

## Seeking Intimacy in the *Wooing Group*

**Abstract:** This essay examines the five lyrical meditations known collectively as the *Wooing Group*, focusing on the anchoritic reader's nurturance of her affective literacies in reading these texts. The presence-absence of the Lover Christ and the Virgin Mary is central to the affective strategies of the meditations: the anchoress is engaged in a continual search for Christ and his Mother, drawing close to them only to find herself distanced again.

**Keywords:** early Middle English; anchoritism

*'Whither is thy beloved gone, O thou most beautiful among women? whither is thy beloved turned aside, and we will seek him with thee?'*  
(Song of Songs 5:17)

To seek the lost Beloved: this is perhaps the most painful objective of the affective and devotional literacies nurtured by the thirteenth-century anchoritic reader. In his recent book on affective literacies, Mark Amsler remarks on the presence-absence of Christ at the core of devotional semiotics: texts and images 'render Jesus semiotically present', yet 'their linguistic and visual textuality depends on the absent Jesus, his not-there-ness which is the precondition for contemplative and imaginative semiosis'.<sup>1</sup> This presence-absence of Jesus/Christ is fundamental to the strategies of five lyrical meditations known collectively as the *Wooing Group*, associated with *Ancrene Wisse* and read by anchorites in their transmission history. These texts facilitate the anchoress' fraught search for the Beloved.<sup>2</sup> Her reading of the meditations nurtures her affective pain-pleasure, predicated on gaining intimacy with the Spousal Lamb and his Mother; such intimacy is not easily attainable. In the *Wooing Group*, the anchoress is engaged in this painful search, drawing close to her Lover and Mary only to find herself distanced again.<sup>3</sup>

The ‘*Wooing Group*’ as a category was invented by W. Meredith Thompson in his 1958 edition, but its definition has transformed over time. The *Group* is currently understood to comprise five meditations, now concretized in Catherine Innes-Parker’s recent (2015) edition: *On God Ureisun of ure Lefdi*, *On wel swuðe god ureisun of god almihti*, *On Lofsong of ure Lefdi*, *On Lofsong of ure Louerde*, and *Pe Wohunge of ure Lauerd*. The first four of these are found in complete form in London, British Library, Cotton Nero A. xiv (N); the sole copy of *Pe Wohunge of ure Lauerd* is in London, British Library, Cotton Titus D. xviii. All five meditations belong to the ‘AB’ group of early thirteenth-century texts, along with *Ancrene Wisse*.

The first of these, *On God Ureisun of ure Lefdi*, has only recently been accepted into the *Wooing Group*, its exclusion due in part to the fact that it is male-voiced and intended originally for a monastic audience. However, Denis Renevey has demonstrated that this meditation in N is an ‘instance of assimilation of monastic material into the specialized anchoritic world’, and Caroline Cole has shown that *On God Ureisun of ure Lefdi* is linked closely to the other meditations in this manuscript.<sup>4</sup> In her edition, Innes-Parker affirms that this text is ‘appropriate for inclusion in the *Wooing Group*’.<sup>5</sup> The present essay focuses on the female anchoritic readership of all five texts, particularly those women with English and possibly French literacy—hence the usage of singular ‘ anchoress’.<sup>6</sup> This is not to sideline the authorial voices, however. Sarah Salih has recently brought the authors of the *Wooing Group* meditations into the limelight. As she observes, the anchorhold is ‘not an exclusively female space, but also a repository for the excess of clerical affects’. She puts forward

a compelling triangular model that takes into account both author and speaker as interlocutors in a shared desire for ‘access to Christ’ – a model which this essay adopts.<sup>7</sup>

Aelred of Rievaulx (1110–1167) is a named source in *Ancrene Wisse*; as such, the meditative section of his *De institutione inclusarum*, a rule for the enclosed life written for his biological sister, may have been a source for the *Wooing Group*. Prayers authentically or mistakenly attributed to Anselm of Canterbury (1033–1109) are also potential sources.<sup>8</sup> Anselm’s readership included a dominant female component, although the male authorial voice cannot be erased from the prayers.<sup>9</sup> The Anglo-Norman ‘Les lamentations Nostre Dame’, a prose text based on the Pseudo-Bernardine *Planctus*, is studied in the present essay as a valuable analogue to the *Wooing Group* meditations.<sup>10</sup> The late thirteenth-century date of the two earliest manuscripts suggests that this Anglo-Norman text may have been composed later in the century than the anchoritic texts, but it remains useful for gauging the contemporary affective climate.

### Anchoritic Meditation

That meditative activity formed part of the anchoress’ day is certain. How large a part it occupied, and when during the day it occurred, is less so. In the recent essay collection on the *Wooing Group*, Nicholas Watson draws attention to the fact that the meditations were part of the anchoress’ recreation: the author of *Be Wohunge of ure Lauerd* asserts that the text should be read ‘hwen þu art on eise’.<sup>11</sup> Equally, however, it is problematic to claim that the *Wooing Group* is ‘a series of imaginative texts defined [...] precisely by the fact that they are *unnecessary*’ (emphasis added).<sup>12</sup> The

anchoress' 'recreational' activity is just that: a process of re-creation, as she continually shapes herself and her intimacy with the Spousal Lamb through meditation.<sup>13</sup> The *Wooing Group* texts are not complete, static artefacts.<sup>14</sup> To use Ann W. Astell's terminology on the Song of Songs, these meditations await their own fulfilment in the reader.<sup>15</sup>

Meditations were crucial to the anchoress' penitential existence. In Part IV, the *Ancrene Wisse*-author affirms that '[h]alie meditaciouns, inwarde ant meadlese ant angoisuse bonen' help to eradicate temptation, an essential penitential task in the anchorhold.<sup>16</sup> The author provides a Latin verse listing the focal points of meditative activity, followed by an English translation expanding each item with the imperative 'Pench' – a command suggesting a slow-moving and careful affective absorption (91: 877-885). Within this, he asserts the need for a ruminative timescale, placing meditation within the wider context of 'pohtes': affective cogitation in the heart (91: 886-887; 92: 899-904). He does not specify when meditation should take place, giving '[e]fter ower sunnen' as the only indication (91-92: 887-888). This reference to meditating 'after your sins' would suggest that meditation coincides with confessional preparation, perhaps occurring immediately prior to auricular confession. And as meditation is bound with the anchoress' confession, it is also inseparable from reading and prayer— a fact the *Ancrene Wisse*-author himself affirms (109: 1552-1557; 105: 1404).<sup>17</sup> Meditation, reading, and prayer are intertwined in the monastic and anchoritic existences, and all are necessary.

Passion meditation is especially vital for the anchoress, and indeed Jesus' last days dominate the *Wooing Group*. Meditators on the Passion are aware of the

difficulty of their goal: affective access to the most painful moment in Christian history. The irrecoverability of the Passion is not lost on the yearning readers, with the spiritual senses employed in a pursuit of imaginative presence.<sup>18</sup> But in the *Wooing Group*, affective pain is also felt by the anchoress due to her or Christ's absence. Like Psalmodic speakers, the speakers of these early English meditations are situated between absence and presence, between desire and fulfillment.<sup>19</sup> It will be useful to touch on this preoccupation with presence and absence in Latin and vernacular meditation, studying Aelred of Rievaulx's anchoritic guidance text and the prayers of Anselm of Canterbury, in conjunction with the possible Anglo-Norman analogue of the *Wooing Group*.

In *De institutione inclusarum*, Aelred guides the anchoress through an intricate meditation on the Passion. Each event coincides with the anchoress' and Aelred's affective presence and participation. Take, for instance, the Wounding of the Side:

Tunc unus ex militibus lancea latus eius aperuit, et exiuit sanguis et aqua. Festina, ne tardaueris, comede fauum cum melle tuo, bibe uinum tuum cum lacte tuo. Sanguis tibi in uinum uertitur ut inebrieris, in lac aqua mutatur ut nutriaris. Facta sunt tibi in petra flumina, in membris eius uulnera, et in maceria corporis eius cauerna, in quibus instar columbae latitans et deosculans singula ex sanguine eius fiant sicut uitta coccinea labia tua, et eloquium tuum dulce.<sup>20</sup>

(Then one of the soldiers opened his side with a lance, and there exited blood and water. Hasten, tarry not, eat your honeycomb with your honey, drink your wine with your milk. The blood is altered to wine to intoxicate you, the water is changed to milk to nourish you. For you there are streams in the rock, in his limbs wounds, clefts in the wall of his body, in which like a dove you hide yourself and kiss each one; from his blood, your lips become just as a scarlet ribbon, and your utterance sweet.)

Aelred shifts his tenses, moving from the past ('aperuit', 'exiuit') to the imperative and present ('festina', 'comede', 'bibe', 'uertitur', 'mutatur', 'sunt'), enabling the anchoress' affective participation at the moment the imagined events occur. The meditator is present in her/his heart, and it is through the heart that she/he nurtures affective pain in each imagined moment of the Passion.

