close to peasant communities, monasteries and castles, but also the main roads between towns and the great pilgrims’ and crusaders’ ways.”⁸ The emphasis for Lefebvre is on the connectedness and the fluidity of spaces.

In Lefebvre’s theory, the anchoritic space would qualify as both a representational space and a religio-political space. A representational space is one which “determined the foci of a vicinity,”⁹ and is understood as “space as directly *lived* through its associated images and symbols, and hence the space of ‘inhabitants’ and ‘users.’”¹⁰ These are important considerations in defining the anchorhold and its relationship to the community. In Lefebvre’s estimation, spaces overlap, yet the anchorhold does not simply conform to Lefebvre’s notion of space as a relationship. For example, for Lefebvre, religio-political spaces are aspects of social space that are “set apart.”¹¹ Thus, although the anchorhold is a social space, its categorization as a social space precludes it from being a representational space because of its religio-political use. Religio-political spaces are “set apart” and representational spaces are “lived in.” The anchorhold is both; it is at the centre of a tension in which a life is lived, and it demands renunciation of previous concepts of what life is. It is attached to a church, which is both geographically and socially at the centre of the town, and yet it represents asceticism. For Lefebvre, death is not represented in “appropriated social space”; it is “relegated to the infinite realm so as to

7 Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 83.

8 Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 45.

9 Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 45.

10 Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 39.

11 Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 35.

disenthrall (or purify) the finiteness in which social practice occurs.”¹² The anchoritic life is a social practice that holds death and life in the same space. Balancing such opposites, the *Wisse*-author creates a domestic spirituality, aware of both the present moment and the end. The anchorhold is both representational and religious. It is a social space that contains life and death.

Death is a central concern in the anchorhold. The ceremony for enclosing an anchorite was akin to the burial ceremony: the words of the ceremony declared the anchorite dead and buried to worldly concerns and attachments. The anchorite was to live out her days in the cell, and some anchoritic manuals recommend that she dig in the floor of her cell a little each day to prepare her grave. As Roberta Gilchrist points out in her discussion of the anchorhold of a female recluse in the Church of St. Anne in Lewes (Sussex), the excavation of a cell within the church

revealed the remains of a woman’s skeleton dug into the foundations. Within a semi-circular recess in the south wall of the church was a squint which slanted towards the high altar; at its base a grave had been tunneled into the sides to allow space for the hands and feet of the skeleton. Below the squint the plaster of the recess continued to the bottom of the grave, which formed the back of the shaped coffin [...]. In order to view the high altar through the squint the recluse would have had to kneel daily in her own grave. Such morbid practices were integral to the denigrating qualities of the anchoress’s life.¹³

As is clear from this example, the anchorite was never to leave her cell; in this case, her living anchoritic space becomes the memorial of that life. If she did leave, or if she was found to be heretical in her thinking, the anchorite could be excommunicated or removed from her anchorhold and imprisoned.¹⁴

As Gilchrist writes in the passage quoted above, the anchoritic life was to be seen as “denigrating,” or humbling, to the anchoress. Linda Georgianna observes that even the most knowledgeable modern readers find the anchorite’s situation “barbaric at worst, and at best [...] a movement that promoted the death of consciousness.”¹⁵ However, despite the burial ceremony, anchorites were actually important community authorities, and their lives were hardly solitary because of the spiritual importance placed upon them. As the religious historian Marilyn Oliva points out, “The prayers of anchorites were [...] highly valued and enlisted by many to help the souls of both the living and the

¹² Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 35.

¹³ Gilchrist, “Unsexing the Body,” 94.

¹⁴ Warren, *Anchorites and Their Patrons*, 80-81.

¹⁵ Georgianna, *The Solitary Self*, 4.

dead. [...] all of society benefitted from them.”¹⁶ The number of bequests from patrons to anchorites for prayers indicates the benefits which the community hoped to reap.

The *Ancrene Wisse*: Background, Structure, Architecture

The most popular rule for anchoresses, the *Ancrene Wisse*, is representative of the daily life which anchorites led and which was governed by its recommendations for prayers and meditations. The *Ancrene Wisse* is a thirteenth-century devotional text originally written for three sisters who wanted an anchoritic rule. The debate over authorship still continues, with critics pointing to possible Augustinian, Premonstratensian, and Dominican elements in the text. The problem of authorship often revolves around localizing the text with the arrival of the religious orders in the West Midlands, where the original versions were written. For example, as Bella Millett points out, “The theory of Dominican origin might resolve these difficulties, since it would be consistent not only with the legislative parallels but with the author’s active involvement in pastoral care [...], but it would also raise again the problem of localization.”¹⁷ In a more recent article tying Part 1 of the *Ancrene Wisse* to the Book of Hours tradition, Millett writes that Dobson connects the Preface and the “overall structure of the work” with “constitutions adopted by Premonstratensian canons in the mid-twelfth century and later taken over, with some modifications, by the Dominicans.”¹⁸ She clarifies this point as follows: “There is some evidence that the content and structure of Part 1 of *Ancrene Wisse* were also influenced by this model, and specifically by the Dominican version; the instructions for saying Matins which appear near the beginning of Part 1 are similar to those in a number of surviving Augustinian customaries, but their closest parallels are with the earliest Dominican Constitutions.”¹⁹ Issues of localization, authorship, and textual parallels are difficult to clear up — even Millett writes “probably” a number of times in relation to Dominican authorship;²⁰ however, what is clear is that the author was influenced by the material, enclosed space itself, for it informs his book.

16 Oliva, *The Convent and the Community*, 155.

17 Millett, *Ancrene Wisse, the Katherine Group, and the Wooing Group*, 13. See also Millett’s article “*Ancrene Wisse* and the Book of Hours.” Yoko Wada also argues for Dominican authorship; see Wada, “What is *Ancrene Wisse*?” 21-23.

