

## Medieval Widowhood and Textual Guidance: The Corpus Revisions of *Ancrene Wisse* and the de Braose Anchoresses

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In 1990, Margaret Wade Labarge published a seminal article on medieval widowhood and religious devotion, arguing that “among the upper classes widowhood could provide for the first time in a woman’s life a freedom of action and choice that she had not previously enjoyed.”<sup>1</sup> She pointed out that not all medieval widows were elderly, and indeed, one of the widows whose life she explored, Loretta, countess of Leicester, was widowed in her early twenties. Such women might wish to avoid remarriage for a variety of reasons, yet their lives were far from over even if they were widowed in their thirties or forties: Loretta lived well into her eighties. Labarge outlined a number of “second careers” that widows might undertake in the secular world, though her article focused on women who “turned to an active religious life and, in reality, took up a new career.”<sup>2</sup> She argued that “Because of their superior social position these women had the luxury of a choice among several patterns of religious life, as recluse, or nun, or mystic living a devout life in the world.”<sup>3</sup> Labarge concentrated on the influence that widows in the religious life could exercise, presenting one example of each of these three patterns: Loretta, countess of Leicester, who became a recluse by 1221; Ela, countess of Salisbury, who founded Lacock Abbey in 1232 and entered it as

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1 Labarge, “Three Medieval Widows,” 159. Labarge’s article was inspirational for me as a graduate student writing about the early thirteenth-century West Midland collection of texts known as the *Ancrene Wisse* Group, and her work has continued to invigorate my scholarship to this day.

2 Labarge, “Three Medieval Widows,” 160.

3 Labarge, “Three Medieval Widows,” 160.

a nun, serving as abbess for nearly twenty years; and St. Birgitta, wife and daughter of Swedish nobles, who influenced popes and kings through her mystical *Revelations*.

The life of Loretta, countess of Leicester and recluse of Hackington, is particularly relevant for the study of *Ancrene Wisse* and the texts associated with it, coinciding as it did with the period in which the texts of the *Ancrene Wisse* Group were written; these texts were written for anchoresses in the Welsh Marches, where Loretta was raised, at precisely the time when Loretta herself was an anchoress. Loretta was the daughter of William de Braose, a powerful Marcher lord, whose Welsh lands were in the same geographical area as the place where these texts were composed. Other daughters of William de Braose and Maude St. Valery de Braose include Margaret, who founded the convent of Aconbury, Flandrina, who was a nun at Godstow, and Annora, who became a recluse at Iffley, near Oxford; the latter, as E. J. Dobson suggested, may have been the original recipient of the French translation of *Ancrene Wisse*,<sup>4</sup> and her husband, Hugh de Mortimer, the patron of *Ancrene Wisse*'s original audience. His suggestion is based, in part, on a grant of land made by Mortimer to, as Dobson unfortunately misquotes, "the sisters formerly living in [the Deerfold]," a grant that Bella Millett later notes was given to brothers, not sisters.<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, two of the de Braose sisters were recluses whose lives overlapped the composition of the *Ancrene Wisse* Group in various ways.

In this article, I shall examine the lives of Loretta and her siblings as templates for the kind of audience imagined by the authors of the *Ancrene Wisse* Group and, in particular, by the author of *Ancrene Wisse* as he revised his original text. While there is no direct evidence for any connection between these women and the *Ancrene Wisse* Group authors (*pace* Dobson), there are several interconnections between thirteenth-century manuscripts and the de Braose kin. For example, Cambridge, Corpus Christi College MS 402 (hereafter, Corpus) was given to Wigmore Abbey by a recluse at Ludlow, the former home of Margaret and her husband, Walter de Lacy, lord of Ludlow and Meath. Another copy of *Ancrene Wisse*, London, British Library MS Cotton Cleopatra C.vi (hereafter, Cleopatra), later in the same century belonged to another powerful Marcher lady, Matilda de Clare (1223-1287), who was

4 Dobson, *The Origins of Ancrene Wisse*, 214-29, 238-50, 299-311.

5 "sororibus quondam existentibus apud le Derefaud"; Dobson, *The Origins of Ancrene Wisse*, 218. Millett points out that these three sisters "are the accidental product of a misread abbreviation," noting that "The charter refers to *fratres*, not *sorores*"; Millett, "The Origins of *Ancrene Wisse*," 219 and 227 n. 80, citing Thompson, *Women Religious*, 34 n. 126.

the granddaughter of Maude de Clare by her second husband, Roger de Lacy. Maude's first husband was William de Braose, the son of William and Maude de Braose and brother of Loretta, Annora, Margaret, and Flandrina. Although William died, with his mother, at Windsor in 1210, at least fifteen years before *Ancrene Wisse* was written, it is not inconceivable that the Cleopatra manuscript descended to Matilda through her grandmother.

The fact that these two particular manuscripts can be connected to the de Braose kin is telling. Cleopatra contains numerous annotations by the original author, suggesting that he was working on revising his text. Many of these annotations (and others) appear in Corpus, which gives the author's final, revised version. If Cleopatra descended to Matilda de Clare from her de Braose connections, the emendations to *Ancrene Wisse* found in the Cleopatra manuscript — which, I shall argue, were likely made in response to the conditions of anchoresses like Maude's sisters-in-law — could be connected to the de Braose sisters, who were all alive in the 1240s, the date suggested by Millett for these manuscripts.<sup>6</sup> This association might also add credence to Dobson's contention that Annora was the patron of the French translation, although the connection is so slim that it must remain simply conjecture.

The de Braose sisters were certainly not the original addressees of *Ancrene Wisse*, which was, in the first instance, written for three sisters who had entered the anchorhold as young women.<sup>7</sup> The de Braose sisters became anchoresses in widowhood, although Loretta must have been considered still to have been “in the bloom of [her] youth” and would certainly have been sought after for her wealth if not for her evident goodness and generosity. Nevertheless, the *Ancrene Wisse* author clearly had a wider audience in mind: the concessions he made when he revised his text for a larger

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6 Millett, ed., *Ancrene Wisse*, 1:xiv.

7 The passage referring to this original audience is retained only in London, British Library MS Cotton Nero A.xiv (hereafter, Nero): “Muche word is of ou hu gentile wummen 3e beoð. vorgodeic & for ureoleic ijirned of monie. & sustren of one ueder & of one moder. i ne blostme of ower 3uweðe uorhete alle wordes blissen; & bicomen ancren” (fol. 50); Day, ed., *The English Text of the Ancrene Riwe*, p. 85, ll. 23-27. It has seen a variety of translations, the best of which is Robertson's: “There is much talk about what noble women you are, sought after for your goodness and generosity, and sisters of one father and one mother. In the blossom of your youth, you forsook all the bliss of the world and became anchoresses”; Robertson, “Savoring ‘Scientia,’” 121-22. Millett translates: “You are much talked about, what well-bred women you are, sought after by many for your goodness and for your generosity, and sisters from one father and one mother, [who] in the bloom of your youth renounced all the joys of the world and became anchoresses”; Millett, trans., *Ancrene Wisse*, 73n.

community of anchoresses make the anchoritic life less physically demanding and thus suggest an audience that included widows along with young unmarried women. The lives of the de Braose sisters coincided with the composition of the *Ancrene Wisse* Group, and their connections put them in the same geographical area; in addition, the sisters were also part of the intellectual milieu in which these texts must have been created. For example, one of the de Braose siblings, Giles, was bishop of Hereford and exiled to Paris during the period just before the text was written, and, as Millett has argued, the author of *Ancrene Wisse* may have been a Dominican trained at Paris university and connected with the outreach programme of the local West Midland bishops.<sup>8</sup> Thus, these women provide a window into the lives and conditions of the widowed anchoresses who would have been among the audience of the revised version of *Ancrene Wisse*.

### The de Braose Siblings

The de Braose family was among the most powerful of the Marcher nobility in the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries.<sup>9</sup> They were also notable patrons of religious houses: William de Braose and his wife Maude (or Matilda) were patrons of Glastonbury and other religious foundations in the Welsh Marches, and Maude's family, the St. Valerys, were patrons of, among others, the convent at Godstow, near Oxford. The elder de Braoses' patronage and religious connections clearly extended into the next generation: Giles (1180-1215) was bishop of Hereford; Margaret (1177 - after 1255) founded a convent at Aconbury; Loretta (c.1180-1266) was enclosed at Hackington, Kent, in her widowhood; Annora (1190-c.1241) was enclosed at Iffley, near Oxford, in her widowhood; and Flandrina (dates unknown) was a nun and later abbess (1242-1248) at Godstow Abbey.