In Anselm's 'Oratio ad Christum' the orphaned speaker attaches her/himself to the Face as a possible point of contact, but continues to yearn painfully.<sup>21</sup> Lamenting her/his absence from the Passion scene, the speaker paradoxically turns her/himself into a witness of Christ's anguish:

Cur, o anima mea, te praesentem non transfixit gladius doloris acutissimi, cum ferre non posses vulnerari lancea latus tui salvatoris? Cum videre nequires violari clavis manus et pedes tui plasmatoris? Cum horreres effundi sanguinem tui redemptoris?  
(7)

(Why, oh my soul, were you not present to be pierced by a sword of most acute sorrow, when you could not endure to see the piercing of the side of your saviour with a lance? Why could you not endure to see the nails violate the hands and feet of your Creator? Why did you not see with horror the blood poured from your Redeemer?)

Complete access to Christ is never granted in the course of this meditation. At its close, there is hope that he will come, but it is an eventuality that remains uncertain (9).

Such lack of fulfillment also extends to representation of the Virgin Mary. As attested in his letter to Gundolf, Anselm wrote three versions of his Prayer to Mary (135-136). Throughout the first meditation, the speaker is painfully aware of the

monstrous numbness ('immanitate stuporis') of sin that alienates her/him from the Holy Mother (13). In the third and final prayer, the meditator engages in a pursuit of Mary as an elusive love-object:

O nimis exaltata, quam sequi conatur affectus animae meae, quo aufugis aciem mentis meae? O pulchra ad intuendum, amabilis ad contemplandum, delectabilis ad amandum, quo evadis capacitatem cordis mei? Praestolare, domina, infirmam animam te sequentem. Ne abscondas te, domina, parum videnti animae te quaerenti. Miserare, domina, animam post te anhelando languentem.  
(21)

(Oh greatly exalted, when the affection of my heart attempts to pursue you, where do you escape the sharpness of my soul? Oh beautiful to gaze upon, lovable to be contemplated, delightful to love, where do you evade the capacity of my heart? Lady, wait for the weakness of the soul who pursues you. Do not conceal yourself, Lady, seeing the insufficient soul which searches for you! Have mercy, Lady, on the soul behind you, panting and languishing.)

As the infirm Anselmian meditator pants and languishes, Mary floats out of reach. Mary's lovability in this text extends beyond her role as the grieving mother— a Marian dominance which is also evident in *On God Ureisun of ure Lefdi*. Whilst 'Oratio ad Christum' bewails the soul's absence from the Crucifixion, unable as it is to witness Christ's wounds, Anselm's third Marian prayer focuses on the Lady's unattainability. In both texts, the meditator is burdened with absence: her/his own, or that of the Beloved Son and Mother.

The thirteenth-century Anglo-Norman 'Les lamentations Nostre Dame' is a pertinent analogue of the *Wooing Group*, as mentioned above. Taking the form of a lament by Mary, this Passion meditation betrays a fixation with affective presence and absence. The meditator requests direct affective access to the Passion, to the extent

that Mary's tears become concretized and quantifiable.<sup>22</sup> The text demands the mediator's affective engagement throughout, evoking a cosmic anguish:

Certes, il n'y ad nul queor que peust suffer a veer si grant anguisse come ele avoit, einz me merveillerei jeo si lui angle ne ploreient, neis en cele grant leessee lasus ou dolur ne poet estre.  
(p. 194)

(Certainly there is no heart that could suffer to see as great an anguish as she had. So I would marvel if the angels were not weeping, even in the sky up there, (of) great joy where sorrow cannot be.)

Though this Anglo-Norman meditation claims that no heart could suffer to see Mary's tremendous anguish, it is this that the mediator attempts. The anchoress reading the *Wooing Group* also has the power to create imaginative affective access to the Passion, but her absence continues to threaten the access she gains. She is engaged in a constant search for Christ and his Mother. Her affective pain is fostered both when she advances closer to her goal of intimacy, and when she is distanced from it. Each text will now be studied in turn, following the order of London, British Library, Cotton Nero A. xiv (N); *Pe Wohunge of ure Lauerd*, found in London, British Library, Cotton Titus D. xviii (T), will be treated separately at the close.

## **The Wooing Group**

### ***On God Ureisun of ure Lefdi***

For so long eliminated from the *Wooing Group*, *On God Ureisun of ure Lefdi* is a meditation in verse on Mary as the resplendent queen of Heaven. Unlike the other *Wooing Group* texts, this meditation is male-voiced, directed originally at a monastic audience. Its presence in N reveals an appropriation of this text by female readers,



though a puzzling reference to a ‘monk’ indicates that the meditations in **N** may have continued to be read by male religious.<sup>23</sup> George Kane surmises that this poem is ‘less an outburst of spontaneous spirituality than a deliberate form of worship, a full-scale devotional exercise designed to arouse religious emotion’.<sup>24</sup> It is a ‘full-scale devotional exercise’ that nurtures the meditator’s affective relationship to the Holy Mother in her state of bliss. As Caroline Cole argues, *Ureisun of ure Lefdi* is significantly placed at the start of the meditations in **N**, commencing the methodical development of the anchoress-Mary relationship. Although the present essay has reservations about the *Wooing Group* as a ‘holistic’ entity, the nurturance of the anchoress’ relationship to Mary, begun with such force in *Ureisun of ure Lefdi*, does become a central part of the anchoress’ suffering in the ensuing prose meditations.<sup>25</sup> As will be seen, in other *Wooing Group* texts, this evolving relationship takes place not in the delights of Heaven, but in the harrowing arena of the Crucifixion.

In addition to her inherently paradoxical nature as both mother and maiden, there exists another tension throughout *Ureisun of ure Lefdi* concerning this resplendent Queen (p. 5, l. 69). At once an independent power and a figure of intercession, she is bound with her Son but also evokes adoration from her devotees. The Virgin meditated upon is defined at the start and the close as ‘Cristes milde moder seynte/seinte Marie’ (p. 3, l. 1; p. 8, l. 171). She does not eclipse her Son. The speaker asserts in later stages of the meditation:

Pu ert mine soule wið-ute leasunge, / Efter þine leoue sune, leouest alre  
þinge[.]  
(p. 5, ll. 75-76)

To þe one is al mi trust, efter þine leoue sune[.]  
(p. 6, l. 125)

Her role as mediator between the wretched sinner and Christ is clear in the statement on the Five Wounds: ‘Vor cristes fif wunden ðu 3if me milce & ore’ (p. 6, l. 102) . Bestowed with the *Theotokos* identity, as in Anselm’s third Prayer to Mary (23), the Mother is also bound with God: ‘Swete Godes moder’ (p. 5, l. 67). Yet the speaker refers to the Virgin not merely as a vehicle for the sinner’s petition, but as a love-object. From the poem’s outset, the speaker’s love for Mary is pervasive. Differently from the other *Wooing Group* texts, it is constructed as a feudal relationship, the mediator a loyal and subservient retainer:

Mine liues leome, mi leoue lefdi, / To þe ich buwe & mine kneon ich beie, /  
And al min heorte blod to ðe ich offrie.  
(p. 3, ll. 2-4)

It is a ‘lofsong’ that never ends (p. 3, ll. 5-8). Both aspects of Mary’s identity in *Ureisun of ure Lefdi*— intercessor and lover— form the basis of the suffering cultivated in the later **N** meditations, and in *Wohunge*.

With adoration for the Virgin laid open in the meditative process, the focus shifts to a visual apprehension of her as the Crowned Queen of Heaven. The precision of the visual imagery is noticeable:<sup>26</sup>

al þin hird is i-schrud mid hwite ciclatune, / And alle heo beoð ikruned mid  
guldene krune; / Heo beoð so read so rose, so hwit so þe lilie, / and euer-more  
heo beoð gled and singeð þuruhut murie.  
(p. 4, ll. 51-54)

Prior to this passage with the gold, red and white in interplay, there is a mention of the ‘gold ringes’, the ‘blostmen hwite & reade’, and the ‘guldene chelle’ (p. 4, ll. 34, 37,

45). Colours, movements, and sounds merge into a deeply visual and aural meditative encounter of Paradise:

Mid brihte 3imstones hore krune is al biset, / And al heo doð þæt ham likeð, so  
þæt no þing ham ne let. / Ði leoue sune is hore king & þu ert hore kwene. / Ne  
beoð heo neuer i-dreaued mid winde ne mid reine; / Mid ham is euer more dei  
wið-ute nihte, / Song wið-ute seoruwe & sib wið-ute uihte; / Mid ham is  
muruðe moniuold wið-ute teone & treie, / Gleo-beames & gome inouh, liues  
wil & eche pleie.  
(p. 4, ll. 55-62)