18 Millett, “*Ancrene Wisse* and the Book of Hours,” 27.

19 Millett, “*Ancrene Wisse* and the Book of Hours,” 27.

20 Millett, “*Ancrene Wisse* and the Book of Hours,” 27-28.

The *Ancrene Wisse* is written with an outside-inside organizational structure. In other words, the discourse of enclosure is paralleled in the actual organizational structure of the text. The individual life of the anchorite is materialized in the form of a book; her outer life surrounds the inner spirituality that is the subject of the inner book. This materializing of the inner life of the anchorite in the form of a rule that she herself could hold in her hands parallels Eric Jager's discussion of the book of the heart, a metaphor indicating interiority in regards to an individual's sins and concretized as the physical heart-shaped book that eventually "appears as an accessory in some early personal portraits, as if to emphasize the subject's interior life and individuality."²¹ The interiority exhibited in these fifteenth-century portraits (an interiority, ironically, rendered so that everyone could see it) postdates the *Ancrene Wisse*. However, in thinking of the popularization of the *Wisse*, as it changes from being addressed to three sisters, to a community of anchorites, to men, and to nuns, it is important to note that the act of holding the *Wisse* was as if holding the anchorhold and the anchoritic life itself: as the book was circulated to a wider and wider audience, the anchorhold became less moored to architecture. This life, intended to be the actualization of a very solitary, invisible life, becomes a life that readers could literally hold in their very public hands.

The *Ancrene Wisse* is divided into two sections. In Parts 1 and 8 the *Wisse*-author describes the outer rule; here he discusses the architecture of the anchoritic space, meal times, visitors, anchoritic activities, such as sewing, and, generally, the means by which anchorites can avoid falling into sin or boredom in their isolated rooms. In Parts 2 through 7, the *Wisse*-author describes the kind of devotion that the anchorite should practise.

The author of the *Ancrene Wisse* represents the anchorhold differently from other institutional spaces such as nunneries or monasteries. Although all of them are intended for spiritual use, nunneries and monasteries divide their spaces according to function, with separate kitchens, infirmaries, chapels, and dining areas.²² In contrast, the anchorhold had to accommodate all these diverse uses in the same space. Because of this simultaneity, the author of the *Ancrene Wisse* both utilizes and re-oriens domesticity in the anchoritic space. However, the domestic aspects of the anchorhold are central to the imitative meditation the anchorite is called upon to enact, as well as indicative of the centrality of the anchorhold to the community, who considered the anchorite a living member

²¹ Jager, *The Book of the Heart*, 120.

²² For a detailed study of the division and function of material and spiritual space (with special reference to English Cistercian monasteries), see Cassidy-Welch, *Monastic Spaces*.

of the community, as is clear from the records of bequests involving domestic items, such as wool, peat, or clothing.²³

Responding to this absence of spatial division, texts like the *Ancrene Wisse* impose temporal divisions delineating what the anchorite is to do in her space by partitioning her time, recommending activities such as sewing and reading to fight boredom and prescribing movements to be performed during prayer in order to overcome stasis. Yet by outlining the domestic expectations concerning the appearance of the anchoritic space and regarding the anchorite's treatment of visitors, the author of the *Ancrene Wisse* indicates that space was complicated by its representative uses. For as much as the *Wisse*-author attempts to expel worldly space from the anchorhold, he returns to domestic language, not only in the "outer" rule but throughout the "inner" rule as well.

Both the inner and outer rule of the *Ancrene Wisse* attempt to align the anchorite's position within Church symbolism. Although critics have argued that the life demanded by the *Wisse* is "penitential, rewarded by union with God in the next world rather than this,"²⁴ the *Wisse*-author uses the anchorhold to illustrate the ways in which the anchoress is joined with Christ now. The church's cruciform architecture was a symbolic link to Christ's body; the anchorite existed in a space connected to that body. As Kevin Marti argues, in medieval spatiality every part of Creation constitutes a centre since "when Christ enters the innermost space of Mary's womb, Mary is said to contain that which contains her and everything else: 'illum continens, a quo tu et omnia continentur.'"²⁵ Marti explains that the "radical transformation of this one central act leaves no part of the universe unchanged. Christ's coming brings with it a new and universal conception of centeredness; now every point within the space of creation may itself constitute the center of all space."²⁶ The anchoress exists in the wound/womb space invoked in manuscript illuminations such as those of the Man of Sorrows, where Christ's wound in his side is reminiscent of the vaginal opening.²⁷ She must also learn to enclose Christ within her; she must be a centre at the same time as she is part of the centre.

Architecturally speaking, this wound in Christ's side, beneath the heart, corresponds to the location of the anchorhold on the north-west side of some churches.²⁸ The wound

23 Warren, *Anchorites and Their Patrons*, 165.

24 Millett, "The *Ancrene Wisse* Group," 2.

25 Marti, *Body, Heart, and Text in the "Pearl"-Poet*, 11.

26 Marti, *Body, Heart, and Text in the "Pearl"-Poet*, 11.

27 Lochrie, "Mystical Acts, Queer Tendencies," 191 & *passim*.

28 See the "conjectural reconstruction" of an anchorhold in Robert Hasenfratz's "Introduction," *Ancrene Wisse*, 11.

is like a window, providing a view into the architectural church body to see the heart of Christ. At the same time, the anchorhold is also a womb. Both the *Wisse*-author and Julian of Norwich employ womb symbolism corresponding to the wounds given to Christ by Longinus. The *Wisse*-author writes that Christ had two anchorhouses, Mary's womb and his tomb, thus being born and buried within four walls, and the *Wisse*-author directly links these life moments of Christ with the anchoress's life: "3e beoð his feolahas, reclus as he wes i Marie wombe" (you are his fellows [or, companions], a recluse as he was in Mary's womb).²⁹ The anchoress will further be like Christ when she dies, passing through the walls of the body, as well as the walls of the anchorhouse. The body and the anchorhouse wall form the double enclosure which will be repeated in the image of God's embrace of the anchoress and which resembles a fortress, with the outer wall of the castle providing protection for the inner castle, the inner anchoritic body. The anchorite Julian of Norwich also invokes the womb as enclosure in her discussion of Christ's motherhood: "And our Savior is our very moder in whom we be endlessly borne and never shall come out of Him. Plenteously and fully and swetely was this shewid."³⁰ For Julian, Christ includes all Christians in his womb but never gives birth to them; they are born without birth in Christ's womb. Hence Julian's term *beclosidness* for a birth that does not leave the eternity of the divine womb. Christ's wound is a space, as Julian indicates in her *Shewings*, an entrance to a womb in which Christians are constantly born without exiting; it is this metaphoric space that anchorites inhabit.