The lives of the de Braose offspring were not characterized by ease and security. Their father, William de Braose, was a stormy character, first raised high by King John, and then persecuted by him for his debts to the Crown and his rash behaviour.

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8 See Millett, trans., *Ancrene Wisse*, xii-xiv; and Millett, ed., *Ancrene Wisse*, 2:xxiv-xxix. The broader implications of this intellectual context will be discussed below.

9 For the history of the de Braose sisters, summarized below, see Labarge, "Three Medieval Widows"; Powicke, "Loretta, Countess of Leicester"; Nicholson, "Margaret de Lacy and the Hospital of St John"; and Deyner and Thompson, "The Barons de Braose," available at <<http://freespace.virgin.net/doug.thompson/BraoseWeb/stage.htm>>.

Their mother, Maude, and their eldest brother, William (1175-1210), were condemned by King John and starved to death at Windsor in 1210 after their father had fled to France (where he later died in exile). Their second brother, Giles, was already in exile in Paris at the time of his mother and brother's imprisonment and there befriended Stephen Langton, the exiled archbishop of Canterbury (in exile 1208-1213), who presided over the elder William's funeral in 1211.

At the time of her father's exile, Loretta was already a widow. She had married Robert de Beaumont, earl of Leicester c.1196 and was widowed in 1204, likely in her early twenties.<sup>10</sup> Her dower was not settled immediately, and even though she had her marriage portion, she seems to have had some financial difficulties in the early years of her widowhood. Nevertheless, Maurice Powicke suggests that overall she came off well, perhaps at least partly thanks to powerful connections at court.<sup>11</sup> Unfortunately, her father's dispute with King John, as well as the quarrel between King John and Rome, put her life and position in jeopardy; as Powicke puts it, "Loretta, so closely related to the chief royal victim among the laity and to one of the episcopal refugees among the clergy, could not hope to escape unharmed."<sup>12</sup>

Loretta's problems with King John seem to have begun early in her widowhood. In November 1207, she signed an agreement that she would not remarry or become a religious (that is, a nun or recluse) for a year from St. Andrew's Day (30 November). This may indicate that she was already contemplating becoming an anchoress at this time. Sometime between 1209 and 1212, Loretta's lands were seized and she most likely went into exile with her brother and father in Paris. Here, in the company of her brother Giles, bishop of Hereford, and of Stephen Langton, archbishop of Canterbury, and the Victorines at the Abbey of St. Victor in Paris, where her father was buried, she would have been in an intellectual milieu similar to that of the author of *Ancrene Wisse*, who, as Millett has shown, was influenced by the Paris schools, the Victorines, and the reforms instituted by the local West Midlands bishoprics after the Fourth Lateran Council.<sup>13</sup>

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10 Based on the date of her death, in 1266, Labarge speculated that Loretta was under twenty at the time of her husband's death; see Labarge, "Three Medieval Widows," 161. Powicke speculates that she was married sometime after 1196, and therefore born c.1180; see Powicke, "Loretta, Countess of Leicester," 149.

11 Powicke, "Loretta, Countess of Leicester," 153-56.

12 Powicke, "Loretta, Countess of Leicester," 156.

13 Millett, trans., *Ancrene Wisse*, xii-xiv; and Millett, ed., *Ancrene Wisse*, 2:xxiv-xxix.

Loretta's return to England and the restoration of her lands in 1214/1215 seem to have been permitted on condition that she again take an oath that she was not married and would not remarry without the king's consent. As a young, wealthy widow with powerful connections, Loretta would have been viewed as quite a prize, and there must have been men vying to gain the king's permission to become her second husband. However, Loretta, it seems, had other plans, and by 1219, she appears to have been preparing for retirement from the world. She was enclosed at Hackington (near Canterbury), in 1220 or early 1221, after settling her financial affairs.<sup>14</sup> Although there are no records to indicate why she might have chosen this location, her brother Giles's connections with Stephen Langton and her own later connections with Simon Langton, his brother, suggest that they may have influenced her choice of location. As early as 1224, Loretta and Simon Langton were patrons of the Franciscans in England, who founded their first English house in Canterbury; and six years after her enclosure, Simon Langton, then archdeacon of Canterbury, also came to live at Hackington. In addition, she may have been influenced by the translation of the body of St. Thomas Becket to a new shrine behind the high altar of Canterbury Cathedral in July 1220.

Loretta's sister, Annora de Braose, also became enclosed upon being widowed. Annora married Hugh de Mortimer (1183-1227), the heir of Roger de Mortimer, who succeeded to his lands in 1214. She was imprisoned in Bristol from 1210-1214, when she was released at the request of the papal legate.<sup>15</sup> Hugh died in 1227, leaving Annora, like Loretta, a childless widow. Unlike Loretta, however, Annora was probably in her thirties and perhaps not pursued as an heiress-bride. Nevertheless, since Annora and her husband had no children, her brother-in-law succeeded to her husband's estates, and she may have felt unwelcome in her former home. In 1232, King Henry III gave Annora permission to reserve an income of 100 shillings for her maintenance as long as she was a recluse, and she was enclosed at Iffley, near Oxford. During her married life she had been a patroness of Godstow Abbey, a foundation with connections to her mother's family, and this may have influenced her decision to choose an anchorhold near this convent, as may the fact that her sister Flandrina was a nun there.

A third de Braose sister, Margaret, was an active patroness of religious women, although she herself never entered the religious life as either a nun or an anchoress.

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14 Powicke, "Loretta, Countess of Leicester," 158-61.

15 Labarge, "Three Medieval Widows," 162.

Margaret de Braose was married to Walter de Lacy, lord of Ludlow and Meath, from *c.*1200 to 1241. Although Powicke suggests that Margaret and her husband fled to France at the time of her father and brother's exile, it seems more likely that they would have stayed in Walter's lands in Ireland. In 1216, in one of his final acts as king, King John granted Margaret a piece of land in the forest of Aconbury by Hereford to found a nunnery in memory of her mother and brother. The nunnery of Aconbury was founded by Margaret in 1218.

Interestingly, the patterns of religious participation among the de Braose women seem to have followed matrilinear lines, as the daughters turned to their mother's family context for their reclusion and religious patronage: Flandrina entered Godstow, which was under the patronage of her mother's family; Margaret's convent at Aconbury (near her own home at Ludlow) was founded, at least in part, in her mother's memory and to ensure prayers for her soul; and Annora was enclosed at Iffley, near Godstow. In light of William de Braose's abandonment of his family at the time of his exile, the death of his wife and eldest son, and the exile or imprisonment of his other children, the matrilinear bias of his daughters' religious patronage is understandable.

There were, of course, many reasons to seek out religious seclusion in widowhood. A noble widow was subject to the demands of remarriage and may also have been seen as a potential threat by her husband's heirs or as competition by their wives. In the cases of Annora and Loretta, both childless, the heirs to their husbands' estates would have had even less reason to welcome them than any sons or daughters of their own would have had. It is also clear that in Loretta's case, at least, King John wished to have control over any remarriage of this rich and powerful widow. More importantly, for both women religious seclusion also provided a form of political sanctuary, away from the teeming intrigues of their parents, for which Annora had suffered imprisonment and Loretta exile. For both women, the anchorhold offered political and social shelter as well as religious seclusion. The imagery of enclosure as penitential suffering, imprisonment, and exile in the anchoritic texts would surely have resonated with these two women.