Given the precision of this imagery, the anchoress' reading of this passage may have been reinforced by visual painting and artefacts: the anchoress employs a 'devotional literacy', to use Margaret Aston's term, which encompasses both textual and visual reading.<sup>27</sup> References in *Ancrene Wisse* indicate that twelfth- and thirteenth-century anchoresses may have kept crucifixes in their anchorholds, in addition to images and relics of saints (8: 60-63; 54: 250-252). Although Aelred warns his sister of an over-dependency on external images – which he says is symptomatic of an inner poverty – he permits images of the Virgin Mother and the Virgin disciple to complement that of the Passion (657, 659).<sup>28</sup> Perhaps the anchoress reading *Ureisun of ure Lefdi* embraces the image of Mary, and of others, as part of her devotional literacy; the images become texts, forming a dialogue with the meditative text in her hand. Louis Réau notes that the cherubim and seraphim are 'essential and indispensable' figures in medieval artistic depictions of the Coronation.<sup>29</sup> Their presence is clear in this meditation: 'Heih is þi kinestol / on-uppe cherubine, / Bi-uoren ðine leoue sune wiðinnen seraphine' (p. 3, ll. 25-26). Angelic beings are an insistent aspect of the Heavenly landscape (p. 3, l. 27, p. 4, l. 47). Moreover, the angels are themselves viewers in this visually evocative meditation, with an echo of Matthew 18:10: 'Murie dreameð engles biuoren þin onsene, / Pleieð & sweieð & singeð bitweonen; / Swuðe

wel ham likieð biuoren þe to beonne, / Vor heo neuer ne beoð sead þi ueir to iseonne’ (p. 3, ll. 27-30). The employment of visual images in conjunction with the text may have brought the reader closer to the Virgin Mother.

The meditator considers humanity’s inability to comprehend this Mother’s bliss: ‘Þine blisse ne mei no wiht understonden’ (p. 4, l. 31). As the rapturous Queen of Heaven, she is experientially removed from the meditator – a fact made explicit in the analogous ‘Les lamentations Nostre Dame’. Now the glorified (*glorifié*) Queen of Heaven, the Virgin of this Anglo-Norman text affirms the pastness of the Passion; she can no longer weep (p. 182). Mary’s sorrow is not entirely absent from *Ureisun of ure Lefdi*, however. The image of the sorrowful Mary standing near the Cross breaks through the texture of the meditation: ‘ðe muchele seoruwe ðet was o ðine mode / þo þu er ðe deaðe him bi-uore stode’ (p. 5, ll. 89-90). At this point in the meditation, the anchoress’ perspective fleetingly moves downwards and backwards: below and before the jubilation of the Queen in Heaven, the anchoress moves to the Mother’s sorrow on Calvary. She glimpses the Mary to be seen in the later **N** meditations, situated not on the Heavenly throne in joy, but by the Cross in agony. The two Mary figures— one the joyous Queen in Heaven, the other the anguished mother by the Cross— exist parallel to one another in the meditative imagination.

Yet both ‘Maries’ remain unreachable, hidden as the meditator seeks them. The bliss granted to Mary’s devotees in Paradise is inconceivable and ineffable, expressed in commonplace Pauline language (1 Corinthians 2:9; also Isaiah 64:4) (p. 4, ll. 47-50)). The meditator’s sight of this joyful scene is expressed with the modal verb ‘schulen’:

Per heo schulen resten þe her ðe doð wurschipe, / 3if heo 3emeð hore lif  
 cleane urom alle queadschipe; / þer ne schulen heo neuer karien ne swinken, /  
 ne weopen, ne murnen, ne helle stences stinken.  
 (p. 4, ll. 41-44)

The attainment of this unspeakable joy becomes dependent on the mercy of Mary, the meditator's virtue, and on the success of the meditative appeal itself. The male speaker entreats Mary at the close, 'And nu ich þe biseche vor ðire holinesse / þet þu bringe þene Munuch to þire glednesse / þet funde ðesne song bi ðe, mi looue leafdi' (p. 8, ll. 168-170). As the meditation nears this end, the speaker attempts to fuse with the Virgin in her entirety: 'Mi lif is þin, mi luue is þin, mine heorte blod is þin, / and 3if ich der seggen, mi leoue leafdi, þu ert min', speaker and Mary blended together with the rhyme of the possessive pronouns 'þin' and 'min' (p. 7, ll. 157-158). Mary, however, has at no point in *Ureisun of ure Lefdi* explicitly reciprocated the meditator's love. The succeeding meditations in **N** do not yearn for fusion with Mary, but the texts do enkindle a desire for entrance into the affective realms of both Mary and Christ. *Ureisun of ure Lefdi* has laid the foundation for both of these shifting and pain-inducing relationships.

### *On wel swuðe god ureisun of god almihti*

*On wel swuðe god ureisun of god almihti* (henceforth *Ureisun of God*) is a meditation devoted to a pursuit of intimacy with Christ; intimacy with the Holy Mother is also sought, but solely within the context of her attachment and privileged access to her son. This meditation at once provides the anchoress with material to create intimate access to Christ, yet also underscores her lack of closeness to him.<sup>30</sup> It does not

provide a narrative; the anchoress does not progress from distance to intimacy, nor is there a Passion sequence that she can follow. Rather, it is a collage of moments of possible intimacy with her Lover as she engages in her search. Like *Wohunge*, *Ureisun of God* opens its meditative journey by an evocation of the honey and sweetness imagery in the Song of Songs (4:3, 4:11, 5: 1) and Psalm 18:11 ('More to be desired than gold and many precious stones: and sweeter than honey and the honeycomb'):

Iesu soð god soð godes sune. Iesu soð god. soð mon. 7 soð meidenes bern.  
 Iesu min holi loue. mi sikere swetnesse. Iesu min heorte. mine soule hele.  
 Swete iesu mi leof. mi lif. mi leome . min healewi . min huniter. Ðu ert al þæt  
 ich hopie. Iesu mi weole. mi wunne. mi bliðe breostes blisse. Iesu teke þæt þu  
 ert so softe 7 so swete. 3et þerto þu ert so leoflich. so louelich. 7 so lufsum. þæt  
 te engles euer biholdeð þe. ne ne beoð heo neuer ful. forto logen on þe.  
 (p. 5, ll. 1-10)

The text first affirms the 'soð' doctrinal paradox of Christ's nature; the meditation is addressed to 'Jesus' rather than 'God' throughout, but he has been identified from this opening as 'true God', 'true God's son', and 'true man'. It is only after the doctrinal paradox is established that the meditation moves to affective interaction between the meditator and Christ. Christ is identified as the quality of sweetness itself: as he is 'god', 'godes son', 'maidene bern', 'min hali loue', he is also 'mi sikere swetnesse', and 'min huniter'. This identification of Christ as sweetness is built up as the incantatory opening progresses, enmeshing the anchoress within his all-embracing delectability. The image of the angels gazing avidly upon Christ, never feeling satiated by this sight (Matthew 18:10), echoes the image in *Ureisun of ure Lefdi* of the angels' rapt gazing upon Mary. In *Ureisun of God*, however, there is an increased sensuality in this viewing, bolstered by the cumulative imagery of sweetness. The

repeated invocation of the Name is also a powerful meditative exercise: the meditator surrounds each 'Iesu' clause with a spectrum of her own associations of Christ as Lover and as Sweetness.<sup>31</sup>

Aligned with the gazing angels, the imagery of sweetness interacts with imagery of light and dark. Having awakened the anchoress' taste-related and tactile capacities, her visual sense now comes into operation: 'Iesu al feir. a3ein hwam þe sunne nis buten ase a scheidewe. ase þeo þat leoseð hire liht; 7 schineð a3ein þine brihte leore uor hire þeosternesse'. This external brightness then gains entrance into the anchoress' darkest reaches, her cell and her soul: 'þu þet 3eouest hire light. 7 al ðet leome haueð. aliht mine þeostri heorte. 3if mi bur brihtnesse. 7 brihtte mine soule þet is suti. 7 make hire wurðe to þine swete wuninge.' (p. 5, ll. 11-18). Such imagery of light-dark contrasts may have been intensified for the anchoress by liturgical practice with the Paschal Vigil.<sup>32</sup>

Despite the anchoress' enmeshment within Christ's sweetness, and his entrance into her heart, she is keenly aware of her estrangement from him at this early point in *Ureisun of God*: 'woa is me þet ic am so freomede wi þe.' (p. 5, l. 21). The question, 'hwi er tu me so freomede?' is posed again later in the meditation (p. 7, ll. 85-86). As Christ lightens the heart, the speaker becomes aware of the incompatibility of earthly and heavenly love. To allow the Spousal Lamb entrance into her heart, the anchoress must expunge fleshly desires from it: 'fleslich luue 7 gostlich. eorþlich luue 7 heouenliche; ne muhen onone wise bedden in one breoste' (p. 5, ll. 27-29).<sup>33</sup> This statement on the irreconcilability of the earthly and heavenly joy is then reformed imagistically, as honey 'ilicked of þornes' (p. 6, ll. 35-36). A tactile quality of

sharpness is brought into the softness that has permeated the opening part of the meditation. The honey of earthly pleasure is rendered bitter by the thorn, a sharpness made almost palpably present on the tongue.<sup>34</sup>