The *Ancrene Wisse* author indicates his expectations of the anchoritic space most clearly in the figurative language he uses, including domestic images such as nests and castles. While such imagery also appears in other devotional works, including sermons,³¹ the *Wisse*-author uses these metaphors specifically to reinforce the anchorite's spatial identity. The importance of his rhetoric and the analysis of his metaphors indicate that the anchoritic space was both ordinary and extraordinary — ordinary in that he finds methods of spiritual instruction in the quotidian, and extraordinary in that through his language the everyday, the routine, is made new. The *Wisse*-author cannot represent the anchorhold without also seeing its relation to the outside world; even though it is delineated as an exclusively spiritual space, it is also a living space which unites material Creation both within and without the anchorite's own body.

29 *Ancrene Wisse*, 6. 421-22.

30 Julian of Norwich, *The Shewings of Julian of Norwich*, ll. 2373-75.

31 See, for example, the homilies collected in *Old English Homilies and Homiletic Treatises* and in *Old English Homilies of the Twelfth Century*, both edited by Richard Morris.

The Anchorhold as Household

It seems counter-intuitive to think of the anchorhold as a domestic space. Indeed, the *Wisse*-author admonishes, “Husewifeschipe is Marthe dale. Marie dale is stilnesse ant reste of alle worldes noise, þet na þing ne lette hire to heren Godes steuene” (Managing a household is Martha’s part; Mary’s part is stillness and rest from the world’s noise, so that nothing may hinder her from hearing God’s voice).³² The anchorhold is commonly thought of as a discrete space, a space in which the anchorite was set apart from ordinary life. Yet her domestic activities are comparable to the running of a household, and the *Wisse*-author’s own metaphors and advice ultimately contradict his admonition.

The *Wisse*-author tries to draw the line between being a housewife and being Christ’s spouse. Spousal imagery is common, for example, in Cistercian literature, and Bernard of Clairvaux’s commentary on the Song of Songs is credited with developing the image of the soul as the bride of Christ. The *Wisse*-author utilizes the space of the anchorhold to emphasize this love. He writes that the love between a man and a woman is great, but that this love can still fail because the woman may prostitute herself and the husband may therefore refuse to love her. But Christ loves the soul more because “for þah þe sawle, his spuse, forhori hire wið þe feond under heaued sunne feole 3eres ant dahes, his mearci is hire eauer 3arow hwen ha wule cumen ham ant leten þen deouel” (for even though the soul, his spouse, might prostitute herself with the devil in mortal sin for many years and days, his mercy is always ready for her when she wants to come home and leave the devil).³³ When the soul, much like the prodigal son, wants to return, God will be waiting.

The *Wisse*-author implies that even though in the everyday world the husband will not take his wife back even if she wants to come home, the marriage between God and the soul (and, by extension, between God and the anchoress) will continue. The desire to return home is key, for even if the anchorite should sin, she will remain beloved by God, for that is how great God’s love is; God is a home from which the anchoress can never be exiled. Even more, when the soul returns, “3et he eorneð [...] a3ein hire 3ein-cume ant warpeð earmes anan abuten hire swire” (Still he runs [...] at her return and throws [his] arms immediately around her neck).³⁴ In other words, when the soul/wife returns from a state of sin, God encloses her in his arms. His embrace provides her with an enclosure.

³² *Ancrene Wisse*, 8. 50-52.

³³ *Ancrene Wisse*, 7. 139-42.

³⁴ *Ancrene Wisse*, 7. 146-47.

Despite this emphasis on spousal imagery, the anchoress still had domestic, and therefore “housewifely,” duties. The anchorhold acted as a household, and to understand the material activities of the anchorhold is to see it as a dynamic space supporting the daily life of the anchoress until her physical death and not only a spiritual life with a symbolic death at the beginning. Thus, it is important to understand that the anchorhold was not an isolated space but was part of the community. As Christopher Cannon points out, “the deep and inherent conflict between community and isolation in the anchoritic life also amounts to a resolution of the problem, for it is precisely because the pressure of others is so constant that a solitary anchorite will have to care about them.”³⁵ More to the point, the anchorite will have to live with them.

In material terms, the anchorhold relied on the outside world for support, for the anchorite and the patron existed in a relationship that spiritually benefited the patron, while materially benefiting the anchorite. As D. Vance Smith argues,

the intense nostalgia we glimpse in the representation of communities — the intertwined histories of mercantile and mortuary guilds, the genesis of cities out of catastrophic collapse — reminds us that sociality is, after all, a kind of death that confronts us with the loss of continuity between ourselves and the world [...] death brings us together by encouraging us to imagine the [...] expenditure that establishes their value.³⁶

The patron’s material support for the anchorite in this life correlates, as Smith points out, to a “pleasure in things that consume themselves.”³⁷ The bequests reveal ways in which patrons had a hand in constructing the living identity of the anchorites. Although bequests of money were the norm, gifts in kind were also made, for example, to the recluse of Iffley of Oxfordshire who received wood, a robe, and wheat,³⁸ to two recluses who received a dress allowance from the abbot of Peterborough,³⁹ and to the Exeter recluse who received a robe, a book of English sermons, and bread from various canons in the community;⁴⁰ other bequests of clothing, peat, and candles further indicate that the anchorite was considered by her community a living being in a domestic space with everyday needs.