It is, however, important not to discount the most obvious reason for withdrawal to the anchorhold — a sincere desire to seek the devout life of prayer and meditation and to prepare the soul for the afterlife, while at the same time interceding for the souls of family and friends, living and dead. As seen above, it seems clear that Loretta was contemplating the religious life as early as 1207, only three years after

her husband's death, and Annora was enclosed within five years of being widowed.<sup>16</sup> It is unlikely that a wealthy aristocratic widow like Annora de Braose de Mortimer or Loretta, countess of Leicester would have chosen an anchorhold over a convent simply as a political or social refuge. Both sisters had the means to enter a convent of their choosing, and they had familial connections to at least two: Aconbury (founded by Margaret in 1218, before either was enclosed) and Godstow (of which Annora was a benefactor and where Flandrina was already a nun). On the other hand, relations between the de Braose family and the religious houses under their patronage were not always peaceful. For example, at the time when Annora would have been arranging for her enclosure, Margaret was engaged in a heated debate with the Hospitallers (to whom she had entrusted the foundation of her convent at Aconbury),<sup>17</sup> which ended with her refounding the establishment under the supervision of the Austin friars. Flandrina, indeed, became abbess of Godstow in 1241 (about the time of Annora's death) but was deposed in 1248 by Robert Grosseteste, bishop of Lincoln. There is no evidence explaining her removal from office or, indeed, concerning her life at Godstow apart from these two events. But Godstow and Aconbury would not have been the only convents available to the de Braose sisters had they wished to seek refuge in a community of nuns. Their choice of the anchorhold seems to have been prompted by a sincere desire for the secluded life of the anchoress rather than the communal life of the nun.

Indeed, the anchorhold may have been attractive precisely because it was *not* a convent, and therefore its inhabitant was not subject to the vows or rule of convent life. The anchorhold would have provided some degree of independence, offering the kind of seclusion without religious vows appropriate for a lay widow who wished to retire to a life of devotion but not to take on the formal life of the convent. Although, as Millett suggests, *Ancrene Wisse* betrays its addressees' anxiety about their liminal status, that very marginality may indeed have been part of its attraction, for enclosure did not have to end all worldly ties, however 'dead to the world' the anchoresses

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16 Considering the time that it would take to settle their husbands' affairs and make arrangements for their own support as recluses, this suggests that they were probably considering the anchoritic life almost as soon as they were widowed.

17 It is interesting to note here that Loretta granted a large part of her lands in Devon "in 'pure and perpetual gift' to the Hospitaller sisters of Buckland (Somerset) to find and support a chaplain"; Labarge, "Three Medieval Widows," 162.



were in theory.<sup>18</sup> Loretta's choice of Hackington for her enclosure may well have been influenced by her connections with the Langton brothers, whom she would have met in France through her brother Giles. That her enclosure was at least in part motivated by personal devotion is indicated by her patronage of the earliest Franciscans in England in 1224, who were also supported by Simon Langton, even before Langton settled at Hackington in 1227; and her patronage also suggests that, even from the anchorhold, she was still able to wield considerable influence. Indeed, Loretta's involvement with the world did not by any means cease with her enclosure, as "she used her influence on behalf of persons from distant places as well as on behalf of her neighbours."<sup>19</sup> This active intercession may explain the unusual fact that besides her two female servants, she also kept a male servant.

Significantly, the connections of the de Braose sisters with the early Franciscans were extensive. Loretta's benefaction was generous and influential, causing Thomas of Eccleston, the Franciscan historian, to mention "the noble countess, lady recluse of Hackington" alongside Sir Henry of Sandwich and Simon Langton as the early patrons of the Franciscans at their arrival in England in 1224, and to laud her for "cherish[ing] them in all things as a mother her sons, sagaciously winning for them the favour of magnates and prelates by whom she was held in the highest regard."<sup>20</sup> Labarge suggests that one magnate she influenced may have been Hugh de Mortimer, her sister Annora's husband, whose nephew later became a Franciscan friar in the Shrewsbury priory.<sup>21</sup> Finally, Margaret de Braose's husband, Walter de Lacy, and his brother Hugh de Lacy, first Earl of Meath (who embraced the de Braose cause), were early and generous patrons of the Franciscans in Ireland. All of this bears out Powicke's assertion that Loretta's "friends and relatives, whether lay or clerical, were to the fore in the political and religious life of England and Wales, of France and of Ireland."<sup>22</sup>

18 See Millett, "Women in No Man's Land."

19 Powicke, "Loretta, Countess of Leicester," 163-64 at 163; see also Labarge, "Three Medieval Widows," 164.

20 "Specialissime vero promoverunt eos dominus Symon de Longeton, archidiaconus Cantuarie, et dominus Henricus de Sandwyg, nobilis quoque comitissa, domina Inclusa de Baginton, quae sicut mater filios, sic fovit eos in omnibus; principum et prelatorum quoque gratiam incomparabiliter consecuta fuerat, favorem sibi sagacialiter acquirendo"; Thomas de Eccleston, *De adventu fratrum minorum in Angliam*, 16. The translations quoted here are from Labarge, "Three Medieval Widows," 164, 166.

21 Labarge, "Three Medieval Widows," 164.

22 Powicke, "Loretta, Countess of Leicester," 147.

In his 1933 article on Loretta, countess of Leicester, Powicke suggested that “The time has not yet come to estimate the significance of the anchoress and anchorite in the history of medieval religious life,” yet at the same time he noted that

those who lived this solitary life helped to foster and enlarge the tendencies in contemporary thought and experience. In some ways they were the spiritual children of St. Anselm, in others careful and responsive converts to new forms of personal devotion to Jesus and the Virgin Mary. [. . .] the literature of personal religion [. . .] gradually became a means for the transmission and development of English prose.<sup>23</sup>

Similarly, Labarge observes that

The expanding influence of the Cistercians, then the Franciscans and Dominicans, encouraged a more personal religion among the laity. [. . .] These contacts and the growing popularity of the books of hours for lay use extended the new emotional emphasis on the humanity and sufferings of Christ and on devotion to the Blessed Virgin and increased personal piety.<sup>24</sup>

Of course, during the almost eight decades since Powicke published his article, a great deal of scholarship has been devoted to the place of anchorites in England and the literature written for and about them. Much of this work has focused on the *Ancrene Wisse* Group. The meticulous scholarship of Bella Millett has revealed that the author of *Ancrene Wisse* was in all likelihood a Dominican, not an Augustinean canon of Wigmore Abbey, as Dobson first suggested; thus, Dobson’s suggestions concerning the relationships between Annora de Braose de Mortimer and her husband with the composition and translation of *Ancrene Wisse* have not been taken up. Yet, although a direct connection is not likely, Annora and Loretta were just the *kind* of woman for whom the text of *Ancrene Wisse* may have been revised in the version that is first suggested by the Cleopatra manuscript and which is extant in the Corpus manuscript: powerful and influential aristocratic widows who became anchoresses upon the deaths of their husbands. The revised text recommends the friars to its readers as reliable confessors, connecting the text with both Dominicans and

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23 Powicke, “Loretta, Countess of Leicester,” 165.

24 Labarge, “Three Medieval Widows,” 160.

Franciscans — and reminding the twenty-first century reader of Loretta’s patronage of the earliest Franciscans in England. Indeed, I have elsewhere discussed the place of the Wooing Group prayers, which form part of the *Ancrene Wisse* Group, in the development of early thirteenth-century English Passion meditation, and have argued that these prayers show the influence of Franciscan devotion.<sup>25</sup> The lives of the de Braose sisters thus provide examples of the context within which, and of the kind of women for whom, the *Ancrene Wisse* Group was written. These were women of consequence — socially well-connected, wealthy, sophisticated, politically astute, and with some theological knowledge — who embraced the austere life of the anchoress. Below, I shall explore the possible influence of aristocratic widows on the revision of the central text in this group, *Ancrene Wisse*.

### Revisions to the Corpus Text of *Ancrene Wisse*

The window into the lives of widowed recluses offered by the lives of the de Braose sisters is particularly important in considering the conditions under which *Ancrene Wisse* was composed and revised. Anne Savage’s recent re-examination of the process of the writing of *Ancrene Wisse* suggests important considerations for the later composition and audience of the revision to the text which survives in Corpus.<sup>26</sup> Savage argues that *Ancrene Wisse* was composed at the height of the careers of its three original addressees, rather than at the beginning. Thus, *Ancrene Wisse* need not have been written in response to the urgent need of newly enclosed anchoresses for a guide to their new lives. Rather, Savage suggests that the catalyst for the writing of *Ancrene Wisse* was not, in the first instance, the enclosure of the three sisters, but the growth of a “community of solitaries” whose existence had expanded even further by the time of the Corpus revision.<sup>27</sup> She further suggests that these anchoresses influenced the revisions to the text, becoming, in effect, co-editors by suggesting revisions to suit their needs or by informing the author of these needs.