As she tastes the bitterness of this life, the anchoress views, or asks why she cannot view, the stretching and spreading body of Christ: ‘hwi ne bihold ich hu þu streihtest þe for me on þe rode?’ (p. 6, ll. 47-48). Christ is first a lover (‘lefmon’) illuminating the anchoress’ dark heart and sooty soul (p. 5, ll. 19, 26). Now, in this stretched position, he is likened to a mother:<sup>35</sup>

hwi ne worpe ich me bitweonen þeoilke ermes so swiðe wide to spredde. 7  
iopeneð so þe moder deð hire ermes. hire leoue child for to bicluppen?  
(p. 6, ll. 48-54)

The anchoress reading *Ureisun of God* re-images herself in tactile intimacy with Christ-the-Mother: ‘hwi nam ich i þin ermes so istreihthe. 7 ispred on rode?’ (p. 6, ll. 57-62). Her movement into the Lover-Mother Christ’s arms, and the sight of him stretched out, are imagined intimacies. They are intimacies she longs for but which are never in the course of this meditation fulfilled, a fact stressed by the negative statements prefaced by the interrogative ‘hwi’. Her assertions refer to the fact that she is not in Christ’s arms. But through such assertion-negation, the possibility of this embrace is created.

The touch, absent yet also imaginatively present, moves to the anchoress’ heart: ‘A swete iesu hwi mid ermes of luue ne cluppe ich þe so feste. þet no þing þeonne ne muwe breiden mine heorte?’ (p. 7, ll. 77-79). The anchoress’ desire for the imagined bodily embrace has been replaced by a desire for an even more powerful



imaginative embrace, residing in her heart. She remains absent from this love-embrace with Christ, however, with her access to him blocked: the ‘attri sunnen’ form ‘þe lettunge’. These bitter sins become even more solid, imaged as a literal ‘wal’ placed between the anchoress and Christ, barring her from the embrace for which she yearns (p. 7, ll. 89-90). It is an image with a precedent in Isaiah 30:13; the image may have also originated from Aelred’s twenty-second liturgical sermon, for the nativity of Mary, where sins are imaged as a wall separating humanity from God.<sup>36</sup> Such palpable imagery of walls may also, as Denis Renevey suggests, be drawn from ‘the world of the anchorage’.<sup>37</sup> The walls of the anchorhold are intended to insulate the anchoress from sin, albeit not infallibly.<sup>38</sup> But the wall placed between the anchoress and the Host may also reinforce the anchoress’ distance from the Flesh of Christ. With the pyx constantly viewable to her, Christ’s Flesh is nonetheless unreachable from her cell. The speaker refers to her not-kissing of Christ in an act of remembrance: ‘hwi ne cusse ich þe sweteliche ine goste. wiþ swete munegunge of þine god deden?’ (p. 7, ll. 79-81). This question moves the anchoress away from bodily contact and towards a level of spiritual bonding, in the ‘goste’. But yet again, it is an intimacy founded on Christ’s ‘not-there-ness’.

The Virgin Mary then enters the meditation. As the anchoress is both lover and child, the Virgin is both mother and daughter to Christ, encapsulated in the typical paradox of her dual identity as maiden and mother (p. 9, ll. 138-140). A profound intimacy is portrayed between Christ and his mother-daughter, an intimacy from which the anchoress is painfully barred as she looks on. She remarks to the Virgin ‘owe muchele menske to boen moder of swich sune wið iholschipe of meiden’ (p. 9, ll. 142-144). In its simplicity, this statement is an expression of the utmost

longing— the Virgin shares a familiarity with Christ that the anchoress, a sinful human being, cannot. From this distance, the anchoress views an affectionate scene between mother and son. The incomplete version in London, Lambeth Palace Library, MS 487 breaks off before this scene is played out, but the full text is found in N:

he streccheð þene riht erm uorð. ase he stont orode. 7 beieð adun toward þe.  
his deorewurðe heaued. ase þauh he seide. Moder al þet þu wult; al ich wulle.  
(p. 9, ll. 146-149)

Christ reaches down to his mother in a way he never does to the anchoress, despite her many vehement requests. The anchoress also reads dialogue in Christ's movement towards his mother: He inclines his head towards his mother's, 'ase þauh he seide' that their desires are united. Blocking the anchoress from participation, this moment also serves to remind her that it is not only Christ's suffering that she must 'bihold' in her heart:

hwi leafdi hwi; nabe ich euer biforen mine heorte eihen. þeo ilke preo  
stondunges . þi sune was ituht on rode. [...] 7 þi stondunge leafdi. 7 sein  
iohanes ewangelistes weopinde otwo half wið sorhfule sikes?  
(p. 9, ll. 149-56)

As her heart allows her to embrace spiritually, her 'heorte eihen' give her the potential for spiritual sight. Through her heart-eyes she has the potential to see the suffering of Christ, the Virgin, and John the Evangelist; all types and loci of suffering merge in this spiritual lens. Whilst she asks why she does not see these three standing figures, she also conjures the image of their pain in her heart-eyes. The anchoress then once again acknowledges her sinfulness as the reason for her lack of intimacy with Christ. She yearns for a burning ('brune') devotion in her heart, which would cast out all sins:

þis þoht wolde sikerliche ontenden so soð luue on me. Nere þe heorte so cold.  
 þet ne schulde neuer sunne habben forðer in3ong. þer þis brune were.  
 (p. 9, ll. 157-160)

Here, the anchoress voices a common denunciation of lukewarm devotion.<sup>39</sup> Given the modal verbs ‘willen’ and ‘schulen’, it is clear that the blazing devotion has not yet been enkindled. Meditation on the Beloved ‘would’ kindle true love, and this true love ‘should’ expunge all sin – but this can still only be imaged. By the same token, the fact that this superior devotion can even be imagined is a meditative gift to the anchoress, allowing her to cultivate precious burns in her heart.

The meditation ends with movement, a flight from the pursuing devil to the arms of Christ: ‘a iesu hwuder schal ich fleon hwon þe deouel hunteð efter me bute to þine rode?’ (p. 9, ll. 162-164). This is set alongside the blessed stasis of the Holy Mother, her standing position invoking the haunting *stabat mater dolorosa* hymn (p. 9, ll. 151, 154).<sup>40</sup> It is a stability of abode that the anchoress is encouraged to emulate in *Wohunge. Ureisun of God*, however, ends with an emphasis on the anchoress’ movement. She herself must move towards Christ, on his static Cross, to gain his intimacy: he will not release his right arm to reach down towards her. Even by the end of *Ureisun of God*, the anchoress has still fallen short of closeness in her meditative play, questioning her failure to view Christ, his mother and the virgin disciple, and to think upon Christ’s sacrifice (p. 9, ll. 150-159). In the following meditation in **N**, the anchoress prays to this Mother standing by the Cross.

### *On Lofsong of ure Lefdi*

Like *Ureisun of ure Lefdi*, *On Lofsong of ure Lefdi* is encased as a prayer to the Virgin. The Virgin's role is intercessory and protective. She is a conciliator between the speaker and her abused Son: 'ich on sori sunfule þing; bidde þin ore. [...] helpe me milzfule meiden; in alle mine neoden' (p. 16, ll. 6-10). Transparent as the Virgin might be in this meditation— in contrast to *Ureisun of ure Lefdi*, *Ureisun of God*, *On Lofsong of ure Louerde*, and *Þe Wohunge of ure Lauerd*, where she is a meditative focal point— she still has an undeniable presence.<sup>41</sup> To invoke Innes-Parker's terms, there is a confessional quality to *Lofsong of ure Lefdi*.<sup>42</sup> This is clear in the first half, and the closing remarks. Thorough, contrite, self-accusatory and carefully expressed, the text encapsulates a worthy confession. The meditator shows an awareness of the Abelardian premise that consent, and not the deed itself, is the basis of sin:

þus ich am lodliche ihurt ine licame . 7 ine soule; wið alle cunnes sunnen. for  
þau þet werc nere i þe bodie; þe wil was in þe heorte  
(p. 17, ll. 31-34)

This is bolstered by a Passion sequence in this meditation, which shifts away from the confessional framework. It attempts to break free from a chronological narrative, in turn enabling the anchoress to meditate on isolable images of Christ's pain (pp. 17-18, ll. 40-67).