Despite the earlier admonition not to treat the anchorhold as a household, the *Wisse*-author proceeds to discuss the limits of generosity, the handling of guests, and the

35 Cannon, “Enclosure,” 115.

36 Smith, *Arts of Possession*, 45.

37 Smith, *Arts of Possession*, 45.

38 Warren, *Anchorites and Their Patrons*, 165.

39 Warren, *Anchorites and Their Patrons*, 265-66.

40 Warren, *Anchorites and Their Patrons*, 270, Table 16.

treatment of servants in Part 8. All of these are representative of female household duties as discussed by Sarah Salih.⁴¹ Salih's essay points out the conflicting valuation of household space. For one, it is "*the* privileged locus for medieval women."⁴² Yet the household could become another kind of female enclosure. Salih writes that "conduct literature works on at least two levels to produce the apparently voluntary containment of women within their households. It works to contain women literally, but also to produce women who have so interiorized the values of the household that they will carry them with them even when elsewhere."⁴³ The household enclosure and the anchoritic enclosure dovetail in terms of the interiorization of the values of each within the anchorite.

Although the *Wisse*-author desires that his anchoritic audience not be too concerned with the outer rule, he still impresses upon the anchoritic reader that her behaviour is important in protecting her standing in the community. No one should suspect her of abusing her station. The import of his instructions regarding domestic duties is that the anchorite must keep control of her household since a poorly managed household would indicate neglect or sloth on her part. Though Part 8 is not a conduct book, its discussion of conduct for the anchorite is reminiscent of these regulatory manuals. With regard to charity, the *Wisse*-author warns, "ȝef ha mei spearien eani poure schraden, sende ham al dearnliche ut of hire wanes" (If she can spare any poor scraps, [let her] send them entirely secretly out of her dwelling).⁴⁴ The anchoress is not to make her anchorhold into an alms house, but she is to give what she can. The advice on secrecy is indicative of the *Wisse*-author's anxieties: although she is performing a public act which benefits the community, she must not let it be known.

To distinguish her role as Christ's spouse from that of a wife, the *Wisse*-author defines these roles in relation to material goods, making it clear that the anchoress should not be concerned with material things, even for the sake of charity. Therefore, she must remember that she is "nawt husewif, ah is a chirch-ancrē" (not a housewife, but a church-anchoress).⁴⁵ The difference between a housewife and an anchoress here is the *accumulation* of material goods. As mentioned above, bequests given to anchoresses included many day-to-day items; but accumulating such items, as women married to human husbands normally would be expected to do, would identify the anchoress as too worldly, and therefore she must retain her poverty and only keep what she needs.

41 Salih, "At Home; Out of the House," 124-40.

42 Salih, "At Home; Out of the House," 125.

43 Salih, "At Home; Out of the House," 133.

44 *Ancrene Wisse*, 8. 63-64.

45 *Ancrene Wisse*, 8. 63.

Definitions of need will vary, but the *Wisse*-author emphasizes simplicity and self-sufficiency in her daily habits.

He also advises on guests. Men, of course, are not welcome to stay as guests of the anchoress, but women and children are: “Wummen ant children, ant nomeliche ancre meidnes, þe cumeð iswenchet for ow, þah 3e spearien hit on ow, oðer borhin oðer bidden hit, makieð ham to eotene wið chearitable chere ant leaðieð to herbarhin” (women and children and especially anchoresses’ maidens who are put to trouble for you — even if you must do without it for yourself or borrow or beg for it — have them eat with loving hospitality and invite them to lodge with you).⁴⁶ As a good hostess, the anchoress should make her guests as comfortable as possible, even if she must go without.

Finally, the discussion of maid servants reveals the tension between the idealized sealed anchoritic space and the community at large. The rules for maid servants, which occupy almost ninety lines (8. 227-311), indicate how the servants should go out, how they should eat and drink, how they should pray, how the anchoress should recommend penance for the servants’ indiscretions, what the wages — sufficient food to live on — should be, and how the rule should be taught to them. The *Wisse*-author emphasizes at the end of the text that anchorites should read parts of the rule to their servants since they, too, are integral to the sacred life of the anchorhold:

3e ances ahen this leaste [lutle] stucche reden to ower wummen euche wike eanes, aþet ha hit cunnen. Ant muche neod is þet 3e neomen to ham muche 3eme, for 3e mahen muchel beon þurh ham igodet — ant iwurset. On oðer half, 3ef þet ha sungið þurh ower 3emeles, 3e schule beo bicleopet þrof biuore þe hehe Deme. Ant for-þi as ow is muche neod, ant ham 3et mare, 3eornliche leareð ham to halden hare riwle, ba for ow ant for ham seolf, liðeliche ant luueliche; for swuch ah wummone lare to beonne, luuelich ant liðe, ant selthwenne sturne.

[You anchoresses ought to read this last section to your women once each week until they know it. And there is great need that you pay much attention to them, for you can be greatly improved — or diminished — by them. At the same time, if they sin through your carelessness, you will be called before the high Judge for it, and therefore as it is very necessary for you, and still more for them, eagerly teach them to keep their rule, both for you and for themselves, [teach them] mildly and lovingly; for so ought women’s teaching to be, loving and mild, and seldom stern].⁴⁷

⁴⁶ *Ancrene Wisse*, 8. 73-76.

⁴⁷ *Ancrene Wisse*, 8. 297-305.