The reviser describes this expanded community as “**þe ancren of Englonde, swa feole togederes (twenti nuðe oðer ma [. . .])**” (“the anchoresses of England, in such

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25 Innes-Parker, *þe Wohunge of Ure Lauered and Related Texts*, forthcoming; Innes-Parker, “Reading and Devotional Practice,” forthcoming.

26 Savage, “The Communal Authorship of *Ancrene Wisse*.”

27 Savage, “The Communal Authorship of *Ancrene Wisse*,” 52.

a large group (twenty now or more [. . .])”,<sup>28</sup> solitaries who nonetheless wish to live as if they were a metaphorical convent, a **“sometreadnesse of anred lif efter a riwle”** (“community of united life according to a rule”),<sup>29</sup> all pulling in the same direction **“as þah 3e weren an cuent of Lundene ant of Oxnefort, of Schreobsburi oðer of Chester”** (“as if you were a single religious community of London and of Oxford, of Shrewsbury or of Chester”).<sup>30</sup> As the community expanded, word of their anchoritic ‘convent’ spread to other areas of England, for which the original community became **“as þe moder-hus þet heo beoð of istreonet”** (“like the mother-house from which they are generated”).<sup>31</sup> The women in the original community lived in individual cells which seem to have been within a day’s walk of each other — they were able to share books through the mediation of their servants, suggesting that the servants could easily travel between their cells bearing books and news — although noble anchoresses could most likely send messengers across longer distances (one recalls that Loretta kept a male servant who could have been such a messenger). Annora’s cell at Iffley, moreover, was within walking distance of Godstow.

The changes to the Corpus revision can be classified under several broad categories.<sup>32</sup> Changes are made to both the Outer Rule (Parts One and Eight, which outline, respectively, the anchoress’s daily devotions and the day-to-day functions of her life) and the Inner Rule (Parts Two to Seven, which concern the virtues and aims of the enclosed life). The author states clearly that the Outer Rule is not a rule, in that its precepts are not binding, but a guide to the outward life of the anchoress. It is intended as a “handmaiden” to the Inner Rule which governs the anchoress’s inner life, which is also, as Millett has argued, less a rule than a guide.<sup>33</sup> A number of

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28 Millett, ed., *Ancrene Wisse*, 4.71.1077-78; Millett, trans., *Ancrene Wisse*, 96. The page numbers of Millett’s translation of *Ancrene Wisse* are the same as those of her EETS edition, vol. 1; thus, citations from *Ancrene Wisse* are hereafter given by part, section, and line numbers as well as (common) page numbers (hence, 4.71.1077-78, p. 96). Millett uses boldface for additions and alterations in both her edition and her translation; I have omitted the bolding in the translated passages since the revisions are so indicated in the corresponding Middle English quotations.

29 4.71.1080, p. 96.

30 4.71.1083-85, pp. 96-97.

31 4.71.1091, p. 97.

32 It is not my intent to undertake a comprehensive study of such changes here, but a brief summary of the changes and a discussion of those most relevant to the present study is indicative of the ways in which noble widows such as the de Braose sisters were accommodated in the revised text.

33 See Millett, “Can There be Such a Thing as an ‘Anchoritic Rule’?” I am grateful to Professor Millett for allowing me to cite her forthcoming article.

changes, then, pertain to concessions made to the Outer Rule, which would make the anchoritic life more comfortable, and better tolerated by anchoresses who entered the anchorhold as widows. Changes to Part One concern the anchoress's daily devotions.

Although many of the changes, particularly those to Parts One and Eight, are to passages which specifically relate to the anchoritic life, others (for example, in Parts Four and Five, on Temptation and Confession) could have been made with a wider audience in mind. Many of the shorter changes clarify the original text or intensify its phrasing. Clarification of theological concepts also prompts some changes. A large number of changes concern the wider audience of the revised text and the wider social contexts of this audience.

Some additions seem intended to intensify the meaning of the text. For example, in 3.14 when the anchoress is compared to the night bird, the text refers to “þe stille niht, hwen me ne sið nawiht, **nowðer ne ne hereð**” (“the silent night, when nothing can be seen, or heard either”).<sup>34</sup> Others increase the affectivity of the text. For example, in 4.12 the reviser intensifies the description of Christ's passion by stating that the crown of thorns pierced Christ's skin so that “te blodri strundes striken adun ant leaueden **dun to þer eorðe**” (“the streams of blood ran downwards and flowed down to the ground”), suggesting that Christ was covered with blood literally from head to foot.<sup>35</sup>

Other kinds of clarifications of the original text are frequent. A number of these pertain to biblical citations. For instance, in Part Two, in the example citing the Old Testament law concerning an animal that has fallen in the pit, the phrase “he hit schulde zelden” (“he had to pay for it”) is expanded to “he [**þe unwreah þe put**] hit schulde zelden” (“he who uncovered the pit had to pay for it”) by the Cleopatra reviser (likely the original author).<sup>36</sup> Similarly, in 2.14 the example of virtuous and innocent people who are suspected and slandered for lack of a witness is expanded with the example of Joseph and Potiphar's wife.<sup>37</sup> A longer and more significant expansion

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34 3.14.371-72, p. 57.

35 4.12.143, p. 71. Millett suggests that this addition was “probably added to clarify the meaning of the verb-form *leaueden* ‘flowed’”; Millett, trans., *Ancrene Wisse*, 209, n. 4.26.

36 2.8.125-26, p. 23. Several folios are lost here in the Corpus manuscript, and Millett provides the text from Cleopatra. It is not my intention to trace every alteration to either Corpus or Cleopatra, but to discuss the import of the revisions identified in Millett's edition and translation.

37 The text gives only the briefest reference “**as Iosep i Genesy of þe gale leafdi**” (“as Joseph was in Genesis by the lustful lady”) suggesting that the author assumes that his audience will be familiar with the story. 2.14.332-33, p. 28.

occurs in 5.8 where the original text explains the bitterness of confession with the example of Judah, whose name means ‘confession,’ and his wife Tamar, whose name means ‘bitterness.’ The author further states, “Ant ba beon somet ifeiet, as Iudas ant Thamar, for nowðer wiðuten oðer nis noht wurð, oðer lutel; Phares ant Zaram ne temið ha neaure” (“And both should be coupled together, as Judah and Tamar were, because either without the other is of little or no value; they will never give birth to Pharez and Zarah”).<sup>38</sup> The revised text explains this elliptical reference: “**Iudas streonede of Thamar Phares ant Zaram (*Phares diuisio, Zaram oriens interpretatur*), þe gasteliche bitacnið tweamunge from sunne, ant i þe heorte þrefter arisinde grace**” (“Judah fathered on Tamar Pharez and Zarah (*Pharez is interpreted as division, Zarah as rising*), who in spiritual terms mean division from sin, and the grace that arises later in the heart”).<sup>39</sup>

Elliptical phrasing is clarified elsewhere by the addition of short phrases. For example, in Part Four the author suggests that earthly sufferings and earthly joys represent the pain of hell and the joys of heaven “as schadewe — for na lickre ne beoð ha” (“as a shadow — for they are no more like”).<sup>40</sup> The ‘likeness’ (or lack thereof) is clarified by the expansion: “na lickre ne beoð ha **to þe wunne of heouene ne to þe wa of helle þen is schadewe to þet þing þet hit is of schadewe**” (“they are no more like the bliss of heaven or the pain of hell than a shadow is like that thing of which it is a shadow”).<sup>41</sup> A similar “discomfort with the condensed metaphorical language of the original version”<sup>42</sup> is seen in the expansion of the metaphor of the anchoress as a mountain imprinted with Christ’s footprints in 6.14: the reviser explains “**Pulliche dunes þe gode Pawel spek of, ant eadmodliche seide**” (“The virtuous Paul spoke of such mountains, and humbly said”) before quoting 2 Cor. 4:9-10: “*Deicimur set non perimus, mortificationem Iesu in corpore nostro circumferentes, ut et vita Iesu in corporibus nostris manifestetur*” (“*We are cast down but not destroyed, carrying around the mortification of Jesus in our bodies, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies*”).<sup>43</sup>

38 5.8.142-44, p. 117.