The anchoress has used her sight to gaze upon each image of Christ's anguish, and now her sight of Christ's ascension ('up ariste') moves her upwards:

from heih 7 toherre euer ðet ich iseo in syon þe heie tur of heouene; þene  
louerd of leome. þet te engles euer biholdeð . 7 euer so lengrre so heo 3irneð  
hit  
(p. 18, ll. 78-83)

The meditative experience of Paradise is also aural, with the heavenly ‘seli song’ bursting forth, comparable with the singing of Heaven in Hugh of Saint-Victor’s (1096-1141) *De anima* (p. 18, l. 83).<sup>43</sup> The anchoress’ exposure in her cell to the singing of psalmody, and to liturgical sound, may have influenced her meditation. We might remember the *Ancrene Wisse*-author’s order in Part I to listen closely to the canonical hours whilst not singing along too loudly (18: 401-403). In *Lofsong of ure Lefdi*, the anchoritic reader’s visual-aural exploration of Heaven recalls that in *Ureisun of ure Lefdi*. But, as in *Ureisun of ure Lefdi*, the verbs are conditional. Whilst the anchoress is given this glimpse of Heaven to see her potential fulfillment, the meditation cannot grant her such a privilege. The anchoress’ near-sight and hearing of Heaven develops into a comprehension of God in the following meditation in N, *Lofsong of ure Louerde*.

### *On Lofsong of ure Louerde*

*On Lofsong of ure Louerde* has received less critical attention than it deserves. This meditation enables a striking level of confidence in the anchoress, with her assurance of intimacy with the Lord growing as the meditation progresses. To recall R. W. Southern’s phrase on Anselmian prayers, *Lofsong of ure Louerde* works within the secrecy of her soul: the speaker twice says she beseeches the Lord with ‘inwarde heorte’ (p. 10, l. 5, p. 13, ll. 112-3). Like the opening of *Ureisun of God*, the beginning lines of *Lofsong of ure Louerde* identify Christ’s paradoxical nature as ‘godes sune soð godd 7 soð mon’ (p. 10, l. 1). This text addresses itself to ‘God’ more frequently than is the case in *Ureisun of God*, but apart from the opening statement of Jesus Christ as ‘God’s son, true God, and true man’ no obvious distinction is made

between the addressees of ‘God’ and ‘Iesu crist’; the two also merge into a general ‘drihten’ or ‘louerde’.<sup>44</sup> As in *Ureisun of God*, the anchoress brings into her heart the varying forms of suffering experienced by Christ, Mary, and John:

ich bidde 7 biseche þe wið inwarde heorte þurh þin akennednesse <ine>  
meidenes licame of þe holi Goste. [...] þuruh al þet ðu tawhtest. 7 þoledest for  
sunfule in eorðe. þurh þine vif wunden. [...] 7 þine moderes ream 7 sein  
i[o]hanes soruwe[.]  
(p. 10, ll. 12-16)<sup>45</sup>

This incantatory account of the Passion provides brief stock references that are used as meditative reflexes, stimulating the meditator’s response to the agony on Calvary without recounting the details of the scene – presumably because the details are already familiar and imaginatively available to her. Despite its brief, incantatory nature, the anchoress hears the sounds of pain resonating in the space of the anchorhold. The reference to the Virgin Mary’s ‘ream’ describes an audible lamentation: in Middle English, ‘ream’ is aligned with the release of sound in lament, horror, and agony, and in later texts (c. 1300) is even associated with loud animalistic noises.<sup>46</sup> Both the Mother and John become listening intercessory figures, hearing the anchoress’ supplications in reward for hearing the Virgin’s pain (p. 11, ll. 31-33). But the anchoress is still unable to speak to God directly.

At first, the speaker begs God not to look at her repulsive sins, due to her ‘ugge’ of his ‘eie’: ‘ne bihold þu ham nout’ (p. 11, ll. 36-37). However, this attempt to conceal sins from the Lord begins to disintegrate, as his sufferings are mapped onto the speaker. The blood he sheds on the Cross washes the anchoress’ sinful soul; his ‘passiun’ quenches the ‘passiun’ of the anchoress’ sins; his ‘pinen’

buy the anchoress from the ‘pinen of helle’; and finally, his death ‘adeadie þe deaðliche lustes of mine licame’ (pp. 11-12, ll. 43-61). Each term of Christ’s suffering is connected with an equivalent term of sin. This paradox of concealment-connection is followed by two other paradoxes. First, the anchoress is both dead and alive, speaking with Paul (Galatians 2:20): ‘ich muwe siggen wið seinte powel þet seið. ich liuie nout ich; auh crist liueð in me’ (p. 12, ll. 67-69). Secondly, she is both high and low. The anchoress imagines Christ’s ascension pulling up her own soul, debased in sin: ‘ich ham heie iclumben wið þis ilke bone. þet ligge so lowe. 7 uor eorðliche luren so muche mislicunge habbe in mine heorte.’ (p. 12, ll. 69-72). The dynamics of the Lord-anchoress relationship have delicately altered in this meditative search. Having been too afraid to reveal herself to God, she now speaks with the voice of Paul, acknowledging that she is alive to the Lord but dead to the world, and is at least partly ‘high’ with him.

She now requests that the gentle Christ both looks at and hears her:

leoue louerd iesu crist loke toward me ase ich ligge lowe. [...] heie helinde beih þe to me. 7 buh to mine bonen.  
(p. 12, ll. 76-79).

In *Ureisun of God*, the anchoress only watches as Christ bends down towards his mother. Here, the anchoress requests the same movement towards her (‘beih þe to me’). Under Christ’s gaze and attentively listening ear, she now casts herself as a pitiful sight, cultivating in herself an utter sense of worthlessness:

Nabbich nowðer in me wisdom ne wurschipe 7 am redleas nab ich  
<[h]waremide le[de]n mi lif iþis[se] worlde 7 am> helples. [...] Deorewurðe drihten ase þu ert redlease red. red me þet am helples 7 redles.  
(p. 12, ll. 79-88)<sup>47</sup>

She becomes like the cunning vagrant who shows her sores to the Lord in order to gain his mercy in Part V of *Ancrene Wisse* (124-125: 409-33). This passage in *Lofsong of ure Louerde* echoes the techniques of self-abnegation employed in Anselmian meditations, with the speaker in Anselm's second Prayer to St John the Evangelist casting herself as a beggar (45-49). In Anselm's Prayer to St John the Baptist, the meditator cannot bear the interior horror of her face, yet feels unable to examine or flee from herself (28). Regardless of her all-consuming self-hatred, the speaker of *Lofsong of ure Louerde* does not flee, but rather tolerates, examines, and presents to Christ her own self— a meditative act that is testament to her mounting confidence. As she grows closer to him, Christ's voice is heard and spoken: 'uor þeo hwile ðet ich truste uppo mon þu seidest. hold þe to ham 7 lettest me al iwurden wið þeo þet ich truste uppon.' (pp. 12-13, ll. 93-96). Though it is reported speech, the absorption of Christ's voice into the anchoress' own as she speaks the meditation aloud is a sign of her growing confidence in Christ's presence. With this increased assurance, the Song of Songs— that most challenging and dangerous of biblical books— is brought openly into the texture of the meditation. In a bold gesture of vernacular appropriation, the speaker assumes the voice of the Bride in Canticles 2:6 and 8:3 ('His left hand is under my head, and his right hand shall embrace me'):

let me beo þi leouemon 7 siggen ase heo seið. leof wið þi luft erm. þet is. wið þine worldliche 3eouen hold up min heauwed ðet ich þuruh to mucche wone ne falle i fulðe of sunne. 7 leof wið þin riht erm. þet is in heuene wið endeleasse blissen biclupe me abuten.  
(p. 13, ll. 117-124)



In Bernard of Clairvaux's († 1153) fifty-first sermon, the Bride's statement is characterized by confidence.<sup>48</sup> Like the Bride whose voice she assumes, the anchoress has nurtured her affective literacy to the extent that she can request Christ's right arm with self-assurance.

As the meditation draws nearer to its end, the anchoress more insistently appropriates biblical and patristic voices in English gloss. They occur in quick succession, almost entering into a dialogue in the anchoress' soul. She cites the voice of David in the Psalter, seemingly based on Psalm 26:10 ('For my father and my mother have left me, but the Lord hath taken me up'), and then 20:3 ('Thou has given him his heart's desire: and hast not withholden from him the will of his lips.')

uor þus seið þe salmwruhte dauīð i þe sawter. þe world haueð forlet me. 7  
godd haweð underfo me. eft elleshwar he seið. haue þi licung ine godd. 7 he  
wule 3iuen þe bonen of þine heorte. vnwrih him þene wei þet is þi wilnunge. 7  
he wule hit forðen.  
(p. 14, ll. 139-144)

Through David's voice, the speaker shows her trust in God's reception of her, and in his capacity to grant the 'bonen' and 'wilnunge' of her heart. She now becomes gladly aware of God's knowledge of her affective space, speaking to him without the need of a mediator: 'þu wost hwat ich wilni al weldinde Godd [...]'. The bending of the meditator's will to God is followed by a statement of trust in God's capacity for protection and goodness (p. 14, ll. 144-147). Through a vernacular gloss of Augustine's words, she expresses her newfound understanding of the need to surrender earthly loves:<sup>49</sup>

uor nu ich understonde hu soð hit is ðet seint austin seið in his boc. uniseli is  
ðet is wið luue to eni eorðlich þing iteied. uor euer bið ðet swete; abouht mid  
twofold of bittre.  
(p. 14, ll. 152-159)

In *Ureisun of God*, the joy of heaven is honey that must be licked off the thorn of earthly suffering. Here in *Lofsong of ure Louerde*, each earthly pleasure is burdened with a twofold bitterness. It is an Augustinian precept that the anchoress comprehends (‘ich understonde’) and repeats assuredly. The meditation ends with a lucid petition to God, spoken by a self-assured anchoress who trusts in his mercy— entirely different from the fearful, self-concealing speaker earlier in the meditation (pp. 14-15, ll. 160-182).