Not only are the servants necessary, and the anchorite must pay attention to them, but she must also be responsible for their actions. She will be judged for the misdeeds of her servants. It is this kind of management of household affairs that is reminiscent of a domestic setting. The material circumstances of the anchorhold presumed a need for the persons inside the anchorhold to be cared for and, thus, servants are required. Despite the emphasis on a sealed space — for example, by keeping the curtains lowered to male visitors — the anchoress has public duties, which include supervising servants, (surreptitious) alms giving, and hosting guests, that indicate the permeability of the space.

As is clear from the above, although the *Wisse*-author is attempting to enclose the anchoress as completely as possible (even reminding her, for example, to keep the senses guarded), his own text wavers and the boundary between inner and outer is proven to be not as stable as it would seem.⁴⁸ This is also clear in an early example occurring at the beginning of Part 1, when the *Wisse*-author guides the anchoress through her morning prayer: “Hwen 3e earst arisedø, blescið ow ant seggeð, *In nomine Patris et Filii et Spiritus Sancti, Amen*” (When you first arise, cross yourself and say, *In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, Amen*).⁴⁹ While directing this spiritual act, however, the *Wisse*-author also gives directions on domestic minutiae: “Her-efter, scheoiende ow ant claðinde ow seggeð Pater Noster ant Credo” (After that, putting on your shoes and clothes, say an Our Father and the Creed).⁵⁰ Providing such a strict script, the *Wisse*-author tightly regulates the anchoress’s actions.

In a space that is apparently not to be seen into, there are still community standards to uphold. Although the anchorite was never to exit her cell and although her very identity was inextricably linked to the space in which she lived, the anchoritic life was led in proximity to, if not within, communities. The urban spaces of medieval England had the largest population of anchorites, Norwich in later centuries being an especially striking example. According to Norman Tanner, “more hermits and anchorites are known to have lived in Norwich, between 1370 and the Reformation, than in any other town in England”; their number may have been anywhere “between 35 and 47.”⁵¹ Although Tanner’s figures pertain to a later period and although the *Wisse* was written in the West Midlands, these statistics indicate not only the popularity of the anchoritic profession, but also the proximity of the community to the anchorites. The anchorhold in the *Ancrene*

48 Beckwith, “Passionate Regulation,” 809.

49 *Ancrene Wisse*, 1. 3-4.

50 *Ancrene Wisse*, 1. 8-9.

51 Tanner, *The Church in Medieval Norwich*, 58.

Wisse is a world of both ritual and ordinary activity — in other words, life. Because of the linkage of the anchoritic space to the life of the community, the death and burial rite of the enclosure ceremony can be read as a metaphoric disruption — the anchoress’s symbolic death is a separation from a previous *framework* of life. What was ordinary domesticity in the “outside” world becomes thought of as a domesticity infused with spirituality in the anchoritic space.

Linda Georgianna argues that the anchoritic life actually demonstrates “not how to become dead to the world but rather how to use human desires, memories, and experiences to one’s spiritual advantage.”⁵² There was time to garden, read, or take care of a cat — the only animal the author of the *Ancrene Wisse* recommends for his readers: “Ȝe [...] ne schulen habbe na beast bute cat ane” (You . . . shall have no animal but a cat).⁵³ In this respect, the space of the anchorhold was not confined and enclosed; although sealed, it was not sealed *off*, but was permeable and allowed for the fluidity of life, with the outside world constantly flowing into the anchoritic space in the form of bequests, prayer, conversation, and food, and the anchorite’s internal world of contemplation, prayer, conversation, food, clothing, and waste flowing out.

Inhabiting Her Space

In the previous section, I emphasized the aspects of household management detailed in the Outer Rule, where one might expect to find the most domestic advice. However, the author of the *Ancrene Wisse* also emphasizes domesticity and uses images of the household to create an anchoritic identity, again creating an overlap of domestic and spiritual spaces.

The *Ancrene Wisse* begins with a discussion of the relationship between the anchoress and her house. The anchorhold is essential to the anchoritic life, which is defined by its architecture just as the text is built around notions of inside/outside, domestic space, spiritual space, and the combination of these discourses. The *Wisse*-author invokes this dual concept of space when he describes the anchoress herself as “Godes chambre” (God’s chamber [or private room]).⁵⁴ She shores up the gaps between her flesh and the walls of the anchorhold, and between the physical and spiritual world, with her love. The *Ancrene Wisse*’s purpose is to explain how the anchoress should make herself that private room. She should not concern herself with a rigid rule except in three things: “þet

⁵² Georgianna, *The Solitary Self*, 7.

⁵³ *Ancrene Wisse*, 8. 90-91.

⁵⁴ *Ancrene Wisse*, 2. 649.

beo[ð] obedience, chastete, ant stude-steaðeluestnesse (þet ha ne schal þet stude neauer mare changin bute for nede ane [...])” (those are obedience, chastity, and steadfastness [or, fixity] of place, that she will never more change that place except for necessity [or, emergency] alone).⁵⁵ The stability of place, central to the identity of the anchoress’s devotions and occupations, is repeated later in the text: God speaks to his spouse “sweteliche,” but will speak to her “grimliche” if the anchoress leaves her chamber.⁵⁶ It is this stability of abode that defines the anchoress.

The *Wisse*-author also combines his discussion of place with the role the anchoress is to fulfill while enclosed. Throughout the text, family is a reference point for a discussion of the relationships between anchoress and anchorhold and between anchoress and God. References to the anchoress as widow, spouse, and child at various moments of the text further indicate the importance of the domestic discourse within the sacred discourse. This intertwining of domestic and sacred discourse with the issue of space in the *Ancrene Wisse* also informs the many metaphors which involve a spatial aspect by referring to various enclosures such as embraces, nests, and castles.