39 5.8.144-46, p. 117. Millett notes that this explanation is based on pseudo-Anselm of Laon, *Enarrationes in Evangelium Matthaei*, PL 162:1237. She suggests that “The explanation of the twins’ names does not fit easily into the sentence, and was probably originally a marginal annotation”; Millett, trans., *Ancrene Wisse*, 238-39, n. 5.37.

40 4.53.891, p. 92.

41 4.53.891-93, p. 92.

42 Millett, trans., *Ancrene Wisse*, 257, n. 6.105.

43 6.14.466-69, p. 143.

Other short additions are intended to clarify theological concepts, for example, the explanation of the Holy Trinity as “**Brumnesse’ on Englisch**” (“‘Threeness’ in English”).<sup>44</sup> Similarly, in Part Four, there are a number of additions to the descriptions of the seven deadly sins. For example, in 4.22, Torpor, or “a lukewarm heart,” is further defined as “**vnlust to eni þing**” (“lack of enthusiasm for anything”).<sup>45</sup> Other additions, such as that in 5.22, where the spouse of Christ is identified as the pure soul, expanded by the addition of Holy Church, remind the anchoress of the communal and institutional recipients of Christ’s love as well as the individual soul.<sup>46</sup>

The examples above do not seem to have been prompted by any change in audience but seem intended to clarify passages which may have been unclear or misunderstood in the original text, though it is possible, of course, that such changes were prompted by questions posed by the original audience, as Savage has suggested. On the other hand, some revisions to Part Four suggest both a wider audience and a wider social context for the anchoress. Although she is enclosed, she herself has an ‘audience,’ who watches her behaviour and whose behaviour she is to watch. In 4.20, for instance, an eighth offspring, Suspicion, is added to the original seven of the serpent of poisonous envy, which include misjudgement and malicious lies.<sup>47</sup> A ninth offspring, “**Sawunge of unsibsumnesse, of wreaððe, ant of descorde**” (“Sowing of dissension, of anger, and of discord”), and a tenth, “**Luðer Stilðe, þe deofles silence, þet te an nule for onde spoken o þe oþer**” (“Sulking, the devil’s silence, when one person will not speak to the other because of envy”), both suggest a wider community rather than a single anchoress.<sup>48</sup> Again, in 4.21, the reviser expands the description of Fury, the second offspring of the unicorn of Wrath, with the warning “**Bihald te ehnen ant te neb hwen wod wreaððe is imunt; bihald hire contenemenz, loke on hire lates, hercne hu þe muð geað, ant tu maht demen hire wel ut of hire witte**” (“Watch the eyes and the face when someone feels furious anger; watch her behaviour, see her expression, listen to how the mouth goes, and you might think her quite out of her mind”).<sup>49</sup> These warnings suggest that the anchoress is also to observe the potential sins of

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44 3.21.568-69, p. 62.

45 4.22.351, p. 77.

46 5.22.424-25, p. 125.

47 4.20.318-35, p. 77.

48 4.20.330-31 and 4.20.332-33, p. 77.

49 4.21.339-42, p. 77.

other anchoresses with whom she is in relatively frequent contact or, perhaps, those of her servants, for whom she is, effectively, the abbess as head of a small community.<sup>50</sup>

On the other hand, the brief addition to the cubs of the fox of Avarice in 4.23 more explicitly suggests readers who once had a life outside the anchorhold. Reluctance in giving or lending is annotated: “**þis is icluht heorte, vnþeaw Gode laðest, þe zef us al him seoluen**” (“this is a tight-fisted nature, a vice most hateful to God, who gave himself entirely to us”).<sup>51</sup> Such emphasis on a failure to give or lend is telling. While anchoresses are encouraged to lend reading material, the anchoress would have had few, if any, other possessions. Indeed, anchoresses are discouraged even from collecting funds for charitable purposes, not only because such charity could lead to pride, but also because if it becomes known that an anchoress has money in her anchorhold, she opens herself to the risk of being attacked — “**reowðe ouer reowðe!**” (“shame added to shame!”), the reviser adds.<sup>52</sup> An anchoress who had come into the anchorhold as a widow, however, might bring with her a Psalter and other possessions; a noble widow might also have more income to support her lifestyle than other anchoresses. Furthermore, this notation assumes that there is somebody to give or lend *to* — again, perhaps the author is thinking of a community of anchoresses, such as the one for whom the revised text of the Corpus manuscript was prepared.

A number of additions, including the reviser’s well-known address to the “anchoresses of England [...] twenty now or more,” specifically consider this expanded community of anchoresses. The religious communities of London, Oxford, Shrewsbury, and Chester to which they are compared are not, it appears, women’s houses, but “sites of Dominican priories, the two earliest foundations in England and the two

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50 I am indebted for this idea to one of *Florilegium’s* anonymous readers. It is also worth noting that this passage occurs in the part of *Ancrene Wisse* that would be most easily adaptable for a wider, non-anchoretic or lay audience.

51 4.23.367-68, p. 78.

52 4.39.656, p. 85. The reviser also intensifies the original author’s concern with scandal, defining scandal in terms reminiscent of the warning not to uncover the pit of sin, as “**þing swa iseid oðer idon þet me mei rihtliche turnen hit to uuele, ant sunegin þrefter þer-þurh wið mis þoht, wið uuel word on hire, on oþre, ant sungin ec wið dede**” (“anything said or done in such a way that people can reasonably misconstrue it, and sin afterwards because of it through shameful thoughts, through malicious gossip about her [the anchoress], about others, and sin in deed as well”); 6.14.444-46, p. 143.



earliest in the West Midlands.”<sup>53</sup> This is consistent with the long, and often cited, addition referring to the Dominican and Franciscan friars, whom the reviser seems to trust more than other religious and to whom the anchoress is to confess whenever the opportunity arises.<sup>54</sup> The anchoress is also given general permission to have Franciscan and Dominican friars at meals, although all other visitors must have special permission.<sup>55</sup>

The growing community of anchoresses also seems to have required that their maidservants act as messengers, going from one anchorhold to another with messages, books, and so forth. The rules concerning hospitality are relaxed especially for other anchoresses’ maids — the reviser insists that the anchoress should invite them to stay, since they have taken such trouble on her account.<sup>56</sup> This suggests that the anchorholds are close enough to be within walking distance, but far enough apart that the distance there and back might not be covered in a single day.<sup>57</sup> Indeed, it seems that such maids’ visits are frequent and important enough for the reviser to add a substantial passage outlining the activities that the anchoress should, and should not, engage in with her visitors and suggesting that a visit of two nights is long enough, and that rarely.<sup>58</sup>

In fact, hospitality towards her sisters’ maids is important enough that the anchoress is advised even to borrow or beg to provide these visitors with meals. A long addition to Part Four, while relaxing the ascetic advice against gluttony, also cautions the anchoress not to ask for charity except from “**sum treowe freond**” (“some

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53 Millett, trans., *Ancrene Wisse*, 224, n. 4.194.

54 2.13.311-26, p. 28.

55 8.9.77-80, p. 157. Again, the reviser is particularly concerned with scandal (8.9.83).

56 8.8.73-76, p. 157.

57 It is interesting to note that the servant who is to go out at need was, in the original text, to be “ful unorne” (“very plain”) and “of feier ealde” (“advanced in years”), but while the edited text adds that she must be “**wiðuten euch tiffunge**” (“without any kind of finery”), it also adds that she might be “**a lutel þuftene**” (“a little maidservant”) — perhaps someone who has the physical strength to walk between anchorholds (8.31.229-30, p. 161). And, the reviser concedes, “Ne ga ha nawt ut of tune wiðute siker fere, **3ef hit swa mei beon**, ne ne ligge ute” (“She should not go out of town without a trustworthy companion, if at all possible, or spend the night elsewhere”) (8.31.238-39, p. 162) yet she is clearly welcome for the night at her sisters’ anchorhold, suggesting that communication between anchorholds was important enough to relax some of the ‘rules.’