*Lofsong of ure Louerde* is the last of the meditations in **N**. Cole convincingly argues that in this manuscript, the speaker of *Lofsong of ure Louerde* ‘reworks the previous meditations to look forward to the final assertive statement of belief’.<sup>50</sup> The assertive statement of belief also runs into the following text in **N**, the Apostle’s Creed. As the Creed-speaker declares: ‘I bileue on ðe holi goste 7 on holi chirche’ (fols 131r-131v). Speaking with a series of different biblical and patristic voices throughout *Lofsong of ure Louerde*, the anchoress is subsequently transported into the realm of communal devotion in the Creed.<sup>51</sup> Though the anchoress cannot participate directly in the communal service, she is here situated within this wider community, all joined in love of Christ.<sup>52</sup> It is love of Christ that forms the core of the longest of the *Wooing Group* meditations, *Pe Wohunge of ure Lauerd*, found in **T**.

### *Pe Wohunge of ure Lauerd*

At its heart, *Pe Wohunge of ure Lauerd* (henceforth *Wohunge*) is a meditation on Christ’s lovability. This is encapsulated in the incantatory refrain repeated by the

anchoress throughout the meditation: ‘A iesu mi swete iesu leue þat te luue of þe beo al mi likinge.’ (p. 21, ll. 55-57ff). Whilst the anchoress does not achieve comfortable intimacy with Christ or his mother, *Wohunge* does bring her closest to intimacy with him. Like the opening of *Ureisun of God*, the incantatory opening of *Wohunge* uses imagery from the Canticles (4:3, 4:11, 5:1) and Psalm 18:10 to invoke Christ’s sweetness: ‘Iesu swete iesu. mi druð. mi derling. mi drihtin. mi healend. mi huniter. mi haliwei. Swetter is munegunge of þe þen mildeu o muðe.’ (p. 20, ll. 1-5). The imagery of sweetness is laced with an aural quality through an echo of the *Dulcis Iesu memoria* hymn.<sup>53</sup> The isolated images of love and sweetness—‘mi derling’, ‘mi huniter’, ‘mi haliwei’—allow the anchoress to attach and build up associations for the images, at once self-contained yet also interconnected. A similar meditative flexibility is evident later in the text, with the various identities of Christ as lover: he is ‘mi luue. mi lif. mi leof. mi luueleuest’, and ‘mi luue. mi lef. mi lif’ (p. 21, ll. 33-34, p. 37, ll. 635-6). This meditative exercise enables the anchoress to develop and interweave her own associations of Christ within each isolable term of his lover-identity.

The first half of the meditation engages with the deep-rooted tradition of Christ’s ‘conditions of eligibility’.<sup>54</sup> Whilst these conditions of eligibility do construct Christ as a ‘wooer’, enticing the anchoress to love him, this is all imagined and spoken by the anchoress herself. She first enumerates the reasons why a person might be loved, and subsequently demonstrates Christ’s fulfilment of each criterion at length (pp. 20-27, ll. 13-251). Her arguments are then summarized, leading onto the next section of Christ’s ‘harde atele hurtes’ as the greatest condition of his love-worthiness (p. 27, ll. 252-262). Christ himself does not speak at this point, unlike the Lover-

Christ of *Ancrene Wisse*, who voices his own eligibility (149: 187-191). The *Ancrene Wisse*-Christ woos the anchoress, albeit threateningly; the *Wohunge*-Christ is only constructed as a wooer in the anchoress' meditative imagination.

Christ is also poised to satisfy a range of interpersonal roles for the anchoress, being 'mare þen fader. mare þen moder'. He is also said to be more than a brother, sister, or friend (pp. 26-27, ll. 248-251). When recounting Christ's poverty, the anchoress images the tender body of the baby Christ, with his 'nesche childes limes' (p. 29, ll. 324-5). She images this baby suckling from his mother to ease his hunger: 'i þi childhad hafdes tu þe pappe to þi fode. 7 ti moder readi hwen þu pappe 3erndes' (p. 29, ll. 331-334). This fleeting scene parallels that on Calvary in *Ureisun of God*, where the anchoress observes— but does not partake in— the affectionate scene between Mary and Christ. Here in *Wohunge*, she is once again able to detect familiarity and responsiveness between Christ and his mother; the baby Christ is hungry, and his mother is ready to feed him. And here again, the anchoress herself cannot participate in the tender interaction.

This image of Christ's destitution leads the speaker into a meditation on the shame he endures: '[p]ouerte wið menske is eað forto þolien', she observes (p. 30, ll. 366-367). As he is shamefully condemned, the words of the condemners are spoken; the anchoress assumes these voices in her meditation, becoming both Christ's defender yet also, as a sinful human being, a contributor to his shame. The voices speak with insistent repetition: 'heng heng þat treitur iewus on rode. Heng him o rode. 7 lese us Baraban' (p. 30, ll. 384-386). This meditative exploration of Christ's shame includes a close-up of his face as the 'sunefule men' in his 'neb spitted' (p. 30, l. 390).

Working within the wider tradition of devotion to the Face, with Christ as the unique and perfect image of the Godhead, the meditator focuses on his desecrated visage (pp. 30-31, ll. 391-400).<sup>55</sup> The anchoress is given fleeting, unclear glimpses of the Face: she is kept at a remove from complete sight of Christ. But Christ's voice is imagined and spoken by the anchoress within her meditation, based on a Christological interpretation of Psalm 68:8:

*Scito quoniam propter te sustinui opprobrium operuit confusio faciem meam.*  
 [You may be sure since for you I suffered reproach, shame covered my face.]  
 Vnderstond þu seist 7 herteliche þenke þat i for þe luue of þe þolede schome 7  
 bismere . 7 schomeliche spateling of unwurði ribauz þa heaðene hundes hilede  
 mi neb for þe. As tah he seide. ne dred tu nawt for þe i of me to þole schome  
 of worlde wiðute þine Gulte.  
 (p. 31, ll. 402-414)

Hearing Christ's voice speaking to and for her, the anchoress is closer to him than she has been so far in *Wohunge*. This is the only instance in the *Wooing Group* that scripture is quoted in Latin, differing from the English renditions in *Lofsong of ure Louerde*: in this moment in *Wohunge*, the anchoress draws nearer to the scriptural voice of her Lover. She seems to respond directly to Christ's statement in her subsequent assertion: 'Bote schome ouer schomes þoledes tu hwen þu wes henged bituhhe twa þeofes' (p. 31, ll. 415-417). The Latin scripture facilitates a brief moment of dialogue between Lover and Beloved, followed by an in-depth, chronological account of her Lover's torture, with the anchoress shifting between participatory and observational roles (p. 33, ll. 472-495).

The culmination of the vivid Passion scene comes at the moment of his death. His dead body is still not free from violation 'Bote ne þinche ham nawt 3et þat

he is ful pinet. ne þat rewfule deade bodi nulen ha nawt friðie.’ (p. 34, ll. 536-544).

The cumulative agony of the observing anchoress reaches its apex in this final act of senseless abuse. Her intense affective suffering at this point is emphasized by the shift away from the rhythmic ‘A hu’/ ‘A nu’ conjunctions that have been accumulating tension. Once the moment of death is reached, she describes the action in short statements replete with active verbs. It is at this moment of incomparable pain, however, that she also reaches absolute clarity. She gains a profound intimacy with Christ, unparalleled in any of the *Wooing Group* texts. The Wounded Heart enables the anchoress’ entrance, where she is invited to read the Spousal Lamb’s love letters: ‘A swete iesu þu oppnes me þin herte for to cnawe witerliche □ in to redden trewe luue lettres.’ (p. 35, ll. 543-551).

There do remain limits to the anchoress’ intimacy in *Wohunge*, however; the search for intimacy persists. The anchoress’ discovery of Christ’s love in the epistles is expressed not as a certainty, but as a possibility, with the modal verb ‘mai’: ‘for þer i mai openlich seo hu muchel þu me luuedes’ (emphasis added). Moreover, the entrance into Christ is short-lived. There is a slight distancing in the anchoress’ subsequent exclamation: ‘Wið wrange schuld i þe min heorte wearnen siðen þat tu bohtes herte for herte.’ (p. 35, ll. 551-3). The speaker seems to have withdrawn slightly from the ecstatic submersion in Christ’s heart; she is now able to perceive her own heart in relation to Christ’s, and to imagine a possible exchange of hearts. And after this comment, the anchoress turns outwards from the Heart to the Virgin Mary, outside Christ’s body (p. 35, ll. 554-6).