In order to teach the anchorite how she should answer those who ask to what order she belongs, the *Wisse*-author explains the dual purpose of religion. Combining religiosity, anchoritic devotion, and family in this explanation, the *Wisse*-author quotes from St. James: “Þet is, ‘Cleane religiun ant [wið]ute [w]em is iseon ant helpen [widewen ant feder]lese children, ant from þe [w]orld [w]iten him cleane ant unwemmet”” (That is, religion pure and without stain is to see and help widows and fatherless children and to keep oneself pure and unspotted from the world).⁵⁷ Religion, then, identifies and offers to protect those who are without husband and father. The latter part of the statement, says the *Wisse*-author, pertains to recluses. Religion divides them from the world, though, he explains, the widows and orphans can also be read symbolically as a reference to the state of the soul: “Þe [saw]le is widewe þe haued forloren hire spus, þet is, Jesu Crist, wið eni heued sunne. Þe is alswa federles þe haued þurh his sunne forloren þe Feader of heouene” (That soul is a widow who has lost her husband, that is, Jesus Christ, through any capital sin. That soul is also fatherless who, through sin, has lost the Father of Heaven).⁵⁸ To reclaim the husband and the father, to relinquish sin, then, is to become complete in a union with the divine understood in the domestic terms of family relationships.

⁵⁵ *Ancrene Wisse*, Preface 64-66.

⁵⁶ *Ancrene Wisse*, 2. 811 and 2. 813.

⁵⁷ *Ancrene Wisse*, Preface 102-104.

⁵⁸ *Ancrene Wisse*, Preface 110-13.

The soul that is fatherless and widowed is housed by the body, and the orphaned soul in her home needs to recover her family. I do not say “housed” accidentally, but invoke the devotion that the anchoress is to repeat — her house is too narrow and must be opened and repaired by God:

Set quis est locus in me quo ueniat in me Deus meus, quo Deus ueniat aut maneat in me, Deus qui fecit celum et terram? Itane, Domine, Deus meus, est quicquam in me quod capiat te? Quis michi dabit ut uenias in cor meum et inebries illud, et unum bonum meum amplectar, te? Qui[d] michi es? Miserere, ut loquar. Angusta est tibi domus anime mee, quo uenias ad eam; dilatetur abs te. Ruinosa est; refice eam. Habet que offendant oculos tuos, fateor et scio; set quis mundabit eam, aut cui alteri preter te clamabo? Ab occultis meis munda me, Domine, et ab alienis parce famule tue.

[But what place is there in me where my God may come into me, where God may come and remain in me, the God who created heaven and earth? Is it so, Lord, my God? Is [there] something in me which captures [or, contains] You? Who will grant to me that You may come into my heart and make it drunk, and that I may embrace You, my one good? What are You to me? Have mercy so I may speak. My spirit is a narrow house for You where You come to it; may it be enlarged by You. It is broken down; rebuild it. It may have [things] which offend Your eyes, I confess and know, but who will clean it? Or to whom else but You shall I cry out? Cleanse me, Lord, from my hidden [sins], and spare Your servant from others [i.e., other sins].]⁵⁹

The prayer, which utilizes many of the metaphors used throughout the text, is important in that the anchoress calls for an opening of her body. Using domestic terms, she desires God to both *clean* her house/body and to *repair* it, while entering her heart. She desires to embrace God as he enters her. It is important to note as well that this prayer is based on Augustine’s *Confessions*, where, as Eric Jager notes, Augustine develops the concept of the inner person: “What has come to be called ‘interiority’ was largely ‘discovered’ by Augustine, who emphasized not so much the (Platonic) distinction between body and soul as the (Pauline) difference between the inner and outer person.”⁶⁰ For the anchoress, however, the distinction between outer and inner person is often blurred. The anchorhold is representative of the inner house into which the anchorite is trying to invite God; the heart is the internal representation of the same thing. This is not the only time the heart is connected with a home; later, the heart is connected to a bird’s nest where Jesus desires to reside. The anchoress not only urges God to enter, to dissolve the

59 *Ancrene Wisse*, 1, 223-31. (Based on Augustine, *Confessions*, Book 1, chs. 2 and 5.)

60 Jager, *The Book of the Heart*, 28.

boundary between the outside of her house and the inside, but in this entrance, the anchoress prays that she will embrace God, providing him with a double enclosure.

One way to understand the joining of inside and outside is to examine the architectural expectations for the anchoritic house, especially with regard to its windows. The material space of an anchorhold varied from region to region — some were single rooms while others consisted of several rooms and sometimes courts or gardens. Despite this variety, the regulations pertaining to windows are one of most emphasized aspects of anchoritic architecture. As Ann K. Warren observes, “early rules for anchorites set out specifications: within the interior of a convent or attached to a church there was to be a room twelve feet square which communicated with the world through three narrow windows.”⁶¹ And Roberta Gilchrist notes that among the basic requirements of a cell were a “window or squint from which to observe the mass, and a grilled or shuttered window through which the confessor communicated.”⁶² Some of these squints still survive in Newcastle-on-Tyne and in Essex churches.

Advising the three sisters that their anchorhold should have three windows — church, parlour, and house⁶³ — the *Wisse*-author uses these windows as a means to point out the ways in which the cell of the anchorhold is intimately linked with both the body of the anchoress and the body of Christ.⁶⁴ He begins by linking windows to the anchorite’s eyes. Connecting the anatomy of the anchorite to the architecture of her living space, he warns the anchorites that they must be wary of men who insist on seeing them and so should keep their eyes, and, by proxy, their windows, shut tight. As he says, “Hund wule in bluðelich hwarse he fint open” (A dog will [blunder] happily into whatever he finds open).⁶⁵ No man is to see the anchoress’s altar within her cell, nor should any man see her face, and therefore she should never lift her veil unless briefly when given leave by her confessor. The face and the window are connected.

As mentioned above, the *Wisse*-author assumes that the anchorite will have guests, whom she is to receive at her parlour window. This use of windows indicates a permeability which the *Wisse*-author both implies and, at the same time, attempts to contain, advising her, “On alre earst, hwen ʒe schulen to ower parlurs þurl, witeð ed

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

62 Gilchrist, *Gender and Material Culture*, 178.

63 *Ancrene Wisse*, 2. 269, 340.