58 8.37.327-28, p. 164.

good friend”).<sup>59</sup> To good friends, the anchoress may reveal her hardships, although secretly, as if in confession. And, while she is elsewhere cautioned to live moderately on the charity she receives,<sup>60</sup> she should accept charity where offered rather than refuse it for the sake of ascetic poverty: “**Ne nawt ne schule we forsaken þe grace of Godes sonde, ah þonkin him 3eorne**” (“we should not reject the grace sent by God, but thank him gratefully”).<sup>61</sup> The acceptance of charity, then, is not only permitted but, in some instances, encouraged. Indeed, in Part Eight, the advice to accept what she needs from a good friend is altered to “Ed gode **men**” (“from good people”), suggesting that a single patron is no longer sufficient or perhaps that some of the anchoresses to whom the revised version is addressed have no particular patrons.<sup>62</sup> The reviser includes a caution against accepting anything from someone whom the anchoress distrusts, “**þurh his fol semblant oðer bi his wake wordes**” (“because of his over-familiarity or his suggestive conversation”),<sup>63</sup> intimating that charity sometimes comes with strings attached. All of these revisions suggest a wider audience of anchoresses who, enclosed though they might be, had more contact with the world than might have been allowed for in the original version of the text.

That this wider audience of anchoresses also had some experience in the world is indicated by a number of revisions. In Part Four, for example, the reviser qualifies the description of Lechery. Indecent fondling, which in all manuscripts except Corpus, *is* a mortal sin, here “**mei beon** heued sunne” (“*can be* a mortal sin”).<sup>64</sup> The slaking of lust, which “bute ane i wedlac” (“except only in marriage”) *is* a mortal sin in the other manuscripts, “**geað to** deadlich sunne” (“*tends towards* mortal sin”) in Corpus.<sup>65</sup> Finally, again only in Corpus, the reviser adds the following comment at the end of his section on lechery:

**3e þe of swucches nute nawt, ne þurue 3e nawt wundrin ow ne þenchen  
hwet Ich meane, ah 3eldeð graces Godd þet 3e swuch uncleanness nab-  
beð ifonet, ant habbeð reowðe of ham þe i swuch beoð ifallen.**

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59 4.77.1189, p. 99.

60 8.7.59-62, p. 156.

61 4.77.1202-1204, p. 100.

62 8.10.84, p. 157. See also Millett, trans., *Ancrene Wisse*, 269-70, n. 8.47.

63 8.10.86, p. 157.

64 4.25.397-98, p. 79; emphasis mine.

65 4.25.410, p. 79; emphasis mine.

[Those of you who know nothing about such things need not wonder or speculate on what I mean, but should give thanks to God that you have not experimented with such filthy practices, and feel sorry for those who have fallen into them.]<sup>66</sup>

The address to “Those of you who know nothing about such things” suggests that at least some of his readers *do* know about “such things,” presumably from having been married before their entry into the anchorhold. Similarly, in the often-deplored passage in 5.10, where the anchoress is advised to state nakedly in confession that she is “a ful stod-meare, a stinkinde hore!” (“a filthy stud-mare, a stinking whore!”),<sup>67</sup> the reviser tones the passage down, adding that

**to fule me mei seggen. Me ne þearf nawt nempnin þet fule dede bi his ahne fule nome, ne þe schendfule limes bi hire ahne nome. Inoh is to seggen swa þet te hali schrift-feader witerliche understonde hweat tu wulle meanen.**

[it is possible to speak too crudely. There is no need to call that filthy act by its own filthy name, or the shameful parts of the body by their actual names. It is enough to put it so that the holy confessor understands clearly what you mean to say.]<sup>68</sup>

Indeed, in 5.36 the anchoress is cautioned against confessing sexual sins in detail to a young priest, and, the reviser adds, “**æt of þis inohreaðe him walde þunche wunder**” (“he would perhaps be shocked even by this”), the simple confession of lust.<sup>69</sup> This addition is short but telling.

Other revisions suggest that the anchoress who had more experience of the world was also, at least in some cases, a member of the nobility. In 2.18, where the author counsels his readers not to rebuke others or reproach them for their sins, he explains, “Hit is hare meoster þe beoð ouer oþre iset ant habbeð ham to witene” (“It is the job of those who are placed over others and are responsible for them”); this sentence is clarified by the addition, “þe [. . .] habbeð ham to witene **as Hali Chirche larewes**”

66 4.25.414-18, p. 79. Millett suggests a comparison to *Hali Meidhad* 16.6-9, “where the reference is to husbands coercing their wives into perverse sexual practices”; Millett, trans., *Ancrene Wisse*, 214, n. 4.78.

67 5.10.249-50, p. 120.

68 5.10.252-56, p. 120. But see also Millett, trans., *Ancrene Wisse*, 240, n. 5.56.

69 5.36.631-32, p. 130.

(“those who [. . .] are responsible for them as teachers of Holy Church”).<sup>70</sup> Millett suggests that this is “possibly a qualification to include the friars, who might have spiritual responsibility (as confessors) for their charges without having organizational responsibility for them.”<sup>71</sup> It is equally possible, however, that this is a clarification to specify that the author refers to spiritual rather than social superiors, who might also be “placed over others” and “responsible for them” (and thus bound to rebuke or reproach those who are under their authority).

In a longer, less flattering addition concerning carnal or worldly behaviour — in particular, pride — the reviser states,

**Bihofde nawt þet swuch were leafdi of castel; hoker ant hofles þing is þet a smiret ancre — ant ancre biburiet, for hwet is ancre-hus bute hire burinesse? — schal beo greattre ibollen, leafdiluker leoten of, þen a leafdi of hames.**

[It would not be proper for a woman like this to be the lady of a castle; it is a shameful and ridiculous thing for an anointed anchoress — and a buried anchoress, for what is the anchor-house but her grave? — to be more puffed up, put on more ladylike airs, than a mistress of estates.]<sup>72</sup>

This passage is part of a long addition on the sins of the mouth, which contains a number of references that suggest an audience whose former experience in the world might have an impact on their ability to live the ascetic anchoritic life — “**þet ower feble, tendre flesh heardes ne mei þolien**” (“because your weak, tender flesh cannot bear hardship”).<sup>73</sup> The anchoress is warned against ill-mannered and childish words, complaints, and despicable behaviour, such as is shown by one who “**sinetin hire wordes, [. . .] wenden þe schuldre, keaste þe heued**” (“emphasizes her words by gestures, [. . .] turns her back, tosses her head”).<sup>74</sup> All of this seems more like the behaviour of a spoiled (and wealthy) woman than that of an anchoress.

The admonishment against behaving like “the lady of a castle” is continued in another long series of additions in 4.18 where, in the description of the lion of Pride, the anchoress is warned against the first cub, Vainglory, specified in an addition as,

70 2.18.373-74, p. 29.

71 Millett, trans., *Ancrene Wisse*, 187, n. 2.65.

72 2.42.895-98, p. 43.

73 2.42.928, p. 44. See below, note 78.

74 2.42.932-33, p. 44.

among other things, pride in reputation, family, or status.<sup>75</sup> Later, a tenth cub, Contention, is added, which includes “**euenunge of ham seolf, of hare cun, of sahe oðer of dede**” (“comparison of themselves, of their families, of what they say or do”).<sup>76</sup> An additional eleventh cub, fed by affectations, includes “**sitten oðer gan stif as ha istaket were [...] spoken as an innocent ant wispin for þen anes**” (“sitting or walking as stiffly as if she were tied to a stake, [...] talking like an *ingénue* and affecting a lisp”), behaviour that suggests training in (courtly?) etiquette.<sup>77</sup> Also included are

**of ueil, of heaued-clað, of euch oðer clað to oue[r]gart acemunge oðer in heowunge oðer i pinchunge; gurdles, ant gurdunge o dameiseles wise; scleaterunge mid smirles; fule fluðrunge, heowin her, litien leor, pinchen bruhen oðer bencin ham upparges.**

[too much embellishment of veils, head-coverings, or any other garment, either by dyeing or by pleating; belts, and wearing them in the style of a teenage girl; plastering on creams; vulgar artifices, dyeing the hair, tinting the complexion, plucking the eyebrows or arching them upwards with moistened fingers.]<sup>78</sup>

Other manuscripts include ‘painting the face’ in this list. This passage suggests an audience well-versed in the various sartorial and cosmetic embellishments of women wealthy enough to afford them; of course, the very creams, tints, and dyes to achieve these effects should be banned from the anchorhold.