The perspective then shifts back to Christ, with the anchoress and her Lamb sealed together in an erotic enclosure. Christ has brought the anchoress ‘fra þe world’ to the ‘bur’ of his ‘burðe’ (p. 35, ll. 573-4). This echoes the Bride’s assertion in Song of Songs 3:4, though here it is Christ’s place of birth. Together ‘staked’ in the confined chamber— a place of birth and sexual discovery— the anchoress, along with the author writing the text, imagines an intimate sexual encounter with Christ: ‘I mai þer þe swa sweteli kissen 7 cluppen’ (p. 35, ll. 574-576). The anchoress does not report Christ’s response, however, and the intimacy is again presented as a possibility with the modal verb ‘mai’. Not entirely fulfilled in her erotic embrace of Christ, the anchoress acknowledges her inadequacy, here assuming the voice of the ‘salmewrihte’ in Psalm 115:12: ‘Lauerd hwat mai i 3elde þe for al þat tu haues 3iuen me’ (p. 36, ll. 582-3). The anchoress attempts to give him her entire self; she and Christ are ‘spered’ together on the cross:

Mi bodi henge wið þi bodi neiled o rode. Sperred querfaste wiðinne fowr wahes 7 henge i wile wið þe 7 neauer mare of mi rode cume til þat i deie. [...] A iesu swa swet hit is wið þe to henge.  
(p. 36, ll. 590-602)

The fleeting gesture towards *Brautmystik* in the Wounded Heart is now usurped by a shared bodily hanging on the cross.<sup>56</sup> She continues to shuttle between yearning and fulfillment, with the use of the subjunctive mood and future tense (‘Mi bodi henge’, and ‘henge i wile’) creating a sense of the anchoress not being there, of her intimacy with Christ not being fact. Yet this is followed by the indicative mood: ‘A. iesu swa swet hit *is* wið þe to henge’ (emphasis added). Moving away from the uncertain realm of the subjunctive and future, the anchoress uses the indicative mood to assert her

fulfilment of a shared crucifixion. For this moment, she has reached her Lover, and hangs beside him in pain.

The recreational nature of all five *Wooing Group* texts should not belie their significance for the anchoritic reader. The final testament from the *Wohunge*-author emphasizes the need to read the text in order to nurture her relationship with the Lord:

Prei for me mi leue suster. þis haue i writen þe for þi þat wordes ofte quemen  
þe heorte to þenken on ure lauerd And for þi hwen þu art on eise carpe toward  
iesu 7 seie þise wordes [...].  
(pp. 37-38, ll. 645-653)

His *envoi* sounds oddly muted when compared to the rest of the text. Like all the *Wooing Group* texts, *Wohunge* is a meditative tool, read by the anchoress as she re-creates herself in meditation. *Ureisun of ure Lefdi*, *Uriesun of God*, *Lofsong of ure Lefdi*, *Lofsong of ure Louerde*, and *Wohunge* itself are necessary instruments with which she tills the land of her heart.<sup>57</sup> Each text is shaped to generate the anchoress' affective pain as she seeks intimacy with Christ and Mary. Like the psalmist of Psalm 38:4, the anchoress reads the texts to kindle meditation within her. Once ignited, she searches with the Bride of Canticles 5:17 for the Beloved she cannot yet fully find.

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<sup>1</sup> Mark Amsler, *Affective Literacies: Writing and Multilingualism in the Late Middle Ages* (Turnhout, 2011), p. 147. For the term 'devotional literacies', see Margaret Aston, *Lollards and Reformers: Images and Literacy in Late Medieval Religion* (London, 1984), pp. 101-133; see also Jennifer Bryan, *Looking Inward: Devotional Reading and the Private Self in Late Medieval England* (Philadelphia, 2008), especially p. 3.



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<sup>2</sup> On meditations as ‘tools’, see further Rachel Fulton, ‘Praying with Anselm at Admont: A Meditation on Practice’, *Speculum* lxxxi (2006), 700-733 (717). On the *Wooing Group* as ‘emotive rather than emotional’, see Bella Millett, ‘The *Ancrene Wisse* Group’, in *A Companion to Middle English Prose*, ed. A. S. G. Edwards (Cambridge, 2004), pp. 1-17 (p. 5).

<sup>3</sup> The *Wooing Group* texts are not best characterized as ‘mystical’. However, for the games of absence and presence in mystical writing, see Vincent Gillespie with Maggie Ross, ‘The Apophatic Image: the Poetics of Effacement in Julian of Norwich’, in *Looking in Holy Books: Essays on Late Medieval Religious Writing in England* (Turnhout, 2011), pp. 277-305 (for the phrase ‘game of mystical hide and seek’, see p. 278); Denis Renevey, *Language, Self and Love: Hermeneutics in the Writings of Richard Rolle and the Commentaries on the Song of Songs* (Cardiff, 2001), p. 58; and Marion Glasscoe, *English Medieval Mystics: Games of Faith* (NY, 1993) (especially p. 3).

<sup>4</sup> Renevey, ‘The Moving of the Soul: the Functions of Metaphors of Love in the Writings of Richard Rolle and Antecedent Texts of the Mediaeval Mystical Tradition’ (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Oxford, 1993), pp. 80–81; and Caroline Cole, ‘The Integrity of Text and Context in the Prayers of British Library Cotton MS Nero A. XIV’, *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen*, civ (2003), 85–94 (especially 88–93).

<sup>5</sup> See *The Wooing of Our Lord and the Wooing Group Prayers*, ed. and trans. Catherine Innes-Parker (Peterborough, Ontario, 2015), p. 23.

<sup>6</sup> For a recent overview of the readership of and scholarship on the *Wooing Group*, see A. S. Lazikani, *Cultivating the Heart: Feeling and Emotion in Twelfth- and Thirteenth-Century Religious Texts* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2015), pp. 8-10.

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<sup>7</sup> Sarah Salih, 'Transvestism in the Anchorhold', in *The Milieu and Context of the Wohunge Group*, ed. Susannah Mary Chewning (Cardiff, 2009), pp. 148-164 (pp. 152, 156-158).

<sup>8</sup> For a more detailed explanation of sources and the texts' various relationships, see Lazikani, *Cultivating the Heart*, pp. 8-10.

<sup>9</sup> On female readership, see further R. W. Southern, *Saint Anselm and his Biographer: A Study of Monastic Life and Thought, 1059 - c. 1130* (Cambridge, 1966), p. 43, and Benedicta Ward, trans., *The Prayers and Meditations of St. Anselm* (Harmondsworth, 1973), p. 277. See also Otto Pächt, 'The Illustrations of St. Anselm's *Prayers and Meditations*', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, xix, no. 112 (1956), 68-83.

<sup>10</sup> For dating of the surviving manuscripts and background to the text, see '*Cher alme*': *Texts of Anglo-Norman Piety*, ed. Tony Hunt and trans. Jane Bliss (Arizona, 2010), p. 181. Hunt and Bliss use the text of 'Les lamentations Nostre Dame' in Dublin, Trinity College, MS 374, with corrections from Cambridge, Emmanuel Coll., MS 106 (I. 4. 31); they date MS 374 to s.xiii<sup>2</sup>, and MS 106 to s. xiv<sup>m</sup>. See Hunt, ed. and Bliss, trans. (2010), p. 181. References are to this edition. See also *Anglo-Norman Literature: A Guide to Texts and Manuscripts*, ed. Ruth J. Dean with Maureen B. M. Boulton (London, 1999), p. 479 (item 955).

<sup>11</sup> Nicholas Watson, 'Afterword: "On Eise"', in *The Milieu and Context*, pp. 194-210. *Pe Wohunge of ure Lauerd*, etc, ed. W. Meredith Thompson, EETS O.S. 241 (1958), p. 38, ll. 650-651. All subsequent references to the *Wooing Group*, apart from *On God Ureisun of ure Lefdi*, are to this edition: abbreviations (with the exception of the *Tironian nota*) are expanded, word-spacing is modernized, and 'wynn' is rendered

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‘w’. A similar phrase is found at the close of *Ancrene Wisse* (*Ancrene Wisse*, ed. Bella Millett, 2 Vols, EETS O.S. 325 and 326 (2005-2006), I, Part VIII, 164: 336).

<sup>12</sup> Watson, ‘Afterword’, p. 208.

<sup>13</sup> ‘Recreate’ with the sense of ‘restore to a good or wholesome condition, refresh’, stems from Latin *recreare*, re + ‘create’. Cited from *The Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology*, ed. C. T. Onions (Oxford, 1966), p. 747.