64 Leigh Gilmore, writing on the use of the body in mystical texts, argues that “mystical self-representation of the body resists the duality and finality of gender, and [...] orthodox mystical texts [...] narrativize gender less as an inevitable identity than as a focus for self-representational agency.” Gilmore, *Autobiographics*, 133.

65 *Ancrene Wisse*, 2. 149-50.

ower meiden hwa hit beo þet beo icumen” (First of all, when you must [go] to your parlour window, find out from your servant who it is that has come).⁶⁶ Sending her maid provides a buffer, allowing the anchoress to prepare herself for the visitor. In contrast, the church window is not to be used for visits, and the *Wisse*-author orders, “Vt þurh þe chirche þurl ne halde 3e tale wið na mon, ah beoreð þer-to wurðmunt for þe hali sacrement þet 3e seoð þer-þurh, ant neomeð oðerhwile. To ower wummen, þe huses þurl; to oþre, þe parlur. Speoken ne ahe 3e bute ed tes twa þurles” (Out through the church window hold no conversation with anyone, but show honour to it for the sake of the holy sacrament which you see through it and take sometimes. With your women, [use] the house window, and with others, the parlour [window]. You ought not to speak except at these two windows).⁶⁷ The recommendation to speak only at the house and parlour windows but not out of the church window represents both the anchoress’s connection to the outside world and the responsibility derived from her existence as a sacred body within her sacred space. It is inevitable that people will want to speak with the anchoress, for her spiritual vocation made her an important member of the community. These same people, however, bring their world to her; they, in turn, take part of her world with them. The *Wisse*-author attempts to direct that permeability by separating speech that pertains to the anchorhold from speech that pertains to the church. The anchoress is the guard between the material and contemplative spaces and the speech acts appropriate to these spaces; she is a space where these worlds intermingle.

Other architectural metaphors also indicate the ways in which the anchoress must inhabit her space. The *Wisse*-author uses metaphors involving nests and castles, both indicating the specific nature of enclosedness and both being domestic spaces, where the domestic and the spiritual overlap. For example, in his discussion of the inner feelings, the *Wisse*-author evokes the image of a bird’s nest, which “is heard utewið of prikinde þornes, inwið nesche ant softe. Swa schal ancre utewið polien heard on hire flesh ant prikinde pinen” (A nest is hard on the outside with pricking thorns, [but] on the inside delicate and soft. So must an anchoress suffer outwardly in her flesh hard [things] and pricking pains).⁶⁸ The nest ultimately offers protection for the bird on the inside as its prickly outside keeps intruders out. She should use or care for her flesh as if it were the outside of the nest. But inside the nest — inside the body — there will be a softness, something that the anchoress will keep safe.

⁶⁶ *Ancrene Wisse*, 2. 269-70.

⁶⁷ *Ancrene Wisse*, 2. 340-43.

⁶⁸ *Ancrene Wisse*, 3. 216-18.

The *Wisse*-author repeats this metaphor as he warns against excessive mortification. The anchorites should let “beo flesches pine efter euchanes euene. Pet nest beo heard wiðuten, ant softe ant swete þe heorte wiðinnen” (the pain of the flesh be according to each one’s ability. [Let] the nest be hard without, and the heart within soft and sweet).⁶⁹ Excessive mortification (a badly built nest) will be detrimental, whereas a well built nest will provide a proper home for bringing up “bridde of swuch nest, þet beoð gode werkes þe fleon toward heouene” (chicks of such a nest, those are good works which fly toward heaven).⁷⁰ Soft interiority is necessary in order to house the gem that the anchoress should protect in the nest of her heart. That gem is Christ. With Christ housed within the anchoress, nesting in her heart, she will be able to repel the serpent of Hell. If the anchoress cannot hold Christ in her heart, the *Wisse*-author recommends that she keep a crucifix in her anchorhold. In other words, if she cannot hold the Passion of Christ within her heart, to hold the metaphor within, she is to make sure she has it literally without. Again, the anchorhold stands in for her heart; the space of the anchorhold stands in for her own interiority.

The other architectural image that the *Wisse*-author uses is that of the castle. Just as the anchorhold was connected to the centre of the community, so the castle was also an important centre of social life. As Roberta Cornelius points out,

the development of the castle allegory presents an interesting parallel between literature and social conditions. [...] In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, the castle was the center of social life. No story or romance of the Middle Ages could possibly be written without its castles: no more could allegory, mirroring life in abstraction, dispense with the most important social institution of the time.⁷¹

This extended allegory illustrates the relationship between the soul and the body, but also reveals the innermost image of Christ to the anchoress herself.

Although the image of the castle also appears in other literature, it is not usually invoked to make the connection between space and the individual. In a twelfth-century Sermon on Septuagesima, the author refers to the soul as a *burh*, a fortified city, fortress, or castle: “Pe saule is cleped burh for þe admodnesse and ðoleburdnesse and swiche oðre holie mihtes. Pe wunieð on hire also folc inne burh” (“The soul is called a city on account of the meekness and patience and such other holy virtues which dwell in her, even as folk dwell in a city”).⁷² While the *Ancrene Wisse* also uses the image of dwelling

69 *Ancrene Wisse*, 3. 221-22.

70 *Ancrene Wisse*, 3. 228-29.

71 Cornelius, *The Figurative Castle*, 13.

72 *Old English Homilies of the Twelfth Century*, 53; translation by Morris, ed. and trans., *Old English Homilies of the Twelfth Century*, 52.

within the castle to create a connection between the anchoress and her soul, the *Wisse*-author develops this image to indicate not just that the soul is a city but also to illustrate the way in which God captures the soul/ anchoress in order to reveal his love.