The diatribe against dyed and pleated clothing and head coverings is expanded in the oft-cited addition concerning wimples in Part Eight. The opening text reads, “**Ʒef Ʒe muhen beo wimpelles — ant Ʒe wel wullen** — beoð bi warme cappen, ant þer-uppon **hwite oðer** blake veiles” (“If you can manage without wimples — and you are quite willing to — make do with warm caps, and white or black veils over

75 4.18.246-48, p. 75.

76 4.18.280-81, p. 75.

77 4.18.290-92, p. 76. One is reminded of young girls being trained to walk with a book on their heads. Or, in a comparison from the Middle Ages, one need think only of Chaucer’s Prioress here and in the following quotation.

78 4.18.292-96, p. 76. The reference to “dameiseles wise” (“the style of a teenage girl”) suggests an older and more mature audience, rather than the young, virginal audience often associated with the anchoritic texts and their “feble, tendre flesch” (“weak, tender flesh,” 2.42.928, p. 44); see above, note 73. Indeed, the tenderness of the anchoress’s flesh may well have been due, not to her youth, but to a former life in the world which pampered, rather than denied, the flesh.

them”).<sup>79</sup> The additions here seem intended to soften the prohibition against wimples and to give the anchoress more choice concerning her veil. However, the addition that follows shows the reviser’s ambivalence:

**Ancren summe sungið in hare wimplunge na leasse þen leafdis. Ah þah seið sum þet hit limpeð to each wummon cundeliche forte werien wimpel. Nai, wimpel ne heaued-clað nowðer ne nempneð Hali Writ, ah wriheles ane.**

[Some anchoresses sin no less than ladies in wearing wimples. But nevertheless, someone may say that it is natural for every woman to wear a wimple. No, Holy Scripture makes no mention of either wimple or head-cloth, only of covering.]<sup>80</sup>

The reviser continues with a reference to Paul’s instruction to the Corinthian women to cover their heads. It is important, the reviser insists, that women “**nawt drahe þe wriheles to tiffunge ant to prude**” (“not turn the covering into adornment and finery”).<sup>81</sup> Moreover, he insists that women should also cover their faces. “**Hwi þenne,**” he asks,

**þu chirc-ancre iwimplet, openest þi neb to wepmonnes ehe? [. . .] Ah 3ef þet ei þing wriheð þi neb from monnes ehe, beo hit wah, beo hit clað i wel-itund windowe, wel mei duhen ancre of oðer wimplunge.**

[Why, then, you church-anchoress in a wimple, do you lay open your face to a man’s gaze? [. . .] But if anything hides your face from a man’s gaze, whether it is a wall or cloth in a well-secured window, there is no need for an anchoress to have any other wimpling.]<sup>82</sup>

The reviser’s ambivalence seems to arise from the fact that he sees wimples as finery, a sign of fashion or of rank. He insists that even the anchoress’s maidservant is to dress without finery.<sup>83</sup> He seems especially concerned with anchoresses whose cells are attached to churches and insists that a curtain over the window is enough to cover the anchoress’s face and that a wimple is therefore not necessary. This is consistent with the long addition to Part Two concerning the covering of windows

79 8.19.140-41, p. 159.

80 8.19.141-45, p. 159.

81 8.19.149-50, p. 159.

82 8.19.152-57, p. 159.

83 An annotation added to 8.31, p. 161. See above, note 57.

lest the anchoress cause a man to sin (2.10). Nevertheless, he is willing to concede that some anchoresses were used to wearing wimples and would experience discomfort, whether physical (from the cold) or simply because wimples were habitual to them — especially, perhaps, for those who had donned customary widow’s weeds, which included heavy wimples.

This concession is part of a number of additions to Part Eight (the Outer Rule, the most heavily edited section), which seem intended to relax the harshness of the anchoress’s ascetic life. Indeed, the reviser adds a further reminder “**þet nan nis heast ne forbod þet beoð of þe uttre riwle**” (“that nothing that comes under the Outer Rule is a command or a prohibition”), referring his readers back to the description of the Inner and Outer Rules in the Preface<sup>84</sup> and the opening paragraph of Part Eight (8.1). The Outer Rule, he reasserts, can be changed “**hwer-se eani neod oðer eani skile hit easkeð**” (“wherever any need or any reason requires it”) in order to serve the Lady Rule.<sup>85</sup> So, for example, the anchoress’s winter shoes are not only to be roomy and warm, but “**meoke**” (“supple”); they are to be comfortable, as well as practical.<sup>86</sup> In the summer, the anchoress may go barefoot, though the reviser adds the permission “**ant lihte scheos werien**” (“and wear light shoes”).<sup>87</sup> Similarly, the anchoress is given permission “**A meoke surpliz [. . .] in hat sumer werien**” (“When it is hot in summer [. . .] wear a light overgarment of white linen”).<sup>88</sup> The belt that the anchoress is to wear with her sleeping garment is, the reviser adds, to be “**swa leoðeliche þah þet 3e mahen honden putten þer-under**” (“so loosely fastened that you can put your hands under it”).<sup>89</sup> Belts, it is clear, are to be for comfort, not for the mortification of the flesh, and the additions to 8.16 are clearly intended to increase the prohibitions against harsh, ascetic practices. Similarly, the prescriptions on food and bloodletting are also relaxed, focusing on health and strength; fasting, for example, is not required of those who are ill or who have been bled (8.4).<sup>90</sup>

84 8.30.220-21, p. 161; and Preface 4-6, pp. 1-3.

85 8.30.223-24, p. 161.

86 8.17.131, p. 159.

87 8.17.132-33, p. 159.

88 8.20.164-65, p. 160.

89 8.16.120-21, p. 158.

90 Similarly, in a series of additions concerning the posture of the anchoress in prayer, the reviser advises that only “**hwa-se is hal-iheafdet**” (“anyone who is fit enough”) should prostrate herself; 1.25.377, p. 17.

Other modifications to the Outer Rule concern the anchoress's activities within her cell. The suggestion that the anchoress and her maid "**ne plohiēn worldliche gomenes ed te þurle**" ("should not play worldly games at the window"), for instance, indicates that at least some of the anchoresses addressed here were accustomed to playing such games in their worldly lives before entering the anchorhold.<sup>91</sup> The prohibition against keeping any animal except a cat is relaxed, but the anchoress should keep other animals only on the advice of her director and only if forced to do so by necessity.<sup>92</sup> Similarly, while she is still not permitted to "chaffere ne driue" ("carry on any business"), such activity is further refined as buying in order to sell at a profit, and the anchoress is told, "**þing þah þet ha wurcheð ha mei þurh hire meistres read for hire neode sullen. Hali men sumhwile liueden bi hare honden**" ("she may, on her director's advice, sell things she makes to supply her needs. Holy men once supported themselves by the work of their hands").<sup>93</sup> Accordingly, the prohibition against making purses or silk ribbons is eased, subject to her director's permission, although the list of things that might lead to vainglory is expanded. Elaborate trim is prohibited, except for church vestments. But the addition includes the warning that "**Amites ant parures worldliche leafdis mahen inoh wurchen; ant 3ef 3e ham makieð, ne makie 3e þrof na mustreisun**" ("Amices and decorative panels for vestments can very well be made by ladies in the world; and if you do make them, you should avoid any ostentation").<sup>94</sup> This long addition seems to be addressed particularly to women who were accustomed to doing fine needlework while they were still in the world, and is combined with an admonishment not to be too attached to family. Nevertheless, as seen above, the restrictions on visitors are also relaxed, in particular for other anchoresses' maids (8.37) but also for relations and friends (8.22) and Dominican and Franciscan friars (8.9).

The role of the anchoress in the community is also modified. While she is still advised not to teach, she is told that, with her director's consent, she may offer guidance or help with learning. This, perhaps, is an acknowledgement of the anchoress's advanced years or experience. Widowed anchoresses, who bring with them the experience of the world, would be well-positioned to offer advice, especially to the young girls who are to be her only 'students' (8.25).