<sup>14</sup> See further Watson, ‘Afterword’, p. 200.

<sup>15</sup> Ann W. Astell, *The Song of Songs in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca, 1990), p. 40.

<sup>16</sup> *Ancrene Wisse*, ed. Bella Millett, 2 Vols, EETS O.S. 325 and 326 (2005-2006), I, Part IV, 91: 868-869; all subsequent references are to this edition.

<sup>17</sup> See further Ward, trans. *The Prayers and Meditations of St. Anselm*, pp. 43-44; and Gillespie, *Looking in Holy Books*, pp. 114-115.

<sup>18</sup> See further Sarah McNamer, *Affective Meditation and the Invention of Medieval Compassion* (Philadelphia, 2010), p. 1.

<sup>19</sup> Throughout the Psalms, the speakers are poised between sureness that God hears their prayers, and fear that their prayers fall on unhearing ears. See, for example: Psalms 4:3, 12:4, 26:7, 37:15, 54:1-2, 56:2, 56:7, 65:18, 68:13, 68:16, 68:17, 85:1, 101:1-2, 101:20, 107:6, 118:145, 118:149, 119:1, 137:3, 140:1, 142:1, 142:7.

<sup>20</sup> *De institutione inclusarum*, in *Aelredi Rievallensis Opera Omnia: I Opera Ascetica*, ed. A. Hoste and C. H. Talbot. *Corpus Christianorum Continuatio Mediaevalis*, i (Turnhout, 1971), 671; all subsequent references are to this edition.

<sup>21</sup> *Orationes sive meditationes*, in *S. Anselmi Cantuariensis Archiepiscopi Opera Omnia*, 6 vols, ed. F. S. Schmitt, III (Stuttgart, 1968), 7; all subsequent references are to this edition. On female readership of Anselmian prayers, see further R. W. Southern, *Saint Anselm and his Biographer*, especially p. 43.

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<sup>22</sup> ‘*Cher alme*’: *Texts of Anglo-Norman Piety*, ed. Tony Hunt and trans. Jane Bliss (Arizona, 2010), p. 182; all subsequent references are to this edition.

<sup>23</sup> *English Lyrics of the Thirteenth Century*, ed. Carleton Brown (Oxford, 1932), p. 8, ll. 168-170; all subsequent references to *Ureisun of ure Lefdi* are to this edition. On its voice and readership, see further Catherine Innes-Parker, ‘*Pe Wohunge of ure Lauerd* and the Tradition of Affective Devotion’, in *The Milieu and Context*, p. 97; and Denis Renevey, ‘The Moving of the Soul’, pp. 80–81.

<sup>24</sup> George Kane, *Middle English Literature: A Critical Study of the Romances, the Religious Lyrics and Piers Plowman* (NY, 1951), p. 134.

<sup>25</sup> See Caroline Cole, ‘The Integrity of Text and Context’, 80, 93.

<sup>26</sup> See further Kane, *Middle English Literature*, p. 135.

<sup>27</sup> Aston, *Lollards and Reformers*, pp. 101–133 (especially p. 118). On visual images used by other female religious, see Jeffrey Hamburger, *Nuns as Artists: the Visual Culture of a Medieval Convent* (Berkeley, 1997), especially pp. 177-178 and p. 192.

<sup>28</sup> On medieval anxiety about the use of visual images in meditation, see Gillespie, *Looking in Holy Books*, pp. 209-239; and Aston, *Lollards and Reformers*, p. 115.

<sup>29</sup> Louis Réau, ‘Le Couronnement de la Vierge’, in *Iconographie de l’art Chrétien*, 3 Vols, II (Paris, 1957), 621-626 (623).

<sup>30</sup> See further Cole, ‘The Integrity of Text and Context’, 91.

<sup>31</sup> See also Gillespie, *Looking in Holy Books*, p. 270; and Denis Renevey, ‘Name Above Names: The Devotion to the Name of Jesus from Richard Rolle to Walter Hilton’s *Scale of Perfection I*’, in *The Medieval Mystical Tradition: Exeter Symposium*, VI, ed. Marion Glasscoe (Cambridge, 1999), pp. 103-121.

<sup>32</sup> See *The Daily Missal*, ed. and trans. Gaspar Lefebvre (London, 1924), pp. 829-833; Douglas Gray, *Themes and Images in the Medieval English Religious Lyric* (London,

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1972), pp. 5-6; and B. Capelle, 'La procession du *Lumen Christi* au Samedi-saint', *RB*, xliv (1932), 105-119.

<sup>33</sup> On this phrase, see further Bella Millett, ed., *Hali Meiðhad*, EETS O.S. 284 (1982), p. xx.

<sup>34</sup> Millett (ed.) observes a parallel image in *Hali Meiðhad*, p. xx.

<sup>35</sup> See further Caroline Walker Bynum, *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages* (Berkeley, 1982).

<sup>36</sup> See *The Liturgical Sermons: The First Clairvaux Collection*, trans. Theodore Berkeley and M. Basil Pennington (Kalamazoo, MI, 2001), p. 309.

<sup>37</sup> Renevey, 'The Moving of the Soul', p. 101.

<sup>38</sup> See Aelred's *De institutione inclusarum*, 638.

<sup>39</sup> See, for example, references to lukewarm love in Anselm's 'Oratio ad Christum' (7), as well as Part VII of *Ancrene Wisse* (151: 236-242).

<sup>40</sup> See further Miri Rubin, *Mother of God: A History of the Virgin Mary* (London, 2010), pp. 244-245.

<sup>41</sup> On Mary's transparency, see Sarah Salih, 'Transvestism in the Anchorhold', p. 153.

<sup>42</sup> Catherine Innes-Parker, '*Pe Wohunge of ure Lauerd* and the Tradition of Affective Devotion', in *The Milieu and Context*, pp. 96-122 (p. 107).

<sup>43</sup> Hugh of Saint-Victor, *De anima*, excerpted in R. M. Wilson, *Early Middle English Literature* (London, 1939), p. 31.

<sup>44</sup> See especially p. 10, ll. 1-2; p. 11, ll. 30, 36, 39; p. 12, ll. 72, 75-76, 84; p. 13, l. 107; p. 14, ll. 140, 145; p. 15, l. 180.

<sup>45</sup> The insertion of [o] in 'i[o]hanes' follows the emendation by Thompson, ed., *Pe Wohunge of ure Lauerd*, etc.

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<sup>46</sup> Cited from the entry for ‘rem’ in the *MED* [accessed 16<sup>th</sup> February 2010]. See also the reference to the Holy Mother’s ‘ream’ in *The English Text of the Ancrene Riwe* edited from B. M. Cotton MS. Cleopatra C. vi, ed. E. J. Dobson, EETS O.S. 267 (1972), p. 87, l. 20.

<sup>47</sup> The words in angular brackets follow the reconstruction of this line by Thompson, ed., *Pe Wohunge of ure Lauerd*, etc; the line is in the margins of the manuscript and is not fully legible.

<sup>48</sup> *Sancti Bernardi Opera*, 8 Vols, ed. J. Leclercq, C. H. Talbot and H. M. Rochais (Rome, 1957-1977), II, 86-87.

<sup>49</sup> The source, as identified by Millett, is Augustine’s *Confessiones* (PL xxxii, 697, 699): Millett (ed.), *Hali Meiðhad*, pp. xx-xxi, p. 14, ll. 4-10, and p. 42, n. 14/4-10.

<sup>50</sup> Cole, ‘The Integrity of Text and Context’, 91.

<sup>51</sup> See also Cole, ‘The Integrity of Text and Context’, 93.

<sup>52</sup> On the blurred line between ‘private’ and ‘public’ devotion, see Susan Boynton, ‘Prayer as Liturgical Performance in Eleventh- and Twelfth-Century Monastic Psalters’, *Speculum*, lxxxii (2007), 896-931 (896-897); and Monika Otter, ‘Entrances and Exits: Performing the Psalms in Goscelin’s *Liber confortatorius*’, *Speculum*, lxxxiii (2008), 283-302 (292-293).

<sup>53</sup> See further Rosemary Woolf, *The English Religious Lyric in the Middle Ages* (Oxford, 1968), pp. 173-174.

<sup>54</sup> See Millett, ‘The “Conditions of Eligibility” in *Pe Wohunge of ure Lauerd*’, in *The Milieu and Context*, pp. 26-47 (especially pp. 32, 43)).

<sup>55</sup> See further Jean-Augustin Robilliard, ‘Face (dévotion à la Sainte Face)’, in *Dictionnaire de spiritualité: ascétique et mystique, doctrine et historique*, ed. M. Viller et al, 17 Vols (Paris, 1962), V (1962), 26-33.

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<sup>56</sup> See further Renevey, ‘The Moving of the Soul’, p. 70.

<sup>57</sup> For this image in *Ancrene Wisse*, see Lazikani, *Cultivating the Heart*, p. 1.