The *Ancrene Wisse*'s discussion of the castle occurs in the section devoted to the varieties of love existing in the world and begins with a reminder that God "haueð ofgan ure luue on alle cunne wise" (has gained our love in every kind of way).⁷³ In explaining why the anchoresses should love God, the *Wisse*-author uses romance love in order to elucidate sacred love. The relationship at the centre of the narrative is that between a king and "a gentil poure leafdi of feorrene londe" (a noble, poor lady from a faraway land)⁷⁴ to whom the king has sent messengers representing the writers of the Old Testament whose writings are "leattres isealet" (sealed letters) before finally coming himself to bring "þe Godspel as leattres iopenet" (the Gospel like letters patent [i.e., public letters confirming a grant]).⁷⁵ These letters patent, which function as wooing-messages declaring the king's love for the lady, are written with his own blood.

The purpose of this tale, clearly, is to illustrate the method by which Christ reveals his interiority through the wounds of the Crucifixion. It is this wound in which the anchoress should look, but symbolically this wound is her space; it is the womb of Christ in which she symbolically resides. The *Wisse*-author uses the metaphor of the "eorðene" (earthen) castle⁷⁶ to parallel both the anchorhold, in which the lady (the anchoress) is enclosed, and her flesh, in which her soul is enclosed. The lady in the castle, as he explains, is the soul which Christ is wooing. Even though the king, who is Christ, sends messengers, musters an army to protect the lady's castle, defeats the enemies besieging it, and eventually reveals his face, the lady still denies him her love. Finally, the king enters "i turnement" and "hefde [...] his scheld i feht, as kene cniht, on euche half ipurlet" (in the fight, like a brave knight, had his shield pierced on every side).⁷⁷ The shield is the body of Christ which protects the "goddhead,"⁷⁸ Christ's divinity enclosed in human nature. Divinity is protected beneath the shield adding a spatial dimension. The shield is the body conflated with the cross; the images become interchangeable. Indeed, the *Wisse*-author exhorts the anchoress to display the shield for everyone to see: "hongeth hehe i chirche his scheld on his mungunge" (hang his shield high in the church in his

73 *Ancrene Wisse*, 7. 48.

74 *Ancrene Wisse*, 7. 61-62.

75 *Ancrene Wisse*, 7. 63-65.

76 *Ancrene Wisse*, 7. 69.

77 *Ancrene Wisse*, 7. 99-100.

78 *Ancrene Wisse*, 7. 101.

memory).⁷⁹ The crucifix-shield is enclosed within the church, indicating the object toward which the anchoress (like the parishioners) should direct her gaze. This last image of the shield is again spatial — the *Wisse*-author writes that Jesus let his shield be pierced in order to “openin his side to schawin hire his heorte, to schawin hire openliche hu inwardliche he luuede hire, ant to ofdrahen hire heorte” (open his side, to show her his heart, to show her how deeply he loved her, and to draw forth her heart).⁸⁰ Not only does the wound become a window for the anchoress to gaze at Jesus’s heart, but the image also describes a way for her to understand how her heart shall be connected to the heart of Christ. This is the anchorite looking into the church through her church window. In this way, the purpose of entering the battle for the besieged castle, or of enduring the Crucifixion, is to reveal the interiority of Christ himself. The anchoress could imagine that she is peering into the open wound in order to see Love. This wound transgresses the boundary between flesh and spirit; the body is the shield and is marked by the drama of the Crucifixion, which itself is spatially represented in the anchorhold.

In these images, the author of the *Ancrene Wisse* illustrates how the anchoress is spatially oriented in her anchorhold and how she is connected to Christ through her architecture. The space of the castle, an image that is central to the social life of the Middle Ages, becomes the space of a relationship made visual between Christ and the soul. What is ultimately revealed in this spiritual transformation is the connection between the anchoress’s innermost self, the soul, and the locus of Christ’s innermost expression of his connection to her, his heart. As the anchoress has prepared her heart for Christ’s coming, so he shows his heart to the anchoress, affirming their innermost connection. The anchoress houses her soul in her cell and, in her heart, peers into Christ, who reveals his heart to her. Her household is both without her, in her anchoritic space, and within her, in the nest of her heart.

Through the maintenance of her household, the anchoress comes to understand how to look within. The emphasis on household management makes the anchoress understand the relationship between her body and her space. The anchoress is to use this understanding to cultivate her spirituality, through thinking of Christ within her, both nested and embracing; she is connected to his interiority spatially and visually, and he has cleaned and repaired her heart. These architectural and spiritual spaces are the structures of her own spirituality. The *Ancrene Wisse* illustrates the fluidity of the anchorhold. The space provides for a use of metaphor that frames the spiritual within the material —

79 *Ancrene Wisse*, 7. 121-22.

80 *Ancrene Wisse*, 7. 126-27.

enclosure creates an internal spiritual world inevitably influenced by the outside world and using domestic spaces and actions to situate the anchorite in a contemplative life that exists in a very small space.

Thus, anchoritic discourse emphasizes the interplay of the spiritual and the domestic existing simultaneously within the same physical and conceptual space. This indicates the nature of the anchoritic space as a disruption of the boundaries between purely discrete spaces: the space of the household and the space of the spiritual anchorhold could exist at once. The ways in which this is manifested in the *Ancrene Wisse* are not simply material, but come to define the space of the anchoress herself. Her identity is connected with space; she encloses and is enclosed by Christ — she must prepare a space for him in her heart, while she looks into his wound and begins to understand how her heart is drawn to his. The life in this space could not be separated from the outside world. This discourse could not deny the flesh, could not deny the ways in which the body was related to Creation. The overlap of domestic and anchoritic space in anchoritic discourse indicates open-ended spatial opportunities — one could be enclosed and yet come to understand the anchoritic life through household and architectural language. One could be enclosed, peer into the church window, and see the heart of Christ.

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