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91 8.37.330-31, p. 164.

92 8.11.90-91, p. 157.

93 8.12.101, 103-105, p. 158.

94 8.22.179-81, p. 160.



The Corpus revision of *Ancrene Wisse* thus contains many alterations which seem intended to lessen the hardship of the anchoritic life, and this may have been at least in part a response to the needs (or realities of life) of aristocratic widows entering the anchorhold. Such widows would have been accustomed to greater comfort than was allowed for under the original ascetic guidelines for anchoresses. We know that Loretta, for instance, received an annual grant from Alice, countess of Eu, of two quarters of wheat, two quarters of barley, one of oats, and two sides of bacon — Labarge notes that this is “rather luxurious fare for a recluse,” although Powicke suggests that “A recluse was expected to live an austere but not too ascetic a life.”<sup>95</sup> After Alice’s death, the grant was continued by Henry III, who was known for his patronage of anchorites, granting each recluse in England an annual gift of firewood. Loretta also received lambs, cheese, and eggs from the archbishopric’s revenues at Henry’s grant.

Annora also had an income that allowed her to live comfortably, though it was somewhat less than Loretta’s. In addition, Annora received royal grants for building material as well as royal gifts of firewood, a sack of grain, and one warm robe annually.<sup>96</sup> The building material was presumably for the construction of her anchorhold, although later grants may have been for construction on the Church of St. Mary in Iffley, to which her cell was attached: the south door was completed during the time of her enclosure, possibly under her patronage.<sup>97</sup>

Many of the revisions in the Corpus text therefore suggest that the audience to whom the revised version was addressed included women who had lived rich and

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95 Labarge, “Three Medieval Widows,” 163; Powicke, “Loretta, Countess of Leicester,” 163.

96 Labarge, “Three Medieval Widows,” 163; Deyner and Thompson, “The Recluses,” available at <<http://freespace.virgin.net/doug.thompson/BraoseWeb/page18.htm>>.

97 For many years, the precise location of Annora’s cell was a matter of debate. The presence of a bricked-in window or door in the south wall which would have given on to the choir of the church (with a direct view of the altar) suggested that this was the location of her cell; yet many were skeptical, as it could have been a priest’s door, and anchorholds were usually, though not always, on the north side of the church. The discovery of a thirteenth-century grave below this window or door seems to confirm that this was where Annora was enclosed and eventually buried, in a literal interpretation of *Ancrene Wisse*’s assertion that the anchoress’s cell is also her grave. There is no record of any other anchorite dwelling at the church in Iffley, and it may be that in the construction of the anchorhold she simply made use of an existing priest’s door and that the anchorhold was torn down after her death. See Deyner and Thompson, “The Recluses,” which shows a picture of the grave slab. When I first visited the Church of St. Mary the Virgin, Iffley, in 1993, the long grass at the side of the church covered the slab, which was only discovered subsequently.

varied lives in the world before entering the anchorhold. In particular, many revisions address activities or habits of women who were probably members of the nobility and had been in charge of large households. These women would have entered the anchorhold as widows, and, indeed, it is telling that the reviser reminds his readers that while chaste purity is a prerequisite for Christ's love, "**ha is þreuald: i widewehad; i spushad; i meidenhad, þe heste**" ("there are three kinds: in widowhood; in marriage; in virginity, the highest").<sup>98</sup> While Millett suggests that this addition is "probably to make it clear that this recommendation of chastity did not imply a heretical condemnation of marriage," it also makes clear that Christ welcomes widows and married women as his brides.<sup>99</sup>

One final, interesting revision is to be found in Part One, concerning the anchoress's devotions. This long addition is concerned with prayers to the Virgin Mary (1.25). Coming immediately after the reference to copies of prayers being readily available, the reviser begins, "**Þus Ich biginne mine Auez oðerhwiles**" ("This is how I sometimes begin my Hail Marys").<sup>100</sup> He adds a series of brief addresses to the Virgin and a series of instructions about the anchoress's posture while praying Hail Marys by decades. This insertion is not surprising; the prayers in Part One are dominated by prayers to the Virgin, interspersed with prayers to Christ. But it does reinforce the anchoress's devotion to the Virgin Mary, and perhaps to her cult.<sup>101</sup> A reference to Loretta, countess of Leicester in a collection of the miracles of the Virgin, described by Powicke, suggests that such devotion was central, at least to Loretta's devotional life.<sup>102</sup> In one of several additions to the collection "made some time after 1235 in the Cistercian abbey of Vaux de Cernay," the abbot recounts that "A recluse at Canterbury, who was formerly countess of Leicester" had told him a story "which she said that she had heard from trustworthy persons who vouched for its truth."<sup>103</sup> The story concerns two women who were great friends. When "one of them, *longe religiosior*

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98 7.12.193-94, p. 150.

99 Millett, trans., *Ancrene Wisse*, 262, n. 7.43.

100 1.25.359, p. 17.

101 For further discussion of the cult of the Virgin Mary and anchoritic prayers, especially those of the Wooing Group, see Innes-Parker, ed., *þe Wohunge of Ure Lauered and Related Texts*. For discussion of the Wooing Group prayers in the Nero manuscript, see Innes-Parker, "Reading and Devotional Practice."

102 Powicke, "Loretta, Countess of Leicester," 166-67.

103 Powicke, "Loretta, Countess of Leicester," 167.

than the other, came to die,” her friend saw her smile five times on her death-bed. Powicke continues, “After her death she appeared to her friend and explained why she had smiled. [. . .] On her death-bed the Virgin appeared to her five times in succession, exactly as she had been wont to imagine her in her daily meditations.”<sup>104</sup> The meditations referred to were meditations on the five joys of the Virgin, carried out five times daily around the canonical hours. Powicke suggests that “The story obviously refers to two women familiar with the devotional tendencies of the time, and living the religious life as nuns or recluses.”<sup>105</sup> Could the younger of the two, who experienced this miracle, have been Loretta herself?

### Conclusion

Obviously, to attempt to connect the additions to *Ancrene Wisse* to individual women such as the de Braose sisters is futile and potentially misleading. Nevertheless, as Margaret Wade Labarge reminds us, we must keep such widows in mind as we contemplate the audience to whom these revisions are addressed. As Labarge points out,

The fortunate accidents of birth in a class accustomed to the exercise of power, some wealth, physical good health (including survival of child-birth), and individual ability and initiative provided some women with the ability to arrange for themselves a different but very satisfying life during the years of their widowhood.<sup>106</sup>

She reminds us that it could be difficult for wealthy widows to remain unmarried, and the choice of a religious life was not only approved and respected but could also suit the individual woman. It is fitting to end with Labarge’s own concluding words, applied to the three widows she discusses in her article but relevant to any woman who entered the anchorhold upon being widowed:

The women discussed here had all been born to power and influence. Widowhood freed them to act as individuals, and they had the ability to adapt to their own desires and requirements the form of religious life each found most suitable. In so doing they made a secure and respected path for themselves in their later years, slightly separated from but not completely

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104 Powicke, “Loretta, Countess of Leicester,” 167.

105 Powicke, “Loretta, Countess of Leicester,” 167-68.

106 Labarge, “Three Medieval Widows,” 172.

alien to the world in which they had originally moved. [. . .] In so doing, they suggest some of the possibilities that might also have been adopted by other contemporaries, whose lives, unlike these, are unknown.<sup>107</sup>

The de Braose anchoresses exemplify the *kind* of audience that the *Ancrene Wisse* author may have had in mind as he revised his text. I have argued elsewhere that they are precisely the kind of audience that the author of *Pe Wohunge of Ure Lauered* would have envisioned, and that *Pe Wohunge* offers precisely the kind of contemplative reading that such widows would have required to fill out their prayers and meditations.<sup>108</sup> Labarge's article points the way for further research into the lives of medieval widow-recluses, and as research into the complex context of the creation of the *Ancrene Wisse* Group continues, we will gain a better understanding of the role of anchoritic guidance literature for these anchoresses.<sup>109</sup>

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107 Labarge, "Three Medieval Widows," 172.

108 Innes-Parker, "*Pe Wohunge of ure Lauerd* and the Tradition of Affective Devotion."